

# Christian Ethics Today

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

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## A Little Disagreement is Good for the Soul

By Pat Anderson, editor

My father and grandmother were only 16 years apart in age. They were saved just a few weeks apart, and they both began preaching almost immediately in the late 1930s. They were among a group of new converts who were so caught up in their salvation and the urgency of sharing their faith and their love for the Lord that they took over the city park in Jacksonville, Florida each Sunday for impromptu revival services. Some of their friends joked, "God called Elwin to preach, but Betty answered!" They say she was a great preacher, but I never heard her preach.

My grandmother moved on to performing medical missions and preaching in Plaquemines Parish in Louisiana, and in Harland County, Kentucky while my father stayed in Jacksonville to preach and learn at the precursor of Luther Rice Seminary. He learned quickly that preaching women were oxymorons of biblical proportions. Though this all happened long before I was born, I remember an angry conversation between my father and grandmother when I was about eight years old. Grandmother had continued preaching despite my dad's disapproval.

"Mother, it is just not right for a

woman to preach! The Bible forbids it!" I heard my father say.

"Son, my calling does not come from you! I can do no other!" she replied.

The argument was heated, but I was not frightened or disturbed by hearing it. Of course, I did not have nearly enough information or wisdom to know who was right. I figured that somehow they were both right. It took me many years to conclude that she was right and he was wrong. It did not take nearly as long to conclude that it is okay for people who love each other to disagree.

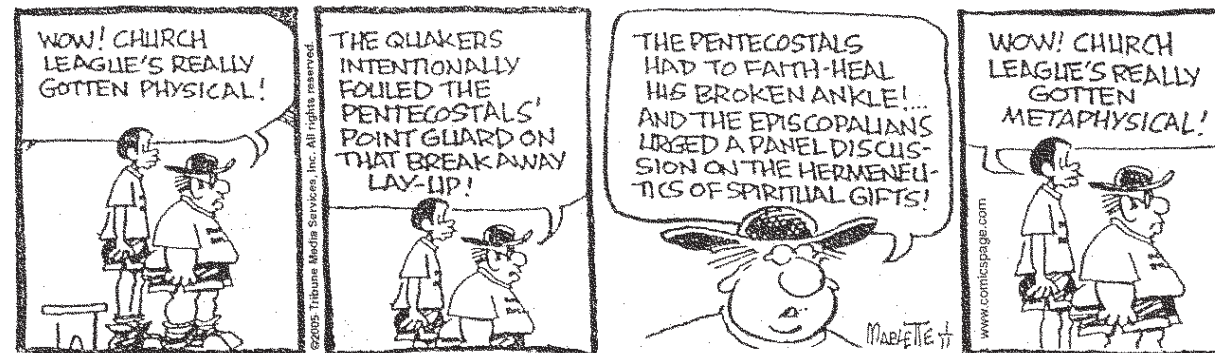
I reflect on this in the context of my role as editor of *Christian Ethics Today*. I have always been comfortable with disagreement and conflicting opinions. Happily, for me at least, the mission statement of the journal fits my own personality. The journal exists "to provide laypersons, educators, and 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." It is often helpful for our readers to read something they do not agree with, and for me to publish something I do not agree with, if it helps us understand and respond in a faithful Christian

manner to concerning issues.

This idea is fleshed out in the inclusion in the Spring issue of Bruce Lowe's article *Important Considerations Regarding Homosexuality*. I think it was an important essay to include because it was written by a 90-something year old preacher, and he was passionate about what he had to say. One of the responses I received was that of Howard Batson, a much younger pastor in Amarillo, Texas. You will see it in this issue titled *A Response to the Rev. Bruce Lowe and His "Six Truths" Which Advocate the Acceptance of Same-Gender Sexuality Within the Christian Community*. He, too, is passionate about what he has to say. I am extremely grateful to both brothers for writing their articles. They have helped us all, I believe, to deal with the issue they address.

Readers of *Christian Ethics Today* can be sure that not everything published in the journal will be completely agreeable. Like exercise, a little disagreement makes us stronger, it is good for the soul. But readers can also be assured that we will address the moral and ethical issues that are of concern to us all in a faithful Christian manner, with love and respect, even for those with whom we disagree. ■

Thank you for your gifts to *Christian Ethics Today*. Your financial support is "greatly needed, urgently solicited, and genuinely appreciated."



## A Response to the Rev. Bruce Lowe and His "Six Truths" Which Advocate the Acceptance of Same-Gender Sexuality Within the Christian Community

By Howard Batson

Ninety-six year old retired pastor, Bruce Lowe, wrote an article in the Spring 2011 edition of *Christian Ethics Today* advocating that the church accept same-gender sexuality as a legitimate lifestyle within the community of faith. His article, to be sure, was a gracious reflection over his nearly century-long pilgrimage as a follower of Christ and leader in the church. I am grateful to the Reverend Lowe for initiating conversation about an issue that all churches must surely confront. I am also appreciative to both *Christian Ethics Today* and its editor, Dr. Pat Anderson, for the invitation to continue the dialogue on such an important, contemporary issue. We can be thankful for the intellectual openness and prophetic courage of *Christian Ethics Today* which allow controversial positions to be presented from polar perspectives. Together, we must face the hard questions that will shape the community of faith.

While I am grateful for Pastor Lowe's contribution to the discussion concerning same-gender sexuality, I found numerous missteps in his logic. His six "truths," upon which he bases his new ethic toward same-gender sexuality, do not successfully guide the church to alter its historic position on homosexuality. Without question, the church's historical approach toward same-gender sexuality has always been one of rejection.

While the patriarchs were not consumed with the issue of homosexuality, they expressed in unanimity their disapproval of same-gender sexual relations. In medieval thought, homosexuality was described as an unnatural vice which transgressed the very order established by God. The Reformation writers, likewise, condemned homosexuality as an unnatural passion which found its source in Satan. Only

in the last several decades have some Christian interpreters expressed a theology which accepts homosexual behavior. Clearly, the tradition of the church speaks overwhelmingly against the acceptance of same-gender sexuality within the community of faith. Before the church does an about-face, making the historic blunder of condoning sinful behavior, I would like to examine Lowe's so-called "truths" upon which he bases his call for a radical departure from the time-tested traditions of the faith.

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In his first "truth," Lowe wrongly states, "There is really nothing in the Bible about homosexuality or homosexual people *per se*." On the contrary, Romans 1:18-32 is quite clear on the rejection of same-gender sexual lifestyles as an acceptable alternative to heterosexuality. Leading New Testament ethicist Richard Hays of Duke University, who rejects homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, as well as United Church of Christ Minister Gary Comstock, who accepts it, conclude that Paul depicted homosexuality as an example of turning away from God and his created order. While homosexuality is only a part of Paul's broader attempt to deal with the Jewish agenda in his letter to the churches in Rome, it plays the role of demonstrating that perversity occurs –

as part of God's wrath – when individuals worship the creation rather than the creator. As Paul alludes to the creation narrative in Romans 1, readers should remember that part of God's creation included the forming of humankind in his own image... "male and female He created them," commanding them "to be fruitful and multiply." Also, Genesis 2:18-24 described the creation of the opposite sexes for one another and moralized, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."<sup>2</sup> The complementary nature of maleness and femaleness are given nothing less than a complete theological grounding based upon God's creative activity. The act of becoming "one flesh" is the created goal of "maleness" to "femaleness."

Being a fundamental part of God's design as depicted in the early chapters of Genesis, sexual distinctions are not to be ignored. Refusing to acknowledge such distinctions results in ignoring the Creator of those boundaries.<sup>3</sup> The employment of same-gender sexual relations as an illustration was a powerful instrument used by Paul to formulate his argument. No other sin seemed to go more directly against the Creator and his created order. Contrary to Lowe's conclusion that the Bible is silent on homosexuality, Hays asserted, "Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all of them express an unqualified disapproval. In this respect, the issue of homosexuality differs significantly from matters such as slavery or the subordination of women, concerning which the Bible contains internal tensions and counterpoised witnesses."<sup>4</sup>

Lowe's basic position regarding Romans 1 follows the old lines of John Boswell, the organizer of the Lesbian and Gay Studies Center at Yale. Such

a position argues that the Apostle Paul was speaking only against heterosexuals who engage in homosexual behavior, rather than homosexuals who follow their inner orientation.<sup>5</sup> In reality, however, such anachronistic readings of the text should not be used by the church simply to make the text less offensive to modern ears. We cannot force categories from the 21st century onto a first-century text. For example, those who oppose interracial marriage do a grave injustice to the Old Testament admonitions prohibiting ancient Israel's taking foreign wives when they shape those texts, anachronistically, for their own agenda. The concern of Yahweh was religious purity and fidelity among his covenant people rather than for racial distinctiveness.

Such readings which "collapse the distance"<sup>6</sup> between ourselves and the ancient text by smuggling modern categories and assumptions fail to recognize potential conflicts among competing sources of authority. Realizing that Paul knew nothing of a "natural homosexual orientation" or "monogamous homosexual relationships," we must avoid the great temptation to re-read the text through modern lenses. Paul clearly uses homosexuality in his rhetorical flow in the book of Romans as an example of a creation rebelling against the Creator's order.

The fallacy of the anachronistic approach is clear. Such an interpreter is arguing along these lines: "If Paul knew then what I know now, Paul would have agreed with me." Employing such willy-nilly logic, we could reformulate many of Paul's positions to agree with our modern sensibilities. This argumentation that Lowe follows in his article will lead him down some problematic paths if he follows them to their full conclusion. For example, to be consistent in his treatment of the issues, Lowe would have to likewise assert that if Paul had known that some alcoholic behavior is based upon biological factors, Paul would not have condemned all drunkenness (Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; 11:21; Galatians 5:21;

Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:7), but only drunkenness by those who had no genetic factor in the formulation of their alcoholism.

The truth is we can never project how the apostle would have assimilated any modern information into his ethical matrix. Rather than re-reading the apostle, it's best to follow his overall rhetorical flow in Romans to see how he clearly condemned all same-gender sexuality, including both homosexual and lesbian behavior. It seems to me to demonstrate greater intellectual integrity to simply assert that although Paul concluded that

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*We must avoid the great temptation to re-read the text through modern lenses.*

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homosexual behavior was unacceptable, some modern interpreters challenge his authority. My own ethical matrix will not allow me to contradict Paul nor perform hermeneutical gymnastics in order to make the apostle appear to agree with my modern assumptions.

Lowe's second "truth," that sexual orientation is innate and unchangeable (thus, beyond one's choosing), bears further discussion. Lowe has used faulty logic when he assumes that any behavior that has a biological basis must be approved and blessed by the church. I wonder if Lowe is willing to travel fully down the road upon which he has begun? I agree with Lowe that there is a possible biological (I would also add psychological) predisposition in regard to sexual orientation. A young man with a homosexual orientation does not necessarily choose to have erotic dreams about members of his same gender. Scientists themselves, however, are not professing a biological determinism. Even the studies which make the most radical claims for a biological basis for sexual orientation indicate that the develop-

ment of an orientation is complex. No one claims that biological factors are so strong that individuals are simply responding helplessly – like puppets on the end of biological strings – to physiological impulses that are beyond their control.<sup>7</sup> Dean Hamer, a pioneer in sexual orientation research, warned, "We have never thought that finding a genetic link makes sexual orientation a simple genetic trait like eye color. It's much more complex than that."<sup>8</sup>

Lowe's line of argumentation makes the error of concluding that all biologically-based desires must be approved by God and the community of faith. Part of humanity's fall is the resulting predicament of being enslaved to sin, predisposed to turn away from God and his will. Despite the fact that we've been born under this fear of sin and death, we are more than culpable for our actions. As scientific research moves forward, I believe that we are going to find that many behaviors which are not accepted within the community of faith have a biological basis. Already, scientists have looked at the issues of alcoholism, gambling, and even racial hatred.

Would Lowe, therefore, contend that if racial hatred has a biological basis that the behavior of an anti-Semite is to be blessed and accepted by the church (reductio ad absurdum)? When the scientists of the next generation link the sexual preferences of a pedophile to a physiological source, are we therefore going to bless adults engaging with children in sexual behavior? The church must never use the faulty logic that a biological basis for any temptation makes it acceptable to engage in behavior that has been determined by the apostles to be hurtful to the body of Christ. The biblical witness is clear: As a result of the fall of Adam, all humanity is predisposed to sin. Biologically or psychologically, we all find ourselves carrying the temptation to give in to the impulses of the flesh.

Lowe also fails to make a clear distinction between sexual orientation – which might be beyond one's choice – and sexual behavior, which is always

an act of volition. No serious ethicist finds fault in the same-gender orientation itself. Yet Lowe assumes that it is unrealistic for the church to expect celibacy from those with a same-gender orientation. On the contrary, we must realize that sexual fulfillment is not, in itself, to be considered a sacred rite. In reality, the church's call for celibacy is the same for all who cannot express their sexuality within the boundaries of heterosexual marriage. The church denies sexual fulfillment to many single or divorced members of the congregation who, despite their best efforts, have been unable to find an appropriate partner for marriage. Likewise, even within heterosexual marriage, the church denies sexual fulfillment to those who have disabled, impotent, or frigid spouses. The demand for sexual gratification should never go unchallenged as we demythologize the idolatry of sex. Following the New Testament pattern, the church recognizes celibacy as a faithful, perhaps even preferred path of discipleship (Matthew 19:10-11; 1 Corinthians 7).

Regarding Lowe's third "truth," that homosexual people are often highly gifted, I fail to follow his reasoning. All can agree that having a same-gender sexual orientation does not prevent one from being gifted in any field of study or art. But is Lowe actually arguing that the church must accept and embrace practicing homosexuals based upon their giftedness rather than their willingness to live by a New Testament ethic? Such a skewed community of faith would inappropriately evaluate members based upon their intelligence, artistic talents, or interpersonal skills.

No New Testament paradigm exists in which members with extraordinary talent are allowed to live in a sinful relationship simply because of their giftedness. Following this line of reason, the church must also invite an accomplished heterosexual soprano to sing a solo despite the fact she is living with her boyfriend. In all moral cases, the church should never accept giftedness as a substitute for committed dis-

cipleship. Surely we don't ever want to compromise ourselves by playing the "talent game."

Lowe's fourth "truth," that many churches and pastors are sinning greatly against homosexual people, is regretfully admitted. The censorious and abusive spirit of others, however, does not place an obligation to condone sinful behavior upon the New Testament church. Rather than exhibiting hatred toward those tempted by homosexuality, or simply condoning their sin, we must find a fresh understanding which includes the biological and psychological factors contributing

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to the complexity of a same-gender sexual orientation. We cannot deny good science its right to speak, and, therefore, we must find a new sense of compassion and understanding for those struggling with same-gender sexuality. Even in our compassion and acknowledgment of the complexities surrounding same-gender sexual orientation, however, we must never approve of homosexuals acting upon their same-gender sexual orientation as long as we give Scripture the place of primacy in the formation of our ethical responses.

Lowe's fifth "truth," no sex act has morality in itself, seems indefensible. Lowe argues that God has no interest in sexual acts, but only in the hearts of the actors. Homosexual sex, he argues, can occur between two men with loving hearts and is, therefore, justifiable sex. Transferring the definition of sin away from the action, to the heart of the actor, may seem to embrace Jesus' ethic found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). To be sure,

Jesus broadened his condemnation to include the angry man along with the murderer (Matthew 5:21-22). In other words, Jesus condemned the murderous heart of the angry man just as much as the hand of the murderer. I am afraid, however, that Lowe has reversed the broadened equation of Jesus by narrowing the scope of condemnation to apply to heart issues alone. Jesus never dismissed "the act" from the definition of sin; he just added "the attitude" as well.

Some acts are sinful in themselves. I fear that Lowe's narrow definition of sin fails to include the objective categories of measurable behavior and begins to fall into the subjective sea of moral relativism. Like the Gnostics of antiquity, Lowe seems to have diminished the body to simply focus on the spirit. God's redemption and Christ's resurrection, however, include transforming our broken flesh. And Paul made clear that our "bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:15-20). Lowe's argument ultimately allows every person's actions to be judged by the contents of his/her own heart. If a 50-year-old man is "truly in love" with a 13-year-old girl who shares his sentiment, Lowe's logic would have to bless their sexual encounter.

Lowe's sixth, and last, "truth" is that the trend in our society and in our churches is toward the affirmation of homosexuals. In this case, Lowe is making the argument that the acceptance of same-gender sexuality by the common culture obligates the church to follow suit. I fear that the Rev. Lowe has once again reversed the biblical paradigm. The church, the people of God, are to be the prophetic voice of guidance to a lost and dying world. Rather than adjusting our course to accommodate the ever-changing and often confused moral compass of the world, the people of God are to live by the revealed word of the Lord. For example, the people of God, ancient Israel, were never called to live by the moral matrix of their pagan neighbors. In the New Testament, moreover, the church was admonished to be salt and light in the midst of a culture domi-



nated by power, lust, and greed.

Finally, I am bothered by Lowe's assumption that a stance against homosexual behavior can be equated to regretful, past treatment of Jews, blacks, or women. In fact, minority groups and women are often bothered by this fallacious argument. There is nothing sinful about being a woman (or a member of a minority group, as Jesus was), but there is something woefully wrong with engaging in same-gender sexual encounters. Being a woman is representative of God's creative order of maleness and femaleness (Genesis 1:27), while engaging in homosexual activity is Paul's very paradigm of rejecting both the Creator and his orderly creation (Romans 1:25).

The gay community must realize that for healthy debate to continue, it cannot dismiss those who maintain a traditional stance toward homosexuality as being homophobic or "full of bigotry." Those making such accusations are attempting to dismiss legitimate arguments without really having to address them on an intellectual level and pushing for their own agenda by using pejorative language about those who simply do not agree with them. While homosexuals are experiencing a great deal of emotional pain and mistreatment from a heterosexual society, all arguments which withhold the church's blessing from same-gender sexuality cannot be described as "homophobic." Such an approach is too simplistic and will not foster healthy discussion.

At the end of the day, I appreciate the Reverend Lowe's open spirit and even applaud his attempt to deal with a very difficult topic. At the same time, I found his six "truths" as totally unacceptable reasons for the church to change its historic position on same-gender sexual behavior. We do no one a favor by redefining destructive sin as acceptable. One of my preacher friends has long said that if he were to replace the label on a bottle of strychnine with "essence of peppermint," it wouldn't make the contents any less deadly or harmful. In fact, I

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would conclude that the most loving position the 21st century church can take is to continue to identify, along with the Apostle Paul and the historic church, same-gender sexual behavior as a destructive and unacceptable lifestyle. At the same time, the church must reach out to all who struggle with a same-gender orientation, just as we reach out to those who struggle with greed, heterosexual lust, alcoholism, or any other temptation known to humanity. ■

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<sup>1</sup>Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's 'Exegesis of Romans 1,'" *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (Spring 1986): 184-215; Gary David Comstock, *Gay Theology Without Apology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1993), 43.

<sup>2</sup>Frank Stagg wrote, "Male and female do look to one another for completion; homosexuality is a denial of this," "The Plight of Jew and Gentile in Sin: Romans 1:18-3:20," *Review and Expositor* 73 (Fall 1986): 406.

<sup>3</sup>Paul J. Achtemeier stated, "The violation of the created order in human sexuality is therefore, as Paul understands

it, an outgrowth of the violation of the created order, a violation whose root lies in idolatry," *Romans. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 41.

<sup>4</sup>Richard B. Hays, "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: Drawing on Scripture and Tradition in the Church Debate on Homosexuality," *Sojourners* 20 (July 1991): 19.

<sup>5</sup>John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 109.

<sup>6</sup>Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," 210.

<sup>7</sup>Pepper Schwartz, sociologist at the University of Washington, wrote, "There is a great deal of information that shows that human sexuality is too cultural, cognitive, situational, and learned to be perfectly programmed at birth; 'The Science of Sexuality Still Needs Social Science,'" *The Scientist* 9 (6 February 1995): 12.

<sup>8</sup>Bob Holmes, "Gay Gene Test, 'Inaccurate and Immoral,'" *New Scientist* 141 (5 March 1994): 9.

#### ETHIXBYTE:

***"Our country is in the midst of a clash between two competing moral visions, between those who believe in the common good, and those who believe individual good is the only good. A war has been declared on the poor, and it is a moral imperative that people of faith and conscience fight on the side of the most vulnerable."***

**Jim Wallis**

## The Secularization of the Cross

By Martin E. Marty

Weekly, year in and year out, we sight new evidence that defining what is "religious" and what is "secular" remains difficult in the United States. One way to trace some attempts is to read *The Humanist*, as we often do. "Cross Purposes," in the current July-August issue, is an example. In it Rob Boston plots the curious, not always thought-through, and apparently self-contradictory actions by "the religious right" which "secularize" the Christians' sacred "central symbol." Boston provides legal examples.

He takes for granted that "the cross is the most [sic] preeminent symbol of Christian faith," the unifying marker for more than one billion people, the reminder to them of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. You'd think believers would guard the centrality and sacrality of the cross. Yet, to achieve certain worldly and civil ends, many recent court cases reveal the religious right leaders in public contexts saying, in effect, "Never mind. We don't mean it. The cross isn't really religious. . . it has become a generic symbol to memorialize any dead person" (e.g. in the *Salazar v. Buono* case where friend-of-the-right Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia ruled that the cross can be a secular symbol. If so, asked plaintiff Buono, a Catholic, "why don't we see crosses in Jewish cemeteries?" Similarly, a Utah court said the cross can be deprived of religious significance, as on highway signs).

Boston writes that such uses of the cross reduce it to the "level of a public service announcement," which is "a novel interpretation of law and theology, to be sure." Agreed. You'd think firm Christians would be the first and loudest to protest such reductions, but in these court cases they promote the secularizing practice. For this "meager payoff," as Boston calls it, "the religious right is willing to deny the meaning of the most significant symbol of Christianity." He is brusque: "Rubbish. Who looks at a cross and

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thinks, 'My, what an interesting way to arrange two planks of wood?'" Why, he asks, with this reduction prevailing, should believers still be asked to "take up the cross"? Why make it the focal point of churches, incorporate it into devotional art, and celebrate it in hymns? Has any non-Christian, he asks, ever felt compelled to cling to "the old rugged cross?"

Believers and non-believers alike have reason to back off in some cases on this scene, and not always be crabby, jumpy, and super-scrupulous about the intru-

sions across the "wall of separation of church and state." Ours, we remember, is a messy religious, secular and pluralist society in which lines are never clear and walls are seldom the best symbols for separation, which is complex and changing. Sometimes to keep the civil peace or civil tone, citizens can wink and live with the mess a pluralist and contentious society creates.

Boston may be over-alert to these issues, but he raises enough flags that Christians, including many not only on the right, may become more aware of the risks. "At the end of the day what will [the cross-planters on public spaces] have achieved?" Not all of their games played with the cross as symbol have to be as cynical as Boston sees them. There can be naïveté and generalized reverence in some of these cross-posting moves. But critics may be doing articulate Christians a favor when they observe militant Christians having mounted crosses alongside highways and atop mountains, "simply and conveniently forgetting they did so by denying the symbol's importance. They should ask 'what if the secular symbolism sticks?'" For many, it has stuck. ■

#### References

Rob Boston, "Cross Purposes: What's Behind the Religious Right's Drive to Secularize Their Central Symbol?" *The Humanist*, July-August 2011.



# (An) open letter to you on the question of the freedom of the Jewish pulpit

By Stephen S. Wise

**Editor's note:** The following is a most interesting statement from the late Rabbi Stephen Wise, founder of the Rabbi Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City. The open letter to the editor of the *New York Times* is powerful. This was forwarded to me by Al Staggs who received it from Rabbi Wise's grandson, Stephen Wise, who is a retired attorney and Presbyterian living in New Canaan, CT who gave permission to Christian Ethics Today to reprint it. Considering the context (1905 New York City, and the myriad social, political, religious, economic issues that any minister faced during that period in our history) special significance attaches to the letters. Hardy Clemon's essay which follows addresses the significance of this century-old sentiment of a prominent rabbi for today's pastors.

As published in full in the *New York Times*, from *Rabbi Stephen S. Wise*, Portland, Oregon December 3, 1905

MR. LOUIS MARSHALL  
CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE  
OF BOARD OF TRUSTEES,  
TEMPLE EMANU-EL.

Dear Sir:

If your letter of December first be expressive of the thought of the board of trustees of Temple Emanu-El, I beg to say that no self-respecting minister of religion, in my opinion, could consider a call to a pulpit which, in the language of your communication, shall always be subject to, and under the control of, the board of trustees. I am,

Yours Very Truly,  
Stephen S. Wise

Dear Editor:

While my position in the matter under question is thus explained in unmistakable terms, I feel that it is become my duty to address this open letter to you on the question of the freedom of the Jewish pulpit.

I write to you because I believe that a question of super-eminent importance has been raised, the question whether the pulpit shall be free or whether the pulpit shall not be free, and, by reason of its loss of freedom, left of its power for good. The whole position of the churches is involved in this question, for the steadily waning influence of church and synagogue is due in no small part, I hold, to the widespread belief that the pulpit

is not free, and that it is "subject to and under the control" of those officers and members of the church or synagogue who, for any reason, are powerful in its councils. The question, therefore, "Shall the pulpit be free or shall it not be free?" is of infinitely greater moment than the question of the occupancy of your pulpit by any man whosoever, and it is the deep conviction that this is so that has

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impelled me, now that any thought of a direct relation between us is definitely set aside, to address you in earnest language as men equally concerned with myself in the well-being and increasing power of our beloved religion.

When a committee of five, constituting a majority of the board of trustees of the congregation, came to me, for the purpose of ascertaining whether a call to occupy your pulpit would be accepted, and, if accepted, upon what terms, I stated that I had but one stipulation to make with respect to the terms of such call, and that I was ready to leave everything else to the judg-

ment of the board of trustees and the members of the congregation, merely adding that a written contract ought not to be deemed necessary between a congregation and its minister. The one stipulation I made in the following words: "If I am to accept a call to the pulpit of Temple Emanu-El, I do so with the understanding that I am to be free, and that my pulpit is not to be muzzled." I made no other stipulation; upon this I insisted. Counsels of prudence, which were urged upon me, suggested that I should have taken this freedom for granted, but viewing the manner in which my stipulation was met by the members of the committee, I deem it most fortunate that I anticipated the situation which has arisen. It was indeed held by some members of the committee that the phrase, "the pulpit shall always be subject to and under the control of the board of trustees," was "an empty formula," or "a mere figure of speech," which interpretation, however, the chairman of the committee at once emphatically disavowed. Even though this phrase were admitted to be an empty formula, I would still be under the moral necessity of refusing to maintain a fiction, of making a compact in terms of falsehood to teach in a place dedicated to truth. But how can a form of words so threatening to the liberty of a minister of religion be regarded as a mere figure of speech? The very fact that it was insisted upon is evidence that it was not intended as a formula, and, if it be intended seriously, as it clearly is, I have only to repeat that no self-respecting minister of religion could

consider a call to the pulpit of a church or synagogue on such terms. Such a formula, taken under any construction that may be put upon it, is not chiefly humiliating to me, who unequivocally reject its terms, but much more humiliating to the congregation in the name of which such terms are offered.

It is not said that in the event of a conflict of irreconcilable views between the rabbi and a majority of the members of the congregation the rabbi must give way, but that the acceptance of the terms "the pulpit shall always be subject to, and under the control of, the board of trustees," implies acquiescence on the part of the rabbi in the views of the board of trustees in the event of a conflict of irreconcilable views between him and them, or the necessity of exercising the "option" or "privilege" of resigning. The board of trustees thus assert for themselves in the last analysis the custodianship of the spiritual convictions of the congregation.

Stated more simply, the rabbi, whose whole life is given to the study of and preoccupation with religion and morals, must always hold his views subject to revision or ratification at the hands of the board of trustees, or of any number, howsoever small, of the members of the congregation having sufficiently formidable influence with the board of trustees. In other words, the mere fact that a certain number, not necessarily a majority, of the members of the congregation or certain members of the board of trustees, might object to his views is to compel retraction, silence or resignation, without the slightest guarantee that reason and right are on the side of the objectors. The mere statement of the case is its own severest condemnation.

The chief office of the minister, I take it, is not to represent the views of the congregation, but to proclaim the truth as he sees it. How can he serve a congregation as a teacher save as he quickens the minds of his hearers by the vitality and independence of his utterances? But how can a man be vital and independent and helpful, if he be tethered and muzzled? A free pulpit, worthily filled, must command respect

and influence; a pulpit that is not free, howsoever filled, is sure to be without potency and honor. A free pulpit will sometimes stumble into error; a pulpit that is not free can never powerfully plead for truth and righteousness. In the pursuit of the duties of his office, the minister may from time to time be under the necessity of giving expression to views at variance with the views of some, or even many, members of the congregation. Far from such difference proving the pulpit to be in the wrong, it may be, and oftentimes is, found to signify that the pulpit has done its duty in calling evil evil and good good, in abhorring the moral wrong of putting light for darkness and darkness for light, and in scorning to limit itself to the utterance of what the prophet has styled "smooth things," lest variance of views arise. Too great a dread there may be of secession on the part of some members of a congregation, for, after all,

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*The chief office of the minister, I take it, is not to represent the views of the congregation, but to proclaim the truth as he sees it.*

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difference and disquiet, even schism at the worst, are not so much to be feared as that attitude of the pulpit which never provokes dissent because it is cautious rather than courageous, peace-loving rather than prophetic, time-serving rather than right-serving. The minister is not to be the spokesman of the congregation, not the message-bearer of the congregation, but the bearer of a message to the congregation. What the contents of that message shall be, must be left to the conscience and understanding and loyalty of him in whom a congregation places sufficient confidence to elect him to minister to it.

In the course of the conferences

held between the committee and the writer, it was urged that the pulpit has no right to demand exemption from criticism. The minister in Israel does not regard his utterance as infallible. No minister will refuse to correct an opinion -- though he will take the utmost pains to achieve correctness in substance and form before speaking -- when reasons are advanced to convince him of his error. Nor will he fail to welcome criticism and invite difference of opinion to the end that truth may be subserved. To declare that in the event of a conflict of irreconcilable views between the minister and the board of trustees, it is the minister who must yield and not the board, is to assert the right not to criticize the pulpit, but to silence its occupant, and, above all, to imply that the board of trustees are always sure to be in the right, or else that the convictions of the board of trustees shall stand, whether right or wrong, and that the minister must acquiesce in these convictions, right or wrong, or else exercise the "option" and "privilege" of resigning.

The Jewish minister, I repeat, does not speak *ex cathedra*, and his views are not supposed to have a binding force upon the congregation to which he ministers. He is to express his convictions on any subject that comes within the purview of religion and ethics, but these convictions do not purport to constitute a creed or dogma to which a congregation must in whole or in part subscribe. But the board of trustees asserts the right to define and to formulate the views in which the rabbi must acquiesce, or, failing to acquiesce therein, resign. Not only is the rabbi expected to sign away his present independence, but to mortgage his intellectual and moral liberty for the future. Stated in briefest possible terms, the rabbi is asked to subscribe to a statement of present and future convictions of the board of trustees. The demand is put forth that he subscribe to a blank page the contents of which are to be determined, not on the basis of his understanding of and loyalty to the teachings of his religion,



but by “the views of the board of trustees.” This is indeed to attempt to rob the pulpit of every vestige of freedom and independence. I am asked to point the way, and my bands are tied; I am asked to go before and my feet are fettered.

If I could bring myself to accept a call to the pulpit of Temple Emanu-El upon such terms, and this is unthinkable, the board of trustees would never find it necessary to call upon me to surrender my convictions, for assent on my part to the stipulation, “the pulpit shall always be subject to, and under the control of, the board of trustees,” would involve such a sacrifice of principles as would leave me no convictions worthy of the name to surrender at any subsequent behest of the board of trustees. It is equally meaningless to declare that “in the past this has never led to any friction between our rabbis and our board of trustees.” Where a rabbi is reduced to the choice of acquiescence in views, right or wrong, because held by the board of trustees, or of silence, friction is impossible. The absence of friction in the past between the rabbis and the

*A free pulpit will sometimes stumble into error; a pulpit that is not free can never powerfully plead for truth and righteousness.*

board of trustees of Temple Emanu-El proves that either the pulpit has been circumspect or that it has been so effectually muzzled that even protest was impossible on the part of an occupant who had subscribed to such conditions. A third possibility obtains -- that the board of trustees has had the forbearance of the angels with the occupants of the pulpit insofar as they have not abused the power which they claim as their own. As for the forbearance of angels, which has possibly been theirs, I wish to make clear that I would not deliver my conscience into the keeping of the angels. My conscience is my own.

Finally, to hold that the subjection

of the pulpit to, and its control by, the board of trustees is a written or unwritten law of the congregation is to maintain that the pulpit of Emanu-El never has been free, and this, I am sure, does not accord with the memories that still remain alive in me and in others of high-minded, independent, revered teachers who have occupied that pulpit. One of the former occupants I have intimately known, and were he living today he would repudiate the claim that he had for many years been the occupant of a pulpit which was not free.

I have sought to do you the justice of helping you to realize the seriousness of the situation which you face. This situation, I believe, you have not planned; into it you have, however, permitted yourselves to drift. That this appeal to the spirit of my people at its highest shall not have been made in vain is my hope, for the sake of our religion, which a free pulpit alone can truly serve. ■

I am,  
Faithfully Yours,  
Stephen S. Wise

## Is a “Free Pulpit” an Oxymoron?

By Hardy Clemons

A “free pulpit” is not an oxymoron to me. At least it shouldn’t be. It is a fruit of the sacred biblical, Baptist-Christian concepts of “Unity in diversity” and “the priesthood of all believers.” It is a phrase that challenges us to tell the truth and be authentic to God, ourselves and our audiences.

I learned this growing up in what we called Training Union on Sunday evenings. It clarified and deepened in my graduate Baptist education and experience. L. R. Scarborough’s<sup>1</sup> major advice to preachers was “tell the truth and trust the people.” Although I am aware that I tend to be more pastoral than prophetic, it seems a worthy barometer for all of us who dare to attempt doing what Paul called “the foolishness of preaching” as we try to address our people with a word from God.

We must be free to speak honestly—to “speak the truth in love” as Paul admonishes us. If laity and clergy don’t tell each other the truth, trust is eroded and integrity is swallowed up in manipulation, game playing and political maneuvering.

Mentors in my experience, men who have devoted their lives to knowing scripture and Baptist history well—such as Doctors Wayne Oates, Boyd Hunt, Harry Emerson Fosdick, T. B. Maston, Carlyle Marney, Blake Smith, Robert A. Baker, Culbert G. Rutenber, James Dunn, Bill Leonard, Buddy Shurden—have been teachers, mentors and friends for me. I owe them a huge debt for the way they helped teach, confront, encourage and equip me to seek to be a “free and faithful Baptist”—one who takes seriously BOTH freedom AND responsibility when I occupy a pulpit as a resident or a guest.

It is not just our kind of churches who wrestle with the freedom of the pulpit. Al Staggs recently shared a letter upon which I could not resist com-

ment. He sent the most interesting refusal, plus an open letter from Rabbi Stephen Wise (above.) My response led to the request to do this article:

This sounds pretty Baptist to me. I am continually amazed at how the polity and approach to churchmanship among Baptists and Jewish believers is similar in so many ways. It seems to me to go to the heart of the question of whether our congre-

*I learned this growing up in what we called Training Union on Sunday evenings.*

gations are a church or a corporation-- whether the pastor is trying to be (or is expected to be) a CEO or a pastor, preacher, and prophet.

The struggle to balance multiple roles is one I hear from many ministers. Having served three churches as pastor and nine as interim pastor since 1954, I have assumed the stance that the pulpit is free for me to say (as well as I am able) what I believe I am led to say by God and the Biblical text. Never, in any of those churches “on either side of the River” has this free pulpit question been raised by any official body. I have, of course, had many examples of pushback over these years, but never has any church committee or board sought to control or muzzle my Christian conscience.

I have felt significant pressure at times to be more of an executive in some of these churches. But I have also felt significant acceptance to lead in the way I felt led to lead—ways that fit both my individuality under God as well as the

church’s uniqueness. My position has been: God does not call churches to be businesses but ministries who operate in a business-like fashion. We must be more family than corporation.

Our goal is to minister; it is not to show a profit, amass a larger financial corpus or grow bigger for our own security. The ultimate goals are to accept God’s grace, share the good news, invite and equip disciples and foster liberty and justice for all.

This sacred challenge seems to me to incorporate the areas of pastoral care, pastoral leadership and preaching, denominational and ecumenical cooperation and the issues of justice and righteousness in our local communities and in our world.

To offer an example, the church I served for 21 years, Second Baptist in Lubbock, Texas, went so far as to enter into their official document the following language:

**FREEDOM & RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PULPIT**

Occupants of this pulpit (pastors, laity, or guests) are expected to be authentic to God, to themselves and to the congregation; they are not required to fit molds or to reflect particular opinions. We encourage them to preach what they believe God leads them to preach, reserving for ourselves the responsibility to agree or disagree. We desire our pulpit to be prophetic within the context of: 1) pastoral concern, 2) responsible dedication to interpreting the Word of God, and 3) respect for the integrity of personality.

That experience was not mine solely. My colleague and soul brother, the late John Claypool, shared the pastoral and pulpit ministry with our team for three of my years there. Charles Foster

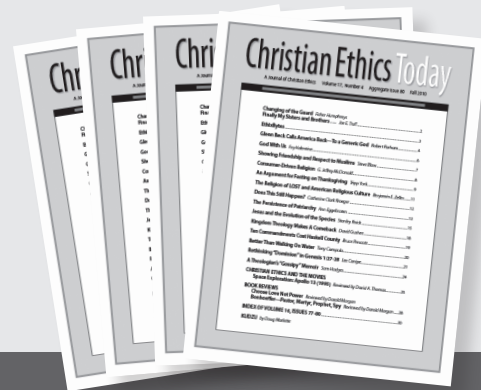
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Johnson, also my friend and colleague with whom I later worked closely, then came as Senior Pastor for 13 years. The late Philip Wise came for five. Ryon Price is now in his second year. I regret that Philip and I never discussed this matter, but John, Charlie, Ryon and I have sought to live with it as faithfully as human instruments can. I imagine that Philip did as well, although I never heard him preach. Both Charlie and Ryon assure me that the free pulpit issue remains more than a firm, half-century commitment at Second B.

In response to my inquiry about pulpit freedom, Charlie responded:

My memory of the freedom of the pulpit at Second B is that by the time I arrived in 1989, the principle of a free pulpit was so firmly established, so deeply a part of the congregational narrative, that it was simply understood and accepted as part of the communal fabric. I cannot even remember it being seriously tested.

In any instances when there was some test (such as our AIDS ministry, various homosexuality issues or moving the church building to a new location) . . . the test didn't really get off the ground. Key leaders neutralized potential conflict by reminding critics of the principle of pulpit freedom, and by suggesting that the mature way to process disagreement with a pastor is always direct communication rather than censorship of the pulpit. . . .

It seems to me that the corollary to pulpit freedom is the spiritual practice of the equality of all persons, the priesthood of all believers, the open access of the pulpit to diverse speakers—both women and men, etc.

That tradition at Second B of open, forthright, direct confrontation of the pastor in the congregational culture when there was disagreement . . . taught me that if someone has an issue with the pastor in that

congregation, they would confront me directly instead of submerging, triangulating, and gossiping. Our people loved each other, took care of each other, trusted each other and disagreed in an agreeable way.

It is good for us all to celebrate this time-honored principle, and how it was so beautifully practiced in our congregation in Lubbock. It is no accident that we were so closely related to the Jewish congregation there; we shared this value and what is now more than a half-century relationship.<sup>2</sup>

Ryon Price grew up in Lubbock, and began his pilgrimage in a three generational family at Second B. He responded to my query:

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**Key leaders neutralized potential conflict by reminding critics of the principle of pulpit freedom.**

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The understanding that preachers ought to have the freedom to preach their honest convictions has been a part of Second Baptist Church's DNA from early on. Though explicit reference to the freedom of the pulpit was at some time removed from our covenant of community, the spirit most certainly still prevails today. In fact, I believe the church's affirmation of pulpit freedom is much responsible for creating the ethos of freedom that permeates the whole life of Second B.

Because Second B intentionally affirmed the pastor to shout from the rooftop what he or she hears Jesus whispering in the study, the church in fact also in turn created a whole culture wherein preachers and lay people alike can speak

freely. This is one of the primary reasons my wife and I first entertained the invitation to come to Second Baptist. We wanted for our family a church which might be open to listen to and discern differing and sometimes dissenting opinions - opinions which may run against the grain of culture (whether American, West Texas, or even Church cultures). This freedom is such a rare gift; and I thank God for it every day.<sup>3</sup>

Ryon seems quite insightful to me when he articulates applying this concept of freedom and responsibility from the pulpit to the whole of the church family. One of Second B's stated goals is:

To meet people whoever and wherever they are and help them grow in their pilgrimage with Jesus the Christ.

We wanted, in all the venues of church life, for people to be free to be who they are as well as challenged to become who they can become in worship and service.

In my years of trying to be a faithful pastor, our three fellowships have had plenty of opportunities to address key theological and ethical issues: race, single member voting districts, war and peace, inerrancy of the scripture, divorce, sex education in the church, evolution, women in ministry, "alien immersion," "closed communion," various issues around homosexuality, and distancing ourselves from the SBC when the value of honest inquiry and free speech waned. We felt the SBC had left us, not that we left them. FBC Greenville, SC, was a Baptist church before the SBC existed.

Someone who knows I am now serving interim pastorates recently remarked: "I'll bet you really enjoy the freedom of preaching, leaving town and not have to deal with any fallout." After thinking about it a moment, I said: "No, it's the other way around. I much prefer to stay around and address the diverse discussion, feed-

back and teaching issues that arise." I don't like to stir up a controversy that someone else has to deal with. Plus, we all profit from hearing the thoughts of others

Somewhere between the extremes of being a "peacekeeper" and making a bully pulpit out of a sacred desk, there is a valid place of grace and integrity. Our Lord was never a peacekeeper; he was a peacemaker. He calls us to follow his lead in this place.

That place calls us to be pastors who love and serve our people as well as prophets who challenge and teach our people to genuinely turn to and follow the scriptures more than cultural ideas, local myths and urban legends. This is the "lamp unto our feet and the light to our pathway."

Jesus gathered all kinds of personalities among his followers. John the Baptist was outspoken, prophetic; John the Apostle was more pastoral and theological. Peter was a plunger; Thomas was an honest skeptic. Martha was an activist; Mary was a thinker and more passive.

Within themselves as individuals and in their gatherings, Jesus follow-

ers seem to have been able to blend the various sides of themselves and their groupings to do what I was urged to do in my formative years by my wise and courageous mentors: It is our calling both to "comfort the afflicted and

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**Somewhere between the extremes of being a "peacekeeper" and making a bully pulpit out of a sacred desk, there is a valid place of grace and integrity.**

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to afflict the comfortable."

Supreme Court Justice Brandeis once offered wise insight to this diversity discussion: "We can have democracy OR a nation run by a very few, very rich people; but we cannot have both."<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that this wisdom applies to our ministries and churches as well. Others do church in

various ways, but looking back over my years as a churchman, I am most grateful that I was led to be a Baptist-Christian who is committed to being as free and faithful as I possibly can.

A "free pulpit" is not an oxymoron. It is a calling and a commitment. It is a mandate we must live out if our lives and churches are to be the *koinonia* God wants to equip us to be. ■

*Hardy Clemons is a Pastoral and Executive Coach who lives in San Antonio with his wife Ardelle.*

<sup>1</sup>First President of Southwestern Seminary. This quote has been attributed to many other people in Baptist life—E. S. James and John Jeter Hurt, both editors of the Baptist Standard, as well as Gene Puckett who worked as a pastor and for six different Baptist papers in his illustrious career.

<sup>2</sup>Letter and phone call with Charlie Johnson

<sup>3</sup>Letter and phone call with Ryon Price

<sup>4</sup>Justice Brandeis <sup>3</sup> As quoted by Raymond Lonergan in *Mr. Justice Brandeis*, Great American (1941).

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# The Interfaith House that Dove Built

By Gregory Magruder

When Dove World Outreach in Gainesville, Florida posted signs that “Islam is of the Devil,” their neighbors protested. When the church sent its children to school wearing T-shirts with the same message, the community protested. When Terry Jones announced that he was going to burn the *Quran*, the world took notice. Jones’ comments sparked international rage and protest. Military leaders and even President Obama warned of the serious consequences and reactions that would take place if Jones burned the *Quran*. Missionaries, American tourists and combat troops would be put at risk. In fact, angry mobs marched in the streets in Muslim nations and death threats were posted on websites. Missionaries contacted the local clergy begging them to stop Jones before Christians in other countries became the victims of violence. The unknown pastor of a small church with pistol-packing members had ignited an international crisis.

How does a community respond to a church and pastor who love controversy and thrive on confrontation? The city and religious leaders of Gainesville struggled with the question as the anniversary of the September 11 attacks loomed. The fire marshal issued the church a burn ban but Jones insisted he would still burn the *Quran*. The city attorney could find no legal reason to keep Jones from carrying out his plan and though the police and sheriff departments prepared for the worst they had no basis to arrest him since no laws had yet been broken. It seemed inevitable that Dove World Outreach would carry out its threat. The world press set up their satellite trucks on the property.

Reaction in Gainesville religious circles was mixed. The Muslim community was angry and outraged. Many Christian churches were vocal

in opposition to Jones. The Christian Pastor’s Association and the Santa Fe River Baptist Association passed resolutions denouncing Dove World’s plans. Other churches were strangely silent about the threat. Some pastors told me that they could not really find any fault in Jones’ line of reasoning and would not speak out against him. They did not agree with his methods but felt his message was on target. Catholic, Jewish and Hindu groups spoke out against Dove World’s intolerance. Local faith groups joined picket lines outside Dove World in

## *How does a community respond to a church and pastor who love controversy and thrive on confrontation?*

protest. Some pastors and religious leaders sought an audience with Terry Jones to dissuade him from carrying out his plans. These actions had little influence on Dove World.

The Council on American - Islamic Relations (CAIR) gathered a group of Muslim, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant clergy together for a discussion on how to respond to Dove World. Meeting at the Hoda Islamic Center in Gainesville, the group considered ways to create a united front against the intolerance and perceived hatred of the small church. There was spirited discussion and a general agreement on areas of common ground shared by the different faith groups. Each faith tradition had scriptures that called for their followers to love God and their neighbors. Those scriptures would become the basis of the united effort to stop Dove World.

The faith communities decided to

call all religious communities to join in the sharing of common readings from the *Quran*, Hebrew scripture, and Christian scripture at their worship services on September 11 and 12. Each would include these readings in their own places of worship at their own Sabbath services. A press conference was held on September 7 at the City Hall to speak out against the burning of the *Quran* and to call for peace and tolerance in the community. An interfaith service of prayer and readings was planned for Wednesday, September 8 at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. The Gainesville Interfaith Forum would hold a Gathering for Peace, Understanding and Hope at Trinity United Methodist Church on September 10, the night before the scheduled burning. The Hoda Islamic Center of Gainesville planned an Iftar dinner at sunset for religious, civic and education leaders. All of these events were designed to counteract the provocative actions of Dove World.

The press took notice of the actions of this interfaith group of religious leaders through the internet . YouTube and Facebook. The Muslim community worldwide recognized the opposition to Dove World’s actions and witnessed a different picture of America than had been presented before. Mission leaders were grateful for the actions to oppose the *Quran* burning.

Terry Jones and Dove World continued to threaten to burn the *Quran*. September 11 arrived with the world holding its breath. Somehow Jones had decided to fly to New York City and not burn the *Quran* in exchange for the promise that a mosque would not be built near the site of the destroyed Twin Towers. The *Quran* was not burned and everyone breathed more easily. A disaster of another form had been averted.

A new wind of cooperation and dia-

logue began to blow in Gainesville. Communication and friendships had developed between religious leaders that had not existed before the Dove World crisis. A group of Muslim, Jewish and Christian clergy decided to meet on a regular basis and discussions began about how to continue the cooperative spirit that had developed. An interfaith luncheon continues to take place monthly at the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in downtown Gainesville. The Gainesville Interfaith Forum meets on a regular basis and will hold another Gathering for Peace, Understanding and Hope this September.

The major act of interfaith cooperation that has resulted from the Dove World crisis has been in conjunction with the work of the Alachua Habitat for Humanity. Interfaith leaders looked for a tangible way to show the Gainesville community and the world our commitment to unity in the midst of religious diversity. It was decided that faith groups in Gainesville would be invited to unite

to build an Interfaith Habitat House. Members from churches, synagogues and mosques would join hands to build a house for a needy family in the community. This would require fundraising and hands-on activity from the various faith groups. It would be a sign to the community that religious groups can work together and still

## *The religious leaders of Gainesville overcame a divisive spirit and worked together to build bridges of peace and unity.*

retain their distinctive characteristics.

The planning group for the Habitat House met in February, 2011. Seventeen religious groups gathered on February 25 to dedicate the new Habitat House. Within two months the interfaith group had collected \$65,000 and construction of

the house began in April. On any given Thursday or Saturday, 40 or more individuals met to build the house. These workers were Catholic, Muslim, Jewish and Protestant. By the end of June, the house was completed. A home dedication service and celebration will be held this year on Sunday, September 11, at 3:00pm at the new house!

The Gainesville community survived a deliberate threat of violence and polarization on September 11, 2010. This year the Gainesville community will celebrate a home that cooperation built. The religious leaders of Gainesville overcame a divisive spirit and worked together to build bridges of peace and unity. With dialogue, prayer and hard work, faith communities can overcome the extremists that destroy and divide. We truly can have a unity that transcends tolerance. We can love one another. ■

*Gregory Magruder is pastor of Parkview Baptist Church in Gainesville, Florida*

Tempted and tried we're oft made to wonder  
How it could be thus all the day long;  
While there are others living about us,  
Never molested tho' in the wrong.  
Farther along we'll know all about it,  
Farther along we'll understand why;  
Cheer up my brother, live in the sunshine,  
We'll understand it all bye and bye.

—W.B. Stevens and J.R. Baxter, Jr.



# Does America Need Ayn Rand or Jesus? A Conservative Christian's Exodus from the GOP's Big Tent Revival

By Gary Moore

When I was young, my mother made sure that I attended a conservative Southern Baptist Church most faithfully. At home, I slept beneath a poster of the Capitol Dome with Thomas Jefferson's quote: "Here, sir, the people govern." While others were protesting the Vietnam War and President Nixon during the sixties, I pursued a degree in political science and became a Distinguished Military Graduate. My family was economically pragmatic. We may have lit up at the mention of the Golden Rule but we grew tobacco for the use of others and had no qualms about price supports. Some thought us hypocritical. But we had simply learned to keep our politics, faith and economics in separate compartments.

That was perfect training for Wall Street and conservative politics during the eighties. I once received a gold card from the Republican National Committee that was preaching fiscal conservatism. Then President Reagan "proved deficits don't matter," to use the words of Vice-President Cheney. During the nineties, I served on the board of advisors of vice-presidential nominee Jack Kemp's Empower America. Jack was a fellow Christian who thought tax cuts could cure cancer.

The past decade, I watched as President "W" waged two wars while cutting taxes, a radical economic approach never before attempted in America. Yet, I have only recently registered as independent. Why now?

The "big tent" revival within the GOP, or God's Own Party, organized by President Reagan insists on singing the praises of both Ayn Rand and Jesus Christ. Fox News has just published an article entitled "Does America Need Ayn Rand or Jesus?" in which the answer seems to be, Ayn Rand. These two dichotomous philosophies

create a lot of stress in American life. The preference for Rand just doesn't sound right to me as I've grown less tone deaf politically and economically.

Rand wanted to be remembered as the greatest enemy of religion ever. She particularly despised Christianity as she thought selfishness is a virtue, the title of one of her minor books. Perhaps because it was strongly promoted by Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck, her gospel *Atlas Shrugged*, which is the second most influential book in

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*Atlas Shrugged, which is the second most influential book in America after the Bible, is required reading if you're on the staff of Congressman Paul Ryan or Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.*

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America after the Bible, is required reading if you're on the staff of Congressman Paul Ryan or Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. GOP senators Ron Johnson and Rand Paul cite Rand's radical ideas, ideas that increasingly shaped our economy before the Great Recession.

To be sure, Rand's philosophy of individualism got some things right by encouraging personal responsibility. All heresies must contain some truth or people would not be deceived by them. But Jesus taught personal responsibility by saying to "love neighbor as self," rather than "instead of self." Rand pales in comparison to Jesus in the area of social responsibility. In her book *The Virtue of*

*Selfishness*, Rand wrote we can rescue our fellow passengers in a shipwreck as long as it doesn't endanger us.

Even conservatives reject that when they admire our soldiers, police officers and the firemen who entered the burning World Trade Center. Yet she goes on to say that just because we save drowning victims does not mean we have any responsibility for them when we get back to shore. Then it's every man or woman for his or her self again, except of course, you should be nice to those "worthy" elites who can help you fulfill your selfish desires.

Alan Greenspan was part of Rand's inner circle during the sixties. That was a major reason *The Economist* said her ideas were influential in shaping Reaganomics. Junk bond king Michael Milken re-read her ideas while in prison. Greenspan confessed before Congress that his thinking about deregulating our S&Ls, and then Wall Street's sub-prime mortgage originators, had been "flawed." He cited one of Rand's radical and utopian ideas: that self-interest, and it alone, should regulate business, even the world. A soon to be released documentary entitled *The Flaw* is about that very idea.

I wrote a book in mid-nineties about my mentor, the legendary mutual fund manager Sir John Templeton. I contrasted his real world ideas, shaped as a Rhodes Scholar and decades as the "dean of global investing," with those of Ayn Rand, who only worked in Hollywood and at writing fiction. Templeton advocated our economic activities be guided by the Golden Rule. For example, he never invested in cigarette manufacturers, which humbled me. Rand taught traditional religion is an "evil," only of benefit for the weak-minded, and that humility is no virtue. She despised human emo-

tion, hence her disdain for charity and welfare. Neither kept her from living off relatives for years or her husband from filing for Social Security.

She worshipped human reason to the point of teaching it is humanity's *only* way of understanding Reality, to the exclusion of Revelation and tradition. She taught Christianity is irrational without acknowledging Jesus taught us to love God and neighbor with heart, *mind* and soul. Her philosophy was especially directed at capital markets as Rand's great commandment was essentially "love yourself; let your neighbor love himself."

John Templeton's real world experiences caused him to teach us that capital markets are lubricated by trust. When that trust in Wall Street evaporated in 2008, capitalism nearly died.

The poverty of Rand's teachings is not simply relational and spiritual. Rand's teachings about selfishness have brought considerable economic pain to millions. That was the subject of a feature article I wrote for the September 2010 issue of *Christianity Today*. Since then, several progressive Christian leaders have written about the irreconcilable differences between Rand and Christ (Google "Ayn Rand and Jesus Christ").

Conservatives seek to "conserve" the traditions that shaped our nation. Rand wanted her disciples to be "radicals for capitalism." Her teach-

ings contradict the teachings of Jesus about "render unto Caesar," as well as those of St. Paul in Romans 13 that we "honor and respect" government.

Conservatives should not forget our personal or social responsibility, whether exercised through the state, through mediating institutions like the Church or personally. Come to think

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*The poverty of Rand's teachings is not simply relational and spiritual. Rand's teachings about selfishness have brought considerable economic pain to millions.*

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of it, those three sectors of our economy may be the three stewards Jesus referenced in his Parable of the Talents. He assured us the most effective steward would be rewarded while the least effective would wither. That morality strikes me as a more likely road to the Promised Land than politics has been recently.

So I believe it is crucial in these troubled times that we reason with heart and soul as well as mind. We might remember the biblical prophets railed about mixing Jehovah with pagan

gods, but not at all against atheism. As John Calvin taught, people will always worship. If not God as Christ taught, or the state as Marx taught, they'll worship money, as Rand taught. Modern theologians term such mixing "syncretism." Yet conservative Christian sociologist George Barna has termed syncretism "America's favored religion." It is why confessing Christian businesspeople, like Ken Lay of Enron, with whom I served on the board of a Christian ministry, think like Christ on Sunday but Rand from Monday to Saturday. That pervasive mental illness has been well documented by sociologist Laura Nash of Harvard.

When Pilate asks if we want Rand or Christ, most conservative Christians may be tempted to rationalize that they can vote "all the above." Yet they should realize, as I have, that the question to ponder is whether the Great Recession was the end of the Puritan ethic that enriched America before the sixties, or have we placed our trust in new Rand-style capitalism. And my most fervent prayer for our future is for all Christians to again support those nearly extinct politicians who are faithful to St. Paul's admonition for "moderation in all things." ■

*Gary Moore has authored five books on the moral foundations of political-economy. More about him is found at [www.financialemminary.org](http://www.financialemminary.org)*

## ETHIXBYTES:

*"They (conservative Republicans) do not see politics as the art of the possible... They believe that politics is a cataclysmic struggle... that if they can remain pure in faith then someday their party will win a total and permanent victory over its foes. They believe they are Gods of the New Dawn." ■ David Brooks*

*"When the hero of (Ayn) Rand's breakthrough novel, 'The Fountainhead,' doesn't get what he wants, he blows up a building. Rand's followers see that as gallant. So perhaps it shouldn't surprise us that blowing up our government doesn't seem to be a big deal to some of the new radical individualists in our House of Representatives." ■ E.J. Dionne*

# Looking at Homosexuality from another Angle

By John R Tyler

The Rev. Bruce Lowe, a 96-year-old, retired Southern Baptist pastor, wrote an essay titled “Important Considerations regarding Homosexuality: Why Churches Should Welcome and Affirm Christian GLBTs” for the spring 2011 issue of this journal. I want to offer another angle from which to view the topic.

It is customary when Christians address homosexuality to begin with the Bible as Lowe did. Much ink has been spilt explicating the few biblical passages that speak directly to sexual acts between males (the Bible is silent on sexual acts between women). I can add nothing original to the debate on these passages, for it’s all been said to the point of exhaustion.

I want to start at a different place—what we observe in nature—and explore questions like these: Why are we built the way we are? Why do we have our sexual drive? What is the purpose of sex, and why is it like it is? What do our answers tell us about homosexuality and homosexual people? I do so as a layman untrained in biology or psychology.

**Proposition 1: The purpose of sex is first and foremost to propagate the species.**

Consider the animal kingdom. I won’t provide illustrations that already are coursing through your mind. Suffice it to say that the sexual drive is powerfully all-consuming with the goal of propagating the species. Perhaps we could propagate by some other means if we were a different life form, but we are made at the foundational level of genes, stretches of DNA. Sex is the process through which male genes are transmitted male to a female and combined with her genes; male and female produce together new humans who eventually will transmit and receive transmitted genes.

Men and women are physically

constructed in a complementary fashion; all the parts fit and function to serve nature’s driving purpose to propagate the species. And to ensure that occurs, males and females are powerfully driven to have sex with one another. There’s a reason we suddenly acquire drives at puberty that we can hardly control. We are in a semi-perpetual state of heat to ensure nature’s desired outcome. Our sexual drive is part of creation, not something we conjured up on our own.

Humans are markedly different from the animal kingdom. We have the image of God within us (the soul), and we have big brains. We have the ability to love, to think, to bond in deep relationships, to make moral choices. So sex for the human species is far more complex than propagation by instinct.

**Proposition 2: Since the primary purpose of sex is to propagate the species, we are all supposed to have a heterosexual orientation.**

Mere observation shows that we are physically constructed for heterosexual sex because the propagation and survival of the species requires it, and all nature strains mightily to achieve that all-consuming goal. Yet some of us have a homosexual orientation. When a homosexual orientation occurs, something has gone wrong; for nature’s first mission is to ensure the propagation of a species. So when a human being is wired with a homosexual orientation, there has been a breakdown in nature. A production error has occurred on the factory floor. The foregoing statement will be offensive to some; but I am not saying that a homosexual person is morally inferior. I am saying only that the first function of sex is to propagate the species; thus, we are all supposed to have a heterosexual orientation. Observation of all animal and plant life shouts this fact.

But . . .

**Proposition 3: Nature makes mistakes.**

Everything about living in our environment demands sight, so nature strives mightily for us to be sighted. But sometimes something goes wrong, and a person is born blind (or deaf or with a cleft palate).

There is a significant difference between blindness and a homosexual orientation, both caused by mistakes of nature. We provide assistance to blind people so they can navigate the world that is constructed for sighted people. We seldom provide assistance to homosexual people so they can live in a world that operates in a different manner than what they are sexually wired for. Blind people receive compassionate assistance because blindness is seen as a physical abnormality absent a moral dimension. Homosexual people often do not receive compassion because homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is seen to have a moral dimension, and in the view of many people, an immoral dimension.

**How Shall We Then Live?**

To what sexual ethic should homosexual people be accountable? We have two basic options (with options in between we haven’t space to explore).

1. The best option for homosexual people and society at large is life-long sexual abstinence. All physically-challenged people have to forego certain activities. Blind people cannot drive automobiles. While we regret that a mistake of nature has created limitations for which blind people are not responsible, there are some things they simply cannot do. In like manner, forms of intimacy and relationship made possible by our human sexual dimension must be forfeited by homosexual people

because all homosexual activity is prohibited by scripture.

2. The other course is to allow marriage for homosexual people just as we do for heterosexual people. All people would be bound by the same Christian sexual ethic: no sex outside of marriage; no adultery; no demeaning sex or exploitation of one partner by the other. The same State-mandated requirements for divorce, property settlements, and other rights and responsibilities would be part of the package. A homosexual couple, like a heterosexual couple, would be united in a shared, life-long venture.

Like heterosexual marriages, some gay marriages will be grand successes, some will just get along, some will be abusive, and some will end in divorce, warranted and otherwise. Gay couples will need to attend marriage enrichment retreats just like heterosexual couples do to get the help they need, for all successful marriages require wisdom and work. They too will need the pressure of the church and society to stay together when the marriage is difficult.

The acceptance of gay marriage will be as rocky and long as was the acceptance in the South of freedom for slaves after the Civil War, and the lingering effects of the past environment for homosexuals will continue for generations just as the lingering effects continue today from the past environment of slavery.

It appears that gay marriage will consume much of the debate in the foreseeable future. Do we or do we not allow marriage for homosexual couples as we do for heterosexual couples, and hold them accountable to the same standards? Would life be better or worse for us all if gay marriage were permitted and supported, and society and the Church held the same ethical standards for both homosexual and heterosexual couples? Would gay marriage provide homosexual people with an opportunity for fuller and richer lives?

Does scripture speak to this, and

from this angle? I think it does. Having started with what we observe in nature, let me move to an application of scripture, but not one of the passages usually cited when addressing this topic.

**Matthew 19:3–9**

Consider Jesus’ words on divorce recorded in Matthew’s Gospel:

[The Pharisees asked Jesus,] “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” Jesus answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”

I reach seven conclusions when reading this passage in the context of our human condition:

1. There is an ideal for marriage—marriage between one man and one woman, and it ought to be permanent. This is how nature and how God intend it.
2. Marriages sometimes fall short of this ideal, and nothing in our fallen world can change that fact.
3. The situation requires an accommodation to the ideal; we call it “divorce.”
4. The provision for divorce has problems, but that doesn’t negate its necessity.

5. The provision for divorce doesn’t negate or diminish the ideal for marriage.
6. The negative impact on the directly involved people and society at large of not permitting divorce is worse than the negative impact of permitting it.
7. In order to achieve as best we can the sweeping moral and ethical goals of Scripture in our fallen world, we have chosen to go beyond what this text permits by allowing divorce for reasons other than adultery (abuse, abandonment, et al.—even no-fault divorce) and by allowing women also to initiate divorce.

Is there a parallel here with homosexuality? I propose that there is, and we need not torture the text to find it.

1. There is an ideal for sexual orientation—heterosexuality. This is how nature intends it.
2. Nature sometimes does not produce the ideal, and we thus far cannot alter that fact.
3. The situation requires an accommodation to the ideal; we call it “gay marriage.” The provision for gay marriage will have problems just like the provision for divorce has problems; but as stated above, an imperfect accommodation does not negate its necessity.
4. The provision for gay marriage doesn’t negate or diminish the ideal of heterosexual marriage or “the family”. Ironically, divorce is most prevalent in Bible Belt states, yet it is Bible Belt, “Bible-believing” Christians who most often claim that gay marriage is an attack on heterosexual marriage and the family.
5. The negative impact on the directly involved people and society at large of not permitting gay marriage is worse than any perceived negative impact of permitting it.
6. In order to achieve as best we can the sweeping moral and ethical goals of scripture in a world where nature makes mistakes, we should permit gay marriage for the benefit



of homosexual people and society at large which includes us all. Isn't this the principle that Moses followed when he made a provision for divorce? It is what we do now when we permit divorce for reasons other than adultery and allow women also to initiate divorce, something that goes beyond Jesus' explicit statement on divorce to a first-century Israelite audience.

#### A Suggested Course of Action

I am proposing that gay marriage be allowed for the reasons I have cited. That will be determined by legislatures and the courts. But there is something we Christians can do apart from the State. We will need to understand the difference between marriage that is a secular endeavor of the State and what I will call "Holy Matrimony" that is a spiritual endeavor of the Church. The State ceremony and Church rite have been conflated in Christendom—the marriage of Church and State in which each functioned for the benefit of the other in a powerful partnership that corrupted both parties.

Marriage is viewed by the State as a secular contract between two people in accordance with and subject to laws enacted by legislatures and interpreted by courts. I view this as a separate transaction from Holy Matrimony where couples make covenants and promises before God and Christian witnesses in the Church, covenants and promises rooted in scripture rather than secular law. God is not concerned with whether or not married couples have different tax rates than unmarried tax payers or certain inheritance rights (although God is vitally interested that justice always be done). God and, thus, the Church have concerns not shared by the State (and the State has concerns not shared by God and the Church).

I cringe in a church wedding when a clergyman says, "By the authority vested in me by the State of \_\_\_\_\_, I now pronounce you husband and wife." To paraphrase the ante-Nicene father Tertullian, "What hath the Church to do with the State? Let a

State official preside over the initiation of a State contract, and let the Church preside over the entry into a covenant I've called Holy Matrimony between two people, one to the other, and between them as a couple and God, and before the witnessing Church that covenants to support them in their lives together. Let us "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21). I would expect Baptists especially to find this desirable, given Baptists' emphasis on religious liberty and the institutional separation of church and state.

Apart from what the State may do, we Christians can provide the

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*I express my views humbly and devoid of certainty; all that is certain is that I may be wrong.*

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Church rite of Holy Matrimony for all people. Our concerns are the covenants we make with God and with each other before God. Being joined in Holy Matrimony by the Church will not grant a couple the rights granted by State law, but it will grant them the rights and responsibilities of a Christian life together lived within the family of God.

I add parenthetically that many heterosexual people, often older adults, would find this helpful. They often want to be married, but their lifetimes of complicated legal, financial, and business arrangements make it difficult because of what State laws would mean for asset ownership and inheritance rights if they married. They don't want the State's interference in that. What they want is God's blessing and the blessing of God's people so they may share their lives together under God, letting State law apply to them as unmarried people since they have not entered into a State marriage contract. Marriage

today is an entanglement of State and Church, and it can be solved when we allow marriage to be a State matter and Holy Matrimony to be a Church matter. Let couples who desire the benefits of both participate in two ceremonies: a State ceremony before a State magistrate and a Church rite before God and Christian witnesses.

This separation of State marriage and Holy Matrimony is not a novel concept. A French marriage must be performed by a French civil authority, which includes the mayor and his legally authorized replacement, the deputy mayor or a city councilor. Religious ceremonies are optional, have no legal status, and may be held only after the civil ceremony has taken place (which can, but need not be, on the same day). We can tweak this concept and allow the rite of Holy Matrimony to be performed absent a civil marriage since Holy Matrimony is a Church rite without civil legal status and, therefore, is outside the realm of State interest or control.

Whether we should allow or prohibit slavery or allow or prohibit women to vote were once complex questions. These questions vanished with time; the answers eventually became crystal clear. Today, homosexuality is a complex topic. I confess that it is for me, and although I have expressed in this essay what now seems best to me, I have done so with fear and trembling. I express my views humbly and devoid of certainty; all that is certain is that I may be wrong.

"Now we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor 13:12). With only dim light available to us all, let us strive with extra effort to do justice to all, afford equality to all, provide inclusion to all, extend acceptance to all, and give love to all. There is no law against these things. The Bible tells me so. ■

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## Civil Unions by Another Name: An Eastern Orthodox Defense of Gay Marriage

By David J. Dunn

New York's recent legalization of gay marriage is being hailed by many as a watershed moment in the history of the fight for equal rights for same sex couples. Whatever the long-term consequences of this decision may be, chances are, in the near term, it will be met with increased opposition from Christian conservatives. Their efforts, which reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of marriage, are misguided at best and sinful at worst. There will always be Christians who oppose "homosexuality" on moral grounds, but enlisting the state to protect "the sanctity of marriage" is a mistake. Such efforts demonstrate a fundamental — even idolatrous — misunderstanding of the meaning of "holy matrimony," effectively denying Christ by vesting the state with divine authority.

California's infamous Proposition 8 and similar measures sure to make it onto the ballots during next year's election fall prey to the so-called Constantinian temptation. When Constantine legalized Christianity in the early fourth century, some began to see an almost godlike authority in the state. An increasing number of Christians found it difficult to tell the difference between the things that belong to Caesar and the things that belong to God.

Yet, despite their confusion, those earlier Christians generally knew there was a difference between God and the state, even if they could not always tell where it was. Our sin is worse. Today's Christian conservatives seem to be worshiping America, or at least a certain idea of it, when they ask the government to protect the "sanctity" of marriage. In doing this, they have vested the state with the power to sanctify.

"Sanctity" is a holiness word. It is what happens when the Holy Spirit (the *Spiritus Sanctus* in Latin) transforms an ordinary thing into a means of salvation. The Spirit turns bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. She makes ordinary water into the instrument of our second birth. I am Eastern Orthodox, so in my church marriage is another kind

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*There will always be Christians who oppose "homosexuality" on moral grounds, but enlisting the state to protect "the sanctity of marriage" is a mistake.*

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of sacrament (like baptism and eucharist). The Holy Spirit turns the husband and wife into an image of Christ and the church.

I mention my church because we take the idea of marital sanctity to the extreme, at least in our official theology. Marriage, for us, is not a contract or a covenant but a miracle! We have no vows in our ceremonies, only prayers, because only God can make a marriage. We allow but discourage remarriage because, as the Spirit transforms bread and wine, she has transformed the couple into one flesh. Because marriage is sacred, we must be married by a priest in a church, not by a judge in a courthouse or an Elvis impersonator somewhere on the Vegas Strip.

Strictly speaking, our theology does not recognize the legitimacy of such marriages. They are not sanctified by the Spirit in the church. On

the other hand, it is not as if the average Orthodox Christian thinks people married in secular ceremonies are not "really" married. For practical purposes we tacitly recognize these civil marriages even if they don't quite meet our theological standards.

This tacit recognition of a distinction between sacred and civil marriages is one my fellow Christians would do well to keep in mind as they consider how to proceed in their efforts to protect the sanctity of marriage. Anyone who thinks marriage is something sacred needs to recognize that from the church's perspective all marriages granted by the state for tax and inheritance purposes are just civil unions by another name. Christians who truly believe that marriage is a sacred institution between a man and a woman are welcome to their belief. But Christians who demand the state take up the task of defending marital sanctity are effectively making the state their god. They seem to think that their local capitol can perform miracles when only the Holy Spirit has the power to sanctify.

If marriage truly is a sacrament, as many Christians (including myself) believe, then we need to be much more concerned with developing a robust theology of marriage and making that understood among our congregations than with mobilizing them to deny the right of a civil marriage to same-sexed partners. If we believe marriage is a sacrament, then all marriages performed outside the church are civil marriages, and however the state defines marriage can have absolutely no bearing on its sanctity as far as the church is concerned.

Of course, there will be some Christian churches that see gay marriage as a sacrament. In a pluralistic society they are welcome to their

belief. It should have no bearing on how Christians relate to society at large but only each other. Disagreements about sacraments are nothing new to the church. We cannot agree on whether we should use leavened or unleavened bread in communion. We cannot agree if Christ is “really” or “spiritually” present in the elements. We cannot agree if baptism is inherently effective or an “outward sign of an inner grace.” Infighting about such definitions is one of the church’s oldest and most venerable traditions! In medieval times a prince or an emperor might have been called in to settle the matter. How strange it would be for Christians today to demand the state protect the sanctity of the eucharist or baptism! How Constantinian!

Denying civil marriage to homosexuals does nothing to protect its

sanctity. If the state stopped granting marriage licenses altogether, making every union a civil union, the church would still have the sacrament of holy matrimony.

Christians opposed to gay marriage can continue to see civil marriages as sacramentally illegitimate without sponsoring ballot initiatives to ban it. They are free to join churches that share their views without essentially vesting judges or Elvis or the U.S.A with the power to sanctify. Christians can continue to bicker with each other about which kind of marriages are sacraments, but civil marriages like the kind New York extended to gays fall beyond the purview of the church because they cannot be sacred by definition. This is true for straights and gays.

Calling upon the state to protect

our sacrament is an act of extreme unfaithfulness. Only God can make a marriage holy. Christians can continue to fight about what kinds of marriages “count” as sacred, but we have also learned to agree to disagree about such things. In polite company, and for the sake of keeping peace with each other (because mutual apostasies take so much effort), we can do with marriage what we do with our disagreements about eucharist and baptism: keep our mouths shut and let God sort it out in the end. ■

*Disclaimer: The views expressed in this post belong solely to the author and are not representative of the Orthodox Church.*

*David J. Dunn has a PhD in Theology from Vanderbilt University. This article was published in The Huffington Post July 13, 2011 and is reprinted by permission.*

## A Better Unity: A Biblical Illustration of Community Building

By Reggie Williams

What is the cost of unity between races, and who is willing to pay for it? That’s an awkward question, and one that has been repeatedly asked, and pursued by far too many people to be ignored. What is “unity that costs too much?”

In 1997, the movie *Volcano* depicted a stirring moment when, after the volcano had finished its destruction in South Central Los Angeles, ashes from its torrent of destruction covered everything. But instead of their being a sign of sheer destruction, they masked the racial distinctions of people seen helping one another. It is inspirational to see people caring for one another and disregarding racial distinctions. Natural devastation had caused society to become “color-blind.”

But is a “color-blind” community a unified community? There is certainly a sort of unity that occurs with color-blindness; the stereotypes and acknowledgments that correspond to racial grouping are not recognized. Instead a sort of generic “humanity” is esteemed. That is the remedy to race-hate that “color-blind” unity see - wash it out and see no color. In *Volcano* racist white policemen became allies with young black men they had previously and unjustly pursued as thugs. They joined together to push back the life-threatening lava flow that sought to kill everyone. The lava that burned and killed became a metaphor for hatred and discrimination. And after the flow had ceased, they looked at each other to find only ash-covered faces, masking the races and revealing a generic “humanity.”

But there are problems with color-blindness; we are more than skin color. We are the product of complex sources of community stories, food and music that makes us who we are. We are cultures in families and communities with histories that parents pass to children over many

years. We have made traditions, and traditions have made us. For example, I am an African American man. I share a history with a people group who have forged a way in the burning heat of white American race hate. My grandmother and grandfather raised my mother and her four siblings in America when segregation was legal. My mother was a teenager when segregation was outlawed in America. She was not familiar with a

*I share a history with a people group who have forged a way in the burning heat of white American race hate.*

city in which whites and blacks intermingled without fear of white violence, until years after she was married and had her own children. But she and my grandparents were not bitter. We had music, art, literature, food, politics, and Jesus; we knew who we were in spite of living among a racist majority.

The majority also had music, art, literature, food, politics, and even Jesus. But many of the things that shaped how they understood Jesus to meet them in society were not the same as those that directed the community where my mother and grandparents lived. I came to know the history and tradition of Jesus, food, music, art, literature, and politics that shaped us. How could I not? It was, so to speak, the language we spoke at home. I would need to disregard that language, and speak a different language when speaking in the majority population. But my “home language” was the courier of the narrative that shaped me; how could I ignore it?

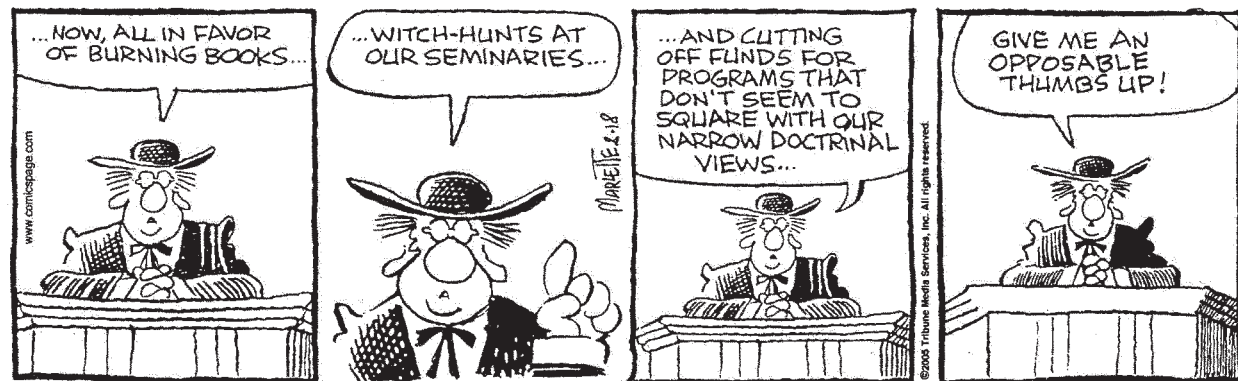
The language of “color-blind” doesn’t recognize “the language that shapes us.” Thus, it asks us to give it up and speak a common language, which is typically the language of the majority. That washes out too much important, formative content. We would cease to know and be shaped by the important history of our survival. The ancestors would cease to provide evidence of Jesus with us, and we would no longer know ourselves in America. That unity costs too much.

The book of *Genesis* tells another story of costly unity. After the great flood, Noah’s sons emerged from the ark, and God told them to go out, “multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1). But they stayed local. Soon, they became a large number, and embarked on a building plan. They wanted to become a unified people, and they felt that a building plan would do that for them “Come” they said “let’s build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies—a monument to our greatness! This will bring us together and keep us from scattering all over the world” (Gen. 11:1-4). But indeed, they were supposed to “scatter all over the world.” They embarked on a plan for unity and greatness, with a building plan.

But their building plans were not dreams of greatness that all of their community could share. Someone had to build it! Someone had to make the bricks and build the buildings; they had to toil and sweat as participants in the unity of the majority who sought greatness. They were not privy to the proud unity that the majority sought. That unity made them invisible, and it was assembled upon their backs.

God saw this unity, and came down. He was not afraid of their “tower to the heavens” idea; nor was God afraid of any future greatness they might pursue. But God struck down their unity;

*(continued on page 25)*



Unintended consequences of crises driving policy: In the aftermath of a young child’s brutal murder, legislation required the creation of a vast national database to include everyone convicted of a “sex crime.” The result is that today almost 700,000 persons are labeled “sex offenders” and listed on the database, many of whom are teenagers who had sex with their girlfriends and adults caught urinating in public.



# A Torturous Decision

by Alexander Patico

You don't have to be a Christian to recognize a serious pragmatic problem with the use of torture: Nothing remains secret forever. As we saw with Abu Ghraib, sooner or later, someone is careless, someone fails to appreciate the gravity of what they are dealing with, or someone makes a conscious decision to go public. Once that occurs, the P.R. fall-out is certain to be negative, and possibly huge.

You don't have to be a Christian to realize that those who oppose our country, or who are fence-sitting, or even those who have been friends in the past, may react to news of torture with anything from disquiet and dismay to overt (and covert) violence. (These are, after all, practices that most people consider abhorrent.) They may even seize upon the inflammatory information in order to recruit impressionable people to radical anti-Americanism.

(There may also be an impact on foreign military or intelligence institutions. As pointed out by Gen. David Patraeus, Gen. Colin Powell and others, our own forces, whether uniformed or clandestine, become more likely to suffer mistreatment. Whether *much* more likely or only *slightly* more likely, we cannot accurately assess, but *some* extra degree of risk to American personnel is nearly undeniable.)

You don't have to be a Christian to accept that our diplomats may have a more difficult job promoting human rights if our own record in these areas is less than exemplary. We saw this in 2007, when China made much of U.S. practices, in order to deflect criticism of their own record. They pointed out that "parts of the U.S. Military Commissions Act violate the Geneva Conventions,"<sup>1</sup> in the murky legal status and indefinite detention of persons at Guantanamo, in violation of American traditions of *habeas corpus*.

You don't have to be a Christian

to figure out that our long-term quest for stronger adherence to rule-of-law around the world suffers just a bit every time a questionable practice is approved or justified, and then becomes widely known. We cannot persuasively sell theories of civilized governance if we seem to denigrate them in actual practice.

You don't have to be a Christian to have reservations about the actual *usefulness* of torture and other harsh methods. Experts on the collection of intelligence from human sources have said as much. Sen. John McCain, a former naval aviator, was himself imprisoned and tortured in Vietnam.

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*The National Defense Intelligence College reported, "Most professionals believe that pain, coercion, and threats are counterproductive to the elicitation of good information."*

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He has said that "subjecting prisoners to abuse leads to bad intelligence because under torture a detainee will tell his interrogator anything to make the pain stop."<sup>2</sup> A science board assembled for the National Defense Intelligence College reported, "Most professionals believe that pain, coercion, and threats are counterproductive to the elicitation of good information,"<sup>3</sup>

You don't have to be a Christian to feel that perhaps an officer or agent should not have to "check his conscience at the door" when he signs up. Wouldn't it provide a vital check

on potential abuses if there is a point beyond which no one should go? (In theory, of course, an unlawful order can be ignored with impunity, but, in the real world, this is only actionable if there is a policy and a tradition of allowing individual exercise of conscience. Under current law, for example, there are no provisions for a person to declare themselves a conscientious objector to a particular war, or a particular practice, no matter how deeply they feel it to be morally repugnant.)

You don't have to be a Christian to be concerned about the impact that administration of torture has on the persons that are charged with carrying it out. Can we reasonably suspect that a person can on one day be asked to act as a torturer, using a torturer's implements and maintaining a torturer's callousness, and the next day be asked to be a loving, nurturing father, a responsible driver, a good neighbor, as though he can split his personality into two parts with a firewall between them?

You don't have to be a Christian to acknowledge complicity in acts committed in our name. One soldier, assigned to interrogation duty at Abu Ghraib, Joshua Casteel, described it this way: "There is no such thing as a private conscience."<sup>4</sup> What we do derives from our society and, in turn, impacts it. As John Donne reminded us, "No man is an island, entire of itself...any man's death [or suffering?] diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind...."<sup>5</sup>

You don't have to be a Christian to have basic respect for human beings. Buddhists, humanists, even atheists, teach that each person has inherent worth and should be accorded dignity. Jewish tradition says "Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if

he saved an entire world."<sup>6</sup> What is torture but the attempted destruction of a soul?

You don't have to be a Christian to cringe at any honest recitation of what the word "torture" has denoted through the centuries. The names are colorful -- necklacing, the rack, the iron maiden, drawing and quartering, keelhauling, the pendulum -- but the reality they represent can only be met with revulsion and disgust. Indeed, these are things that if done to a cat would be a good indicator of a sociopathic personality. Yet, our kids watch it enacted on the television show "24" by a man who is supposed to be a good guy and who works for us.

You don't have to be a Christian to be impressed by the fact that a great many church leaders have seen fit to decry its use. An emphatic denun-

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*What if it turned out to be true: "whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me?"*

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ciation has been signed by the leaders of groups from the Rabbinical Assembly to the Catholic Bishops, from the Unitarian Universalists to the Evangelical Lutherans -- over 30 American denominations. Rich Warren said, "If we condone torture, we yield the moral high ground to our enemies and encourage anyone who

hates us to stoop to using that subhuman level against us. We reap whatever we sow."<sup>7</sup>

BUT...what if you *are* a Christian? What if you believe in the mysterious, yet marvelous, idea that *each* of us has been created in the likeness and image of God? What if Jesus -- who was himself flayed, beaten and pierced -- meant it, when he warned (in Matthew 25) that leaving a prisoner to fend for himself might constitute denying Him? What if it turned out to be true: "whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me?" What if eternal life is at stake? It's something to think about, isn't it? ■

*Alexander Patico is Secretary (North America), Orthodox Peace Fellowship (Participating Member, National Religious Coalition against Torture)*

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<sup>1</sup>Eland, Ivan, "China Returns Fire on Human Rights Abuses" in Anti-War.com, March 17, 2007

<sup>2</sup>Reported by Vance, Lawrence M., "Senate Republican Torture Masters" in Lew Rockwell.com, October 12, 2005

<sup>3</sup>Reported by Scmicke, Sharon, " in MinnPost.com, December 20, 2007

<sup>4</sup>Casteel, Joshua, speaking at Truth Commission on Conscience in War, Riverside Church, New York City, March 21, 2010

<sup>5</sup>Donne, John, "Meditation XVII," *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, 1624

<sup>6</sup>Rabbinical scholar, in "Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5", *Babylonian Talmud* (Tractate Sanhedrin 37a)

<sup>7</sup>Warren, Rick, quoted on website of National Religious Coalition against Torture, 2010.

## ETHIXBYTE:

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*It is more beneficial that many guilty persons should escape unpunished than one innocent person should suffer: John Adams*

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## A Better Unity

(continued from page 23)

God gave them different languages, and halted their building plans. God liberated their oppressed and he set their captives free (Gen. 11:5-9). At the tower of Babel, God created cultures and liberated the oppressed, recovering them from invisibility, and oppression under a destructive and all too costly "unity," giving them their own lands and culture. In the very next chapter, the call of Abram is narrated, and the Jewish culture is born, from whom the world receives a Savior.

Years later, the languages are brought back together in an intentional way by God. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came from Heaven "like a mighty rushing wind" and settled like tongues of fire above the heads of disciples gathered there. And everyone watching this event heard them speaking in other tongues. That is, they heard them praising God in the languages of many different cultures (Acts 2:1-13). On the day of Pentecost, God reversed the cause of language confusion, and brought people back together under a different building project--under a different unity. They retained their languages, and in their formative languages, they praised God together.

That doesn't sound like "color-blind" to me. God is okay with our different languages and formative narratives. It seems to me that we should be too. Hence, we should not seek to build a unity that washes out those distinctions; we must find a way to embrace one another, stories and all, in an effort to "love neighbor as self." That is a better unity. That is a unity that endures. ■

*Reggie Williams is a Lecturer in Christian Ethics at Baylor University's Department of Religion*

# Staff Terminations in the Church: A Beastly Endeavor

By Jim Shoopman

I used to teach a Sunday morning Bible study class before worship in the board room of the Children's Advocacy Center, an organization dedicated to helping children who have been abused in various ways. Our startup church rented space from this social service agency. In that boardroom the administrators of the Children's Advocacy Center often display exceptional artwork created by the children who work through their fears and tears with colored pencils and crayons. One of the pictures I found most moving was of a monster wolf, huge, hideous, slavering and bearing down on its prey. The caption under the picture, written by the 8-year-old boy who drew it, says "This is the beast that hurts people."

I suspect I have felt a similar beast on the prowl in Christian congregations more often than any of us should have. Perhaps you too have seen abusive and overly authoritarian pastors dismissed. Predatory church members are sometimes openly "disfellowshipped" or privately "disinvited." However, even such measures on the part of a congregation may sometimes become the use and abuse of power. We do not always recognize the abuse of power when we see it.

To explain how we sometimes miss seeing the misuse of power, let me first define "power." Power is nothing more than the ability to make things change or the ability to keep things as they are. Everyone has some power, and, indeed, everybody needs some — in the home, in the workplace, and in the church.

A very wise director of missions I knew, Dr. Robert Perry, once published an excellent little book on church dynamics called *Pass the Power Please*.<sup>1</sup> In many ways "power" is a morally neutral concept, and the desire for power is not evil in itself. Many people seek power in order to

make things better. We generally only accuse someone of being "power hungry," in the insulting sense, if we do not agree with that person's goals. When used for the benefit of others, power is a gift of God. In that sense, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Lottie Moon were powerful people in different ways. The key question is: what do we want power for in our religious institutions?

This issue of religious motivation was first explored scientifically by Dr. Gordon Allport in his early psychology-of-religion landmark work, *The Individual and His religion*. In this work Allport suggested that

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*This abuse of power is typically accomplished through the power to hire and fire. This use of economic control is a potent process.*

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there are two types of motives for religious behavior. He eventually came to refer to these motives as *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*.<sup>2</sup> Persons drawn to religious life by intrinsic motives are attracted to the spiritual benefits actually promised by the religion such as meaning, hope, forgiveness and moral guidance. Persons drawn to religious life by extrinsic motives are drawn by the byproducts of institutional religious success such as business contacts, social "respectability," and a place to be important or exercise authority. Theoretically, we can imagine individuals who are drawn to religious institutions exclusively by either intrinsic or extrinsic motives, but in the real world most of us are a mixed bag, drawn to churches and other reli-

gious institutions for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. As much as we love God, we also love having a sense of community and corporate achievement with likeminded believers, and we are drawn to places where we can do things that matter and thus feel more important. The more acceptable language for this is that we seek "significance." All of this is perfectly normal.

That being granted, some church leaders are more "extrinsically" motivated than others, and therein lies the problem. The desire to keep a church financially stable, the desire to attract a specific demographic to the church, the desire to change worship styles or keep them the same, the desire to avoid the tensions inherent in conflict, and many other matters extrinsic to the religion itself, may cause a leader to rationalize hurtful actions as being ultimately virtuous because those actions are, in the end, "for the good of the church." In the intense desire to see this through, a church leader may well abuse the power of office or influence. This abuse of power is typically accomplished through the power to hire and fire. This use of economic control is a potent process. I have been both its victim and its enabler.

An elderly African-American woman cooked Wednesday night suppers for a large church where I served for a time as Associate Pastor. Her meals were becoming increasingly salty, and complaints were frequent. The Kitchen Committee was assigned to my area of administrative oversight, as the church's chief administrator, so the unenviable task of getting her to change this fell in my purview. She ignored all my entreaties to use less salt, so at the next meeting of the kitchen committee I was told to fire her. I had never fired anyone before in my life, and it did not go especially well. I called her on the phone to tell

her of the committee's displeasure, and she angrily quit before I could say the words I'd planned, "We'll have to let you go."

Mind you, the church had a perfect right to dismiss her — they certainly had a right to healthy and good tasting meals on Wednesday nights. I do not question that, but I was untrained in the dismissal of personnel, I wish I had gone to see her personally instead of phoning her, and I still wish our church had some system in place to deal with staff dismissals in a more humane and compassionate fashion.

This was an elderly woman who clearly needed the income from this work or she would not have been there. She'd been a part of the church's life for some years. A greater effort to fight for her job, finding another job she could do with equal dignity, providing a severance package, a kinder and gentler good-bye — any of that would be more becoming of an institution existing in Christ's name. Instead, she was "just a cook," an easily replaceable worker bee, and countless cooks, custodians and church secretaries have been disposed of in equally cursory fashion by churches of every stripe over the years.

With swift karmic force my fate followed hers a few months later in that same church. Over the course of two years I was told by two lay-leaders that I was not performing up to the congregations' standards and should resign quietly for the sake of the church. By the time I asked about the opportunity to discuss my side of these matters with the personnel committee, the pastor had already discussed the matter with those lay-leaders and he informed me that the members of the personnel committee were all in agreement with the asking for my resignation. The pastor told me in almost these very words, "If you resign immediately and quietly you'll receive a three month's severance package. If you don't, I cannot guarantee what will happen." This was the power of economic reward and the threat of punishment.

My story is not unique. Dr. Charles Chandler, the founder and direc-

tor of the Ministering to Ministers Foundation, a support organization for forcibly terminated ministers, reports this to be the most common pattern of dismissal. In a 1997 article from *The Servant*, a quarterly journal of Chandler's Ministering to Ministers Foundation, Rev. Everett Goodwin published an article entitled "Forced Terminations and Ethics." In that article he says,

"The most frequent violation [of ethical codes of conduct] is in the failure to observe established procedures and processes for evaluation, conflict resolution or review in pastoral relationships. Terminations commonly are accomplished without a meeting of the pastoral relations committee, diaconate or church board taking place. Instead, small groups or powerful individuals often accomplish their

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*Church constitutions provide ample information on the appropriate ways to call or hire church staff, but typically very minimal information on how dismissals are to be conducted.*

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purpose by private meetings or conversations followed by the use of threats, intimidations, or enticements designed to encourage a pastor to resign...Following a successful forced termination, ethics are sometimes also compromised when reports regarding the cause of terminations are distorted or misrepresented by church members or boards..."<sup>3</sup>

Ministers treated in this fashion are usually encouraged to leave quietly and peacefully "for the good of the church." If they do, they are often promised a severance package in

return for this silence. Of course custodians, cooks and secretaries are almost never offered such a generous parting gift. The ministers who face the ultimatums are usually hurt and confused. They often accept these terms out of fear and a broken heart.

We speak of "Christian" ways to conduct marriage, raise children, seek entertainment, support churches and call pastors, but we seldom talk at any length about either Christian or sinful ways to hire and fire. Perhaps pastors feel it would sound self-serving to bring the matter up, but directors of missions, denominational staff, visiting seminary professors, and interim pastors could appropriately address such an issue without any undue embarrassment. The church's way of handling the business-end of employment relations is often modeled, without much thought, strictly on the business world around us.

Often, corporate rules of dismissal are far more rigorous than those of most churches. Church constitutions provide ample information on the appropriate ways to call or hire church staff, but typically very minimal information on how dismissals are to be conducted. Charles Chandler tells of the reaction of a corporate psychiatrist who had been asked to assist in a retreat designed to help ministers cope with their forced terminations. The psychiatrist was "...appalled as he heard the stories. He worked extensively with corporations in 'downsizing' and noted that none of them treated their employees like the churches treated the retreat participants."<sup>4</sup>

Church employees do not typically have the ordinary government protections against unlawful termination because the American courts have determined they will not adjudicate internal church disputes of this nature.<sup>5</sup> This means that clergy in the United States do not have the same right of employees in the business world to sue for unlawful termination. This also means that only churches themselves can improve this situation. The church exists as a community of Christians who practice together living



as people of the Kingdom of God, so that when we get out into the world we will live differently. As such, our way of doing business must reflect that our “citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20).

Insensitivity to economic violence in the church is not restricted to any theological ideology. Liberal, conservative or moderate churches can fall victim to the temptation of economic abuse in dealing with personnel matters, particularly with non-ministerial church workers.

This issue is complicated by the very real fact that there are times when people need to be fired from church staffs, and fired fast. Sexual predators, embezzlers, psychological manipulators, verbally abusive leaders and hate mongers, all are a great danger to any congregation and any time a church employee truly violates congregational trust, the first act of healing is usually to remove the offender so the congregation can heal. It is vital that church leaders have the power to do this, and beyond that, every church has the right to hire whomever they find to be most helpful and in tune with their mission, and dismiss those they find to be least useful. But surely there is a more compassionate way to see to this business.

I believe we need a qualified body to write and publish a set of principles for how churches should conduct these matters. If all churches pledged to live by such a code, perhaps there would be fewer horror stories concerning the abuse of economic power “for the good of the church.”

Every church staff member should be given a specific list, in writing, of things to correct, before churches take the step of dismissal. Every church staff member should have the opportunity to discuss accusations of deficiency with specific accusers. Churches should make *some* kind of severance package (and more decent salaries) available to custodians, cooks and church secretaries. It would be reflective of Jesus’ admonition to “go the second mile” if we actively helped some terminated employees find new

and comparable employment.

Dismissal of church staff is usually a politically volatile act. Most church members only see the most public parts of any staff ministry, while more involved leaders and other staff must deal with the failures of a deficient staff member on a daily or weekly basis. Dealing with the “problem” more openly and honestly can be very dangerous for the church’s money and morale.

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But conscience demands that we accept the fact that the life and well-being of the unwanted staff member is also important. At the very least, we should treat such staff members as we would wish to be treated in the same situation. We are directly responsible for whether people in our employ can obtain food, clothing, shelter and medical care. That is not a morally neutral matter. Of course we have to have the right to hire and to fire, but when we hold the livelihoods of real people in our hands, the conscience must be engaged or we are not living as Christ directly commanded, when He said “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matt. 7:12). ■

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Perry, *Pass the Power Please: Lead by Empowering*, Richmond, Virginia: Organizational Health Associates, Inc., 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Allport, *The individual and his religion*, New York, Macmillan,

1950, especially p. 72. In this work Allport actually discussed “Mature” and “immature” religion, but in a later study refined the terminology to avoid evaluative judgments, referring instead to “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” religion, in the following work: Allport, G.W. & Ross, J.M., “Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1967, especially p. 434.

<sup>3</sup>Everett Goodwin, “Forced Terminations and Ethics,” in *The Servant*, Richmond VA, Ministering to Ministers Foundation, Vol. 2 Issue 1, February 1997, p. 1. Since 1994 the Ministering to Ministers Foundation has done a masterful job of providing support, legal advice, fellowship and encouragement in the midst of the crisis of forced termination of clergy. The Foundation’s website address is [mtm.foundation.org](http://mtm.foundation.org) and their phone number is 804-594-2556.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Chandler, “Is There a Rulebook on Forced Terminations,” *the Servant*, Richmond, VA, Ministering to Ministers Foundation, Vol. 5, Issue 4, October 2000, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Richard R. Hammar, J.D., LL.M., CPA, “Termination of Clergy,” *Church Law and Tax Report*, 1998, <http://www.churchlawtoday.com/private/library/pcl/p02d.htm>.

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## Book Reviews

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

### God of Liberty: “A Religious History of the American Revolution”

by Thomas S. Kidd, Basic Books, New York 2010 (\$26.95)

A review by Darold Morgan

To our readers keenly interested in the urgently important subject of religious liberty and the separation of church and state, here is a book of exceptional importance and relevance. Thomas Kidd, a professor of history at Baylor University, has written an extremely readable and convincing volume on the issues of religious liberty in those vital and formative periods of American life. You will discover reams of new material, particularly about Baptist influences in this time frame, confirmed by some exceptional research the author has done regarding the role of religion in those revolutionary times.

What an astounding compendium of issues surface from the author’s pen! There is convoluted subject of the tax supported churches ...i.e....the Congregationalists in New England and the Anglicans in the Colonial South. There is a helpful review of both of the Great Awakening Revivals before and after the revolution and its influence on Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield come into focus as men who ultimately helped the cause of religious liberty. The author treats fairly the peculiar deism of some of America’s political leaders, citing some of the major authors of those times. There are the lurking fears of a continental Catholicism, as well as the outreach of the French Revolution and its anti-religious bias. Add to this impressive list something that most historians completely miss...the eschatological currents of the emerging Protestants.

All of these subjects come together in the excellent format of this well-written book which result ultimately in American experiment of religious

liberty, culminating in the separation of church and state...a new nation with no established church...but a nation with a vibrant religious expression unlike anything else found in the world. One will come away with the impression that these new Baptists and Presbyterians really made a difference in religious views held by Jefferson, Adams, Madison, Henry, Washington, America emerges with its new documents guaranteeing religious liberty for this new nation.

In the epilogue the author gives us some very quotable words from the famed French author, Alexis de Tocqueville, writing more than a generation after the years of the Revolution...“The partnership of religion and liberty lay at the heart of America’s political success.” Add to that Kidd’s own evaluation as his book ends...“One of the greatest accomplishments of the American Revolution was the ingenious balance between religious freedom and religious strength.” (p. 256) The need for a modern perspective on this theme is apparent today as many among us seem to have forgotten how this prized possession of religious liberty in American experiment came about. These distant years come alive in the good book! ■

### Evolving in Monkey Town: How a Girl Who Knew All the Answers Learned to Ask the Questions

By Rachel Held Evans

Zondervan, copyright 2010, 232 pages

Reviewed by Marion Aldridge

When I was growing up in North Augusta, South Carolina in the 1950’s and 60’s, the people in our church knew we were Southern Baptists, not Independent Baptists or fundamentalists. Bob Jones University was Fundamentalist, and they believed some things differently than we did. They were against the idea of evolu-

tion, for instance. In fact, as many things as God told us Southern Baptists not to do or believe, it seemed that their list was longer. These fundamentalist folks had strong opinions about such things as millennialism and dispensations that I don’t remember being important at all in our Southern Baptist world. We were “pan-millennialists,” figuring it would all pan out in the end.

Rachel Held Evans grew up in that world of Independent Bible churches and Fundamentalist Bible colleges. Before Southern Baptists took a hard right theological in the 1970’s and 80’s, these independent congregations were as different from my kind of Baptists as were the Catholics. They were our neighbors and we liked them, but they were a bit weird. Eventually, because Southern Baptists moved in their direction theologically and politically, I learned more about the beliefs of these Independent/Bible people. No wonder the secular press has a hard time figuring Christians out. Nowadays, it is sometimes hard even for insiders to distinguish between fundamentalists, pentecostals, evangelicals, Southern Baptists, inerrantists and conservatives.

Doctrinal purity was way more important to the Independent Bible Churches than to us denominational Baptists. Most of their churches, as a result, were small. Southern Baptists, on the other hand, were marketing geniuses. We majored on evangelism, revivals, altar calls, missions, starting new churches, witnessing and church growth. We knew all the 10-year-olds joining our churches would not hang around into adulthood. That is why 1000 member SBC churches averaged 250 in attendance.

The word “apologetics” was apparently hugely important in Independent Bible churches because the Bible is chock-full of verses that need explanation. The idea is that there needs to be a defense, an apology, a clarification, a justification for difficult passages. Rachel Held’s world



was full of these teachings. She mentions a volume that apparently was a standard part of her church life:

*“Gleason Archer’s massive **Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties**, a heavy volume that seeks to provide the reader with sound explanations for every conceivable puzzle found within the Bible—from whether God approved of Rahab’s lie, to where Cain got his wife. Note to well-meaning apologists: it’s not always the best idea to present a skeptic with a five-hundred-page book listing hundreds of apparent contradictions in Scripture when the skeptic didn’t even know that half of them existed when you recommended it.”*

Rachel Held Evans and I did not grow up in the same world. Still, she seemed to tell my story. Less than half my age, Rachel Held Evans figured out before age 30 some of the deeper questions of the Bible and faith that I had only begun to wrestle with at age 60.

The evolution issue that gives her book (and her blog) its title, ***Evolving in Monkey Town***, turns out to be one of a dozen theological and ethical questions with which she wrestles. Just a few years ago, I read Darwin’s ***Origin of the Species*** for the first time ever. I thought that Darwin made his case for natural selection soundly and impressively. He did leave God out of the book, since his was a science treatise and, by then, he had become a man of little or no faith. I am sure I take medicine that was discovered or created by non-believers. What does that have to do with whether the medicine works? What does Darwin’s faith or lack of faith have to do with whether he told the truth about evolution? So, at my semi-advanced age, finally I have begun to read books about Darwin and the voyage of the HMS Beagle. Visiting the Galapagos Islands is now on my Bucket List. When I discovered ***Evolving in Monkey Town***, I was drawn to it. Rachel Held Evans narrates a relatively brief summary of the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, for those who don’t know that story.

The title of the book comes from the small town where Rachel Held grew up, home of the famous trial in 1925 in which evolution was hotly debated between Clarence Darrow and William

Jennings Bryan. I incorrectly made the assumption that the book was primarily about Evan’s pilgrimage with regard to the subject of evolution. Instead, the book is a memoir of her adolescence and young adult years as she wrestled not only with the matter of evolution, but also with traditional theological hot topics such as hell and hot button topics such as homosexuality, militarism, pluralism, feminism, and even politics.

Mature beyond her years, Rachel Held Evans wrote many lines I wish I had written:

- *The problem with fundamentalism is that it can’t adapt to change.*
- *The ability of the body of Christ to change—to grow fins when it needs to swim and wings when it needs to fly—has preserved it for over two thousand years.*
- *I think I must have gotten my bleeding heart from her [my mother], which, combined with my father’s cautious idealism, accidentally made me into a liberal.*
- *Salvation wasn’t just about being a Christian; it was about being the right kind of Christian.*
- *The evangelical community has a curious reputation for resisting cultural movements before suddenly deciding to embrace them.*
- *Stubborn isolationism and anti-intellectualism is an outdated and ineffective strategy for expanding the kingdom.*
- *We criticized relativists for picking and choosing truth, while our own biblical approach required some selectivity of its own.*
- *In Sunday school, they always made hell out to be a place for people like Hitler, not a place for his victims.*
- *The space between doubting God’s goodness and doubting his existence is not as wide as you might think.*
- *I think you officially grow up the moment you realize you are capable of causing your parents pain.*
- *Christians who claim to take the Bible literally or who say they obey all of his teachings without ‘picking and choosing’ are either liars or homeless.*
- *You’d have to be crazy not to have second thoughts about following Jesus.*
- *Some Christians are more offended by the idea of everyone going to heaven than by the idea of everyone going to hell.*
- *As soon as you think you’ve got God fig-*

*ured out, you can bet on the fact that you’re wrong.*

- *In the end, it was doubt that saved my faith.*
- *Apologists like to say that following Christ shouldn’t mean checking our brains at the door. Perhaps it shouldn’t mean checking our hearts either.*
- *We are not saved by information.*
- *Our way is to make someone pay with blood; his way is to bleed.*
- *Perhaps being a Christian isn’t about experiencing the kingdom of heaven someday but about experiencing the kingdom of heaven every day.*
- *The idea of a single comprehensive biblical worldview to which all Christians can agree is a myth.*
- *For as long as I can remember, the Bible has been compared to a weapon, and for as long as I can remember, it has been used as one.*
- *The Bible is by far the most fascinating, beautiful, challenging, and frustrating work of literature I’ve ever encountered.*
- *Our interpretations are colored by our culture, our community, our presuppositions, our experience, our language, our education, our emotions, our intellect, our desires, and our biases. My worldview affects how I read the Bible as much as the Bible affects my worldview.*
- *Maybe God wants us to have these discussions because faith isn’t just about being right; it’s about being a part of a community.*
- *Most weren’t looking for a faith that provided all the answers; they were looking for one in which they were free to ask questions.*
- *It’s not up to some politician to represent my Christian values to the world; it’s up to me.*
- *Our best answers in defense of Christianity have always been useless clanging symbols unless our lives have inspired the world to ask.*

I loved this book. I like this woman. She can think. She can write. I like the way she has evolved. May I evolve in my faith as well! ■

*Marion Aldridge is an author and the coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina.*

## A Young People’s History of the United States

By Howard Zinn, adapted by Rebecca Stefoff

Reviewed by K. Hollyn Hollman

In this sweeping survey of U.S. history, young and old alike will find plenty of material to engage. Rebecca Stefoff’s helpful adaptation of Zinn’s popular work, first published in 1980 and updated in this version through 2006, introduces young readers to a wide variety of historical topics from a purposefully “radical, critical” point of view. Zinn takes the reader through U.S. history “from Columbus to the War on Terror” at a brisk pace, covering a surprising amount of ground with just enough detail to provide a substantial overview of more than 400 years.

The author includes little-known episodes such as Bacon’s Rebellion in the 1670s and the rise and reforms of the National Child Labor Committee in early 1900s, as well as more familiar events regarding slavery, war, immigration and economic development. Scattered throughout the book are simple illustrations and photographs, as well as short vignettes set apart on colored paper that helpfully break up the narrative.

Zinn’s take on U.S. history is an alternative to the often quoted idea that history is written by the winners. This is not the typical history. Zinn aims to cover events from diverse perspectives, including those often omitted from other historical accounts — racial minorities, the poor, and children.

The book begins with the Arawak men and women coming out of their village to see Christopher Columbus, curious about the soldiers and their swords. Then, from ship logs, we learn how Columbus described the inhabitants of the newly discovered lands. At the same time, the ship logs gives the reader the first glimpse of one of the book’s primary themes: “They had no iron. Their spears are made of cane. . . They would make fine servants. . . With fifty men we could subjugate [overpower] them and make them do whatever we want.”

Zinn records the ability of the powerful to maintain and expand their economic dominance through force and describes their actions as the impetus behind well-known events not typically interpreted in that way. Zinn also argues that in times of social unrest or growing rebellion, the government has distracted citizens from social inequalities by invoking hopeful ideals and the promise of change.

No chapter is dedicated to the brilliance and bravery of the founders. Early chapters on “Black and White” and “Who were the Colonists?” instead lay bare the way wealthy, elite colonists grew richer by exploiting Native Americans, blacks, and workers. As the upper class realized

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***Zinn emphasizes the important role of dissent and rebellion in our history and the need for critical thinking in a democracy.***

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that their security depended on the loyalty of the growing middle class, Zinn notes that they found a “wonderfully useful” tool: “That tool was the language of liberty and equality.” Zinn says such language mobilized the forces of the Revolutionary War, establishing a pattern for many wars that followed. These ideals proved strong enough to unite the population against a common enemy and provide a distraction from inequality or other injustices that would threaten major internal upheaval in America.

Some surely will regard this presentation of American history as too negative. At times, it feels like Zinn has moved from critic to cynic. But Zinn’s critical point of view is designed to illustrate an important lesson for young readers: that all presentations of history include judgments about what is important. Zinn makes clear that

what is important to him is to criticize and fight against war, racism, and economic injustice.

Accessible and memorable, the book is likely to spur conversations and additional reading for young and old. While this is not a balanced view of history, it is an interesting one. Zinn emphasizes the important role of dissent and rebellion in our history and the need for critical thinking in a democracy. Especially effective is the way he talks about race and class distinctions. He shows how certain events have shaped social and economic dynamics, and how those events were not inevitable.

I share Zinn’s view that young readers should not be shielded from a critical account of U.S. history, and I appreciate his unusual emphasis on stories of courage and bold action on the part of ordinary people. This combination provides a useful and stimulating counterpoint to the more traditional narratives of U.S. history textbooks. ■

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### ETHIXBYTE:

***“You’re gonna catch a cold from the ice inside your soul.”***

**Christine Perry**



CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY FOUNDATION

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# Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

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

## PURPOSES

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

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

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

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