

# 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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# Why White Evangelicals Voted for Trump and Why They Will Do So Again in 2020

by Tony Campolo

In November of 2016, Donald Trump was elected president with the help of 83% of white evangelicals. Since his election, there have been many who have wondered why evangelicals so strongly voted for him, and continue to support him. Here are some explanations.

I'm a Democrat; but I think Democratic Party strategists fail to have a good read on the American people. I agree with Jim Wallis, the editor of *Sojourners Magazine*, who, as a subtitle of one of his books wrote, "Why the Republicans Are Wrong and the Democrats Don't Get It." Hillary Clinton lost in her bid for the presidency, in part, because the Democrats, as Jim Wallis wrote, "Don't get it." Furthermore, if they don't wake up to the mindset of mainstream white evangelicals they will lose again in 2020. The Democrats still don't get it.

There were two primary reasons why Hillary Clinton lost a significant number of white evangelical voters during the 2016 election. First, her views on abortion, especially as they were expressed in the last televised debate she had with Candidate Trump, came across as too extreme for most evangelicals. She declared herself as supporting abortions for pregnant women right up until the very end of a pregnancy. That turned off many progressive evangelicals who agreed with her on most other issues.

Hillary's husband, Bill Clinton, also was "pro-choice" on the abortion issue; but his statements on abortion were far more nuanced. He said that abortions should be "legal, but rare." Furthermore, he promoted a plan that he claimed could help make abortions

rare. Bill Clinton knew that as many as 72% of abortions, according to the Guttmacher Institute, were driven by economic forces, and that by addressing many of the economic concerns of economically limited pregnant women, the number of abortions per year could be cut significantly. In reality, the number was cut each year he was in office.

To understand President Clinton's thinking, consider a single pregnant woman who works at a super market for the minimum wage. She finds that she is hardly able to support herself, let alone carry the extra financial burden of supporting a newborn child. In addition, she knows that there will be very limited government provision for day care for her child. Add to her difficult situation the threat that if she took off from work for a couple of weeks to have and nurture her new baby, she might lose her job. Even then, her problems would not end. If she lacks medical insurance coverage, the threat of a high hospital bill could prove overwhelming. Given such realities, it is easy to understand why such a distressed woman might feel driven to have an abortion, even though she might rather become a mother.

Bill Clinton's campaign addressed each of these concerns. He was unable to get through Congress all the legislation he wanted, especially when it came to health care; but at least his political agenda convinced many voters that he would do his best to make abortion rare. Most of us know, as he did, that simply making abortion illegal would only drive it underground, delivering many poor pregnant women into the hands of "back alley butchers." Several pro-life advocates

found his proposals attractive and recognized that many of the Republicans in Congress who claim to be pro-life usually voted against those very economic measures that could reduce the number of abortions.

There is much evidence to support the claim that the abortion issue is decisive for many voters, but this is especially true for most evangelicals. I personally know several politically progressive evangelicals who voted against Hillary Clinton on the basis that they viewed her as being extremely liberal on the abortion issue. In my own state, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a traditionally blue state, a strong pro-life candidate, Rick Santorum, won his campaigns for the House and then later for the Senate against pro-choice candidates, gaining wide support not only from Christians in the evangelical camp, but also from significant numbers of Catholics who, in previous elections, had voted for Democrats. When the Democrats eventually did put up pro-life candidate Robert Casey to run against him, Senator Santorum, an incumbent, lost big-time.

If the Democrats, who can be expected to continue to be pro-choice in 2020, would deal with abortion as Bill Clinton did, they might be able to win more elections, especially in swing states like Pennsylvania. Their campaign strategists should pay more attention to the statistics that show that, unlike the 1960's and 70's, America is moving more and more in a pro-life direction, especially among young voters and intensely so among evangelicals.

A second reason why white evangelicals tended to vote for Donald

Trump and for other Republican candidates in 2016 was their impression that the Democratic Party came across as being anti-religious. Whether or not that impression is the reality, at least we must agree that if things are real in the imagination, they are real in their consequences. What they heard over the 1500 evangelical radio and television stations very much seemed to generate in the imaginations of many evangelicals that whenever religious issues were raised in the political arena, the Democrats would be likely to vote against their interests. Recently, for instance, several of the presidents of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities, an organization that unites more than 150 evangelical schools, shared fears that the government might end the Pell grants and government subsidies for the “work study programs” that are essential for covering tuition costs for many of their students. These evangelical academic leaders have been concerned that a liberal Supreme Court, likely to be put in place by a Democratic president, might vote to end these programs on the claim that such programs could be defined as government funding of religious institutions. They feared that this, in turn, might be viewed by the court as a violation of the constitutional principle of separation of church and state.

These government-funded programs have enabled significant numbers of economically limited students to attend both Protestant and Catholic faith-based schools. If these benefits were ended, some of these religiously-based schools would be hard pressed to find the financial support they need to continue to function. This would be a tragedy—not only for the students and the schools that would be affected—but also for the rest of America. Faith-based colleges and universities have provided a huge proportion of America’s most needed leaders and specialists, and they do

so with at least half of their financial support coming from private sources. The Democrats could prevent any such attack on faith-based schools if they took pre-emptive action and passed legislation that protected these schools from such fiscal cuts. This would go a long way to create a counter-narrative to those who claim that the Democrats are anti-religious.

Religious television and radio programs regularly preach that religion is under attack in this country, primarily at the hands of Democrats. As a case in point, the impression is created by many evangelical media personalities that some Democratic Party leaders support efforts to secularize Christmas

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by such actions as opposing religious carols at ceremonies at the White House and even the use of the word “Christmas” in public statements. President Trump shows no hesitation in using the word “Christmas,” and many evangelicals view this as an effort on his part “to put Christ back into Christmas.”

A third reason why many white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump could be because there may be some of them who vote Republican no matter what. It’s almost as though the Republican Party is viewed as the “God Party” by such evangelicals. During his campaign, Trump made the statement that his support base was so solid that he could go out and shoot someone in broad daylight and his supporters would still vote

for him. I’m afraid that what he said might be true, especially for some in his evangelical base. I hope that’s not true; but with some people on both sides of the political aisle, party loyalty is far too important and, at times, transcends moral and religious values.

Adriana Huffington, founder of the Huffington Post, once said, “For me, there is one question I ask of any candidate which takes precedence above all others. I ask: ‘What will you do for those whom Jesus called, as cited in Matthew 25, ‘the least of these?’”

We, who are part of the Red Letter Christians movement (see [www.red-letterchristians.org](http://www.red-letterchristians.org)) would like to ask this same question of any candidate, regardless of party affiliation. Given the recent two billion dollars in government cuts in programs for the needy and oppressed by a Republican Congress, I think that the Democrats could come out ahead among many white evangelicals in the next presidential election by making “caring for the poor” a campaign issue. That kind of issue could win over even some of the white evangelicals who are increasingly aware that Trump and his fellow Republicans in Congress are more supportive of benefits for the rich than for providing a social “safety net” for the poor. That’s something the Democrats could do to help them win in 2020.

In some of those red letters that highlight the words of Jesus we read that He said that those who have ears should hear. If the Democrats want to win over white evangelical voters, they had better hear these things that evangelicals are saying. ■

*Tony Campolo is a founder of the Red Letter Christians Movement, a well-known and respected writer and speaker, an inspiration to many. He is a board member of Christian Ethics Today, a frequent contributor to the journal, a trusted friend and colleague.*

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# When Scripture Gets in a Foul Mood

## Or: Remember that time when Jeremiah failed to accentuate the positive?

### A rant and riff on Jeremiah 7–8:3

By Ken Sehested

“The word from On High came to crotchety Jeremiah: Stand in the gate of the YHWH’s house and announce: Thus says the Lord. Assess your days and amend your ways. Do not rely on deceptive marketing campaigns, or say ‘God bless America,’ ‘God bless America,’ ‘God bless America.’

“For if you do well, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan and the widow, or shed innocent blood, then I will dwell with you. But see how my sanctuary has become an altar for violent design—Torah’s and Psalmist’s, Prophet’s and Gospel’s place usurped by gunmetal steel.

“My house has become a den of pistol-packing pietists, certain that their firepower serves to protect the integrity of the Most High who, GREAT as he is and all, is just a little naïve about the possibility of active shooters and thus the need for safety training, practicing lock-down procedures, video surveillance, car tag monitoring services in the parking lot, off-duty deputies guarding the till.”

Maybe, we say, we could dual-purpose the choir rehearsal room to serve as a shooting practice range for church staff and deacons, and hand-to-hand combat techniques using ink pens as knives, with training in how to aim at intruders’ carotid arteries at the first shout of “Allahu Akbar!”

What’s that, pastor, about aliens? Don’t worry. We’ll get ICE down here pronto to get them into one of the

private prison deportee camps where no writ of habeas corpus can reach them. We’ll get the lighter skinned orphans and widows to the social services office and get the rest bused back to their neighborhoods beyond

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the tracks. The Salvation Army and rescue shelters have experience handling their kind. We always take our Wednesday night church supper leftovers there. (I’ve heard some say those shelters spoil their guests, particularly whoever gets Mrs. McKleson’s chicken and dumplings.) I don’t mean we take it, you know. That would violate our church security protocol. Willie, our custodian drops it off on his way home. He knows the neighborhood.

“The Lord God of Heaven speaks

to the shut-out, warning against the rationers of Heaven’s manna, saying, ‘As for you, do not pray for this people, do not raise a cry or prayer on their behalf, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. Their confidence is vested in what they strap on their hip, in their legislative graft, in the market’s bullish tilt and their brokerage firm’s guilt.’

“This people have done evil in my sight, says the Lord. They commit abominations in their liturgy. Their invocations call upon the reign of ruin. Their incantations foster mayhem in the courts of justice. Their eucharistic practice devours the poor. Their anthems celebrate infamy; their praise songs, villainy. Their prophets accentuate the positive; their priests treat harm lightly.

“Their benedictions are boisterous claims to more of the same.

“At the appointed time, says the Sovereign, all the bones of their presidents and congressional leaders, chief justices and CEOs, shall be disinterred and spread before the sun, and what they previously worshiped will be turned against them. And they shall be scattered to sh\*thole regions, to be heard from no more.” ■

*Ken Sehested is a well-known Baptist preacher, prophet, and writer living with his wife, Nancy, in Asheville, NC and followed most notably at <http://www.prayerandpolitics.org>*

# Academic Strangers: Introducing My Historically Black and White Colleges

By Chris Caldwell

Consider this conundrum: Most Americans want racial reconciliation.

Strangers cannot be reconciled, for one can't restore a nonexistent relationship.

African-Americans and whites in the United State are largely strangers.

As a step toward bridging our divide and opening up paths to reconciliation, I want to introduce two colleges to each other and to you. One, where I teach, is a historically black college, Simmons College of Kentucky. The other, where I graduated, is what I call a historically white college, Rhodes College in Memphis. While both are friends to me, they are strangers to each other. If the colleges were in the same city, the chances of any two of their students knowing each other would be low, and the chances of a Rhodes student and a Simmons student being friends would be abysmally low, even though I know the individuals in my colleges would like to know each other better.

What stands between them? We often speak of the racial "divide" or "chasm," but these images fall short. My two schools and others like them are not set apart on some level plane, as, say, Republicans and Democrats are in Washington. Neither is there a chasm between them as might exist between feuding families. No. What separates my two colleges is a **cliff**. Rhodes sits at the top, with a \$300 million dollar endowment and annual tuition of \$46,500. Simmons sits at the bottom, with no endowment to speak of and annual tuition of \$5,300.

The cliff between my colleges is just one of many we fail to notice every

day. Cliffs separate predominantly black and predominantly white neighborhoods, high schools, businesses, churches and more. The cliff separating my two colleges is as sure as the cliff between the lawyer who gets his morning coffee at McDonalds and the woman who serves it to him. They may smile at each other, may even know each other's names if he's a reg-

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ular. But make no mistake. They are strangers living at drastically different socioeconomic elevations. My colleges are strangers just as whites like me and African-Americans are overwhelmingly strangers. The cliffs between us are built partly of racial animosity, but primarily they arise from prejudiced structures and the sorts of class divisions laid out by Richard Reeves in *The Dream Hoarders* and by Richard Rothstein in *The Color of Law*. In short, we white and black folks seldom really know each other. We may have contact, perhaps even work in the same business. But typically this is what the great Howard Thurman called "contact without fellowship." We live in the same country but do not know each other's worlds.

And so, white America, meet

Simmons College of Kentucky, a Historic Black College (HBCU), which the Higher Education Act of 1965 defines as any pre-1964 black college or university "whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans." Most HBCUs, including Simmons, were established during the educational renaissance among African-Americans after slavery ended, when the literacy rate among African-Americans skyrocketed and African-American schools and colleges were rapidly being birthed. Simmons was founded in 1879 by former slaves, along with a few white allies and blacks who had not been enslaved. The buildings where I teach were built in part by former slaves.

For its first half-century, Simmons College offered a broad liberal arts and sciences curriculum. In 1931, financial pressures brought it under the control of the University of Louisville (U of L), and it became Louisville Municipal College, the black college associated with the then-segregated U of L. When U of L integrated in 1951, Charles Parrish, the star professor of Municipal College, was offered a position on the faculty, thus making U of L the first university in the South to integrate its faculty. This step forward for U of L was a disaster for Simmons, because the remainder of the Municipal College faculty and staff lost their jobs. Furthermore, Municipal College was forced to become Simmons Bible College and was permitted to offer degrees only in religion, so as not to compete with U of L for students. For the next half-century the school limped along, ultimately finding itself an unlicensed and unaccredited school



with a student body of about 50. Since 2005, under the leadership of President Kevin W. Cosby, Simmons has returned to its liberal arts roots, is now licensed, accredited and, for the first time, has federal HBCU recognition. The present student body of around 200 is tiny, but it is a far cry from the even tinier school of 15 years ago, and we proudly reside once again on the original Simmons campus.

The theme of the Simmons College story is the theme of the African-Americans it serves—survival under oppression. Started with no capital by people who were denied capital, staffed by educators whose parents were denied education, forced to move, forced to change its name and its mission and with its faculty decimated, yet the school soldiers on. Every school and every person has to overcome obstacles, true. But the overcoming of fundamental, life-threatening, and enduring obstacles is uniquely the story of African-Americans and their schools.

Now let's take a look at the story of Rhodes College. Founded by the Masons during slavery in 1845 in Clarksville, Tennessee, the school later came under the control of the Presbyterian Church and relocated to Memphis, where it existed as Southwestern at Memphis until changing its name to Rhodes in 1984 (my sophomore year).

As I look at my alma mater's story through the lens of Simmons, three things stand out: Masons, Presbyterians and Memphis. These three words indicate the white privilege that has been the wind at Rhodes' back from the beginning. I know "white privilege" is a loaded term, synonymous with evil and guilt in the minds of some. But I see it simply as a fact, a reality of one's story. And this next part is vital: If white and black folks are to move beyond "contact without fellowship," we whites must acknowledge the wind that has been at our backs. The winds in the face

of the Simmons ship have already been made clear. But consider the difference in the Rhodes story. Where would Simmons be today if, instead of being founded by former slaves, it started with the weight of the Masons and then the Presbyterians behind it? And consider the Memphis cotton money—money inextricably tied to the slavery that made it possible. Rhodes is an "old money" school and, for much of its history, "old money" and "slave economy," (then "old money" and Jim Crow) were inseparable. While I don't yet have access to all the same information for Rhodes, the Pell grant eligibility is 15% at Rhodes (compared to 85% at Simmons). It

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is not hard to imagine how different the other numbers would be if donors to Simmons down the years had been the beneficiaries of these systems rather than their victims.

But to paint Rhodes as villain would be too simplistic. Did I see elements of racism at Rhodes in the 1980's? Yes, but only at the edge of things. At the heart of Rhodes then and now is a progressive spirit. By today's standards, my curriculum at Rhodes absolutely underrepresented non-white voices. But Rhodes also challenged me to move beyond provincial Southern norms and fully supported me when I brought gay speakers to campus for a symposium on AIDS amid the early, panicky years of the epidemic. Furthermore, Rhodes now is consistently recognized as a model of com-

munity involvement and engages the inner city neighborhoods surrounding it in meaningful ways. In short, I believe the cause of racial reconciliation is moved forward if a young person attends Rhodes.

Even so, consider how radically different the schools are. Here is some data on our students at Simmons: Sixty-seven percent are first-generation students. Thirty-three percent have parents who did not graduate from high school. Seventy-eight percent are living at or below the poverty line. Eighty-five percent are eligible for Pell grants. Thirty-three percent work full-time during the semester.

While I don't yet have access to the same information for Rhodes, it's not hard to imagine how different the numbers would be.

Different students necessitate different missions. Rhodes takes well-prepared high school students and challenges them to think more deeply. One's ideas are nurtured by the roots of history and philosophy, and one's views are broadened and skills are sharpened. This is education purely and wonderfully for education's sake. But it must also be admitted that this sort of education arms students to go out into the dominant white culture and thrive. My fellow graduates went to fine law schools, med schools, and graduate programs. Others stepped into great professional opportunities.

Like Rhodes, Simmons takes bright women and men and sharpens their thinking and skills. But unlike those who enter Rhodes, our students rarely step into college ready to tackle Camus or Erasmus. Many of our students were passed grade to grade by schools that had given up on them. They were not seen as "college material," and expectations were dumbed down accordingly. Our mission is to first get them to college level, then to move forward from there. A colleague once said, "HBCUs are easy to get

into and hard to get out of.” That’s true at Simmons, where our attrition rate is high. If you measure us by the demands of our 100 level courses, you might see us as one of the least challenging schools in the state. But if you look at the academic distance our students travel in four years, measuring from point A to point B, I would maintain we may be the *most* challenging school in Kentucky.

Some of our star students will go on to do Master’s level work or take professional jobs. More typically, we are giving our students a shot at moving from poverty to the middle class. A Rhodes grad who ends up with a middle class job working for the city is, in some ways, a mission failure; for us at Simmons, it is mission success.

One other thing is different about my two schools. Only rarely did anyone talk to me about my whiteness at Rhodes. Why would they? Those of us who are white or, as Baldwin puts

it, “who think we are white,” have no reason to consider our whiteness any more than a fish has to consider the water it swims in. But at Simmons we equip our students with what our college president calls “ethnic armor” to go out into a world that is often hostile. We pass along two traditions here: the intellectual tradition of the dominant white culture, but also the robust intellectual tradition of African-Americans; for Du Bois’ “double consciousness” is no less a requirement today than it was in 1903.

There is much more to tell, and I hope to do so in a book that will include personal interviews and a deeper dive into the stories of my two colleges. For now, I offer these thoughts as an ice breaker between two honorable schools that represent parts of our society who cannot honor each other because they do not know each other. But let’s keep

it real. Rhodes is honored in this country, just as all things are honored when they have power and prestige. Simmons, on the other hand, gets little respect. A retired university professor was discussing with me my new position at Simmons. (I joined the full-time faculty in 2017 after teaching at Simmons part-time while I was a pastor.) He asked me my age, and then declared, “You know, you’re still young enough to get a job at a real college.” We are a faith based college, but at Simmons most would say a man like that, to put it generously, is full of it. Such candor may seem antithetical to friendship. In fact, it is friendship’s prerequisite. ■

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# Will We March with the World's Children?

## Understanding Children's Rights through Michael Walzer

by Laura M. Rector

In *Thick and Thin*, Michael Walzer argues that, "Moral terms have minimal and maximal meanings; we can standardly give thin and thick accounts of them, and the two accounts are appropriate to different contexts, serve different purposes."<sup>1</sup>

The minimal understanding of justice means that as the world watches a march for freedom in Prague, "we recognize the occasion; we imaginatively join the march; our endorsement is more vicarious than detached and speculative."<sup>2</sup> We all understand terms like "justice" and "truth," even if the terms have a "full expressive range within our own culture."<sup>3</sup> This means that "while we march in spirit with the men and women of Prague, we have in fact our own parade," and this parade is what Walzer calls the "maximal" or "thick" understanding of justice.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, 2017 saw a number of marches in the United States after the inauguration of Donald Trump and daily we see partisan debates over what justice looks like in its particularities. In the midst of tweet wars, serious investigations, and wave after wave of political controversies that leave many in the world stunned, the failure of the United States to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) for the past 28 years easily could go unnoticed. However, even in an age when we rightfully fear that many human rights are falling through the cracks and fissures of America's political life, we cannot continue to fail the world's children.

The CRC is considered internationally an expression of minimal human rights for children. Although, of course, there are institutional and cultural practices inherent in the con-

struction of the human rights treaty, for the most part, the document could be considered what Walzer calls a parade advocating for a "thin" view of child justice, though the members of the UN committee were able to draw this thin sketch because of their various maximal views of child justice. Justice is never detached from our embedded cultures.<sup>5</sup> The document

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was formed by a committee composed of individuals from a variety of countries and religious traditions, taking 10 years in formation because of these competing maximal understandings.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, it has been ratified by all member nations of the UN except the United States, which implies an almost universal understanding of child justice within its specific guidelines.<sup>7</sup>

The U.S. alone as a nation fails children by not ratifying the treaty, and it does so in true, bi-partisan fashion. No U.S. President has ever

sent the treaty to the Senate, including those who expressed support for it.<sup>8</sup> However, this is not simply a political failure; it's also an evangelical failure, because U.S. ratification has stalled in part because of propaganda produced by conservative, evangelical Christians, complete with complaints that the CRC is an assault on Christian homes.

Is the CRC really anti-Christian? This paper will use Walzer's understanding of justice in *Thick and Thin* and *Interpretation and Social Criticism* to critique the position of the American evangelical right on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Walzer writes: "Opposition, far more than detachment, is what determines the shape of social criticism. The critic takes sides in actual or latent conflicts; he sets himself against the prevailing political forces."<sup>9</sup> Opposition forces conversations that can thicken understandings of justice and provide a system of checks and balances within societies.<sup>10</sup> What then is so problematic about the opposition of the CRC by the evangelical right? The problem, in this case, is that the Right does not merely want to oppose the CRC and propose an alternative description of minimal justice. Rather, they want to close off voices that disagree with them with sharp polemic that really fails to address the conditions of children around the world, such as displacement from their homelands and families, lack of education, and enslaved labor that brought about the CRC in the first place.<sup>11</sup> In this way, the Right is more like the revolutionaries that Walzer describes, "for the point of their politics is not to criticize but to overthrow" their opponents without



regard to the context of the CRC.<sup>12</sup>

As Walzer argues, “An enemy is not recognizable as a social critic; he lacks standing. We expect and simultaneously discount criticism from our enemies.”<sup>13</sup> Conservative Christians have used such strong polemic that they seem like enemies to the international body, rather than dialogue partners. Consider the claims of one of its opponents:

*In what may be the greatest assault ever on parental rights in America, liberal leaders are pushing for Senate ratification of a United Nations treaty called the Convention on the Rights of the Child, or CRC. If ratified, it would: radically encroach on our sovereignty; subject us to an independent UN committee of “experts” in Geneva; allow the government in all cases to determine what is in a child’s best interest; intrude on parents’ rights to teach values and faith; and grant to children autonomous rights, which many believe would include access to controversial sexual information and even abortion.*<sup>14</sup>

Opponents to the CRC seem to see the UN as what Walzer describes as a “kind of global vanguard, aspiring, perhaps, to rule outside their sphere, claiming political authority everywhere on the basis of ideological correctness.”<sup>15</sup>

This is, in fact, the exact opposite of what the CRC attempts to do. The CRC is open to ratification by individual states, so rather than “claiming political authority everywhere,” its authority is granted only by consent.<sup>16</sup> The committee actually sought to avoid imposing one view of “ideological correctness” on countries, which is why it took years to draft its document. This then seems to imply, as Walzer does, that there is “no single correct, maximalist ideology.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, however, the Right believes that their maximalist view is the correct one. The Right also sees itself as a minority group being threatened. If this were true, they could cer-

tainly have grounds for complaint.<sup>18</sup>

In reality, though, it is the Right which seems to be seeking to “claim political authority everywhere on the basis of ideological correctness” by imposing their singular view of the home upon the almost universal understanding of child justice evoked by the UN.

Additionally, the fears of the evangelical right develop from its own “tribalism,” to use Walzer’s term, and this hardly makes an effective ethic for social criticism. Walzer poetically describes the “tribal” state of the international community, in which particular groups sometimes pass down hatred towards other groups through the “songs and stories of the old men

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*For example, what would happen if the evangelical right pictured Jesus as a child at risk or remembered more distinctly the fact that Herod slaughtered thousands of children in his effort to eradicate Jesus at birth?<sup>24</sup> What would happen if they remembered Moses floating in a basket or the fact that the Israelites were once slaves, just as children in parts of the world are today?*

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and women.”<sup>19</sup> The fear described by the evangelical right is one such song, and the message contained in the song is both fact and fiction. It is true, for example, that parents should be concerned about children viewing pornography, but it is not true that the CRC promotes pornography.<sup>20</sup> The CRC promotes child rights, such as the right to life, the right to privacy and freedom of expression.<sup>21</sup> Conservatives

fear that giving children universally recognized rights means that “freedom of the family is at risk.”<sup>22</sup> It argues its maximalist position as that of concern for all families (a minimalist claim). The truth is that the CRC does more to recognize the concerns of many families and seeks to move to a morality inscribing child justice that can be agreed upon by almost all cultures. This does give children a “voice” in their own morality, but is not the only voice. Rather, children’s voices are expressed alongside those of parents, schools and governments. They become pluralist citizens, not elite individuals, by the recognition of their human rights.

### **Corrections through Prophecy, Pluralism and Inner Criticism**

So, how can we correct course? Walzer uses the Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition to show a key correction that could aid the Right. He writes, “The law is not in heaven; it is a social possession. The prophet need only show the people their own hearts.”<sup>23</sup> What might a call back to Christians’ own professed traditions and heritage look like? For example, what would happen if the evangelical right pictured Jesus as a child at risk or remembered more distinctly the fact that Herod slaughtered thousands of children in his effort to eradicate Jesus at birth?<sup>24</sup> What would happen if they remembered Moses floating in a basket or the fact that the Israelites were once slaves, just as children in parts of the world are today?<sup>25</sup> The key “thing to notice is that the prophetic message depends upon previous messages. It is not something radically new; the prophet is not the first to find, nor does he make, the morality he expounds.”<sup>26</sup> This is the culture of “interpretation” that Walzer advocates, and it is key for correcting the mistakes of the evangelical right.

An inward criticism of communities is a key component of the prophetic tradition described by Walzer.<sup>27</sup> Although the CRC was developed

by the international community, one positive benefit is that it requires countries to look internally and develop their own policies.<sup>28</sup> This seems to make the fear of the Right—that they would not be able to train their own children or control their own homes—inconsistent with the reality of what the CRC attempts to do. The truth is that beyond minimal guidelines, countries are free to accommodate the pluralistic associations within state boundaries.

Inherent in Walzer's view of prophetic justice are the "principle of consent" and also self-determination.<sup>29</sup> This means that, "The work of the critic, when it is maximalist work, is also local and particularist in character."<sup>30</sup> What does this mean when applied to the CRC? It means that Christians are allowed to raise their children in a distinctly Christian way, Muslims are allowed to raise their children in a Muslim heritage, and Buddhists are allowed to raise their children within the guidelines of their traditions "free from government interference."<sup>31</sup> The CRC, like Walzer, supports the basic rights of members within different groups "*to be allowed to govern themselves* (in accordance with their own political [and religious] ideas)—insofar as they can decently do that, given their local entanglements."<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the CRC protects children's rights to survival and development—including the right to be raised in a family with parents. Such procedures actually protect the home, something which both the CRC and the evangelical right can agree about.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, pluralism is an important correction to the evangelical right's worldview. As Walzer writes, "I hear voices, I play parts, I identify myself in different ways—and so I must aim at a society that makes room for this divided self."<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere, he says, "But I listen to other voices and so require other forms of protection: religious toleration, cultural autonomy, indi-

vidual rights. It is not possible to pick out the best protection, for no voice is necessarily or rightly dominant; none of my self-critics has the last word."<sup>35</sup>

These selves come from a collective body of knowledge. An effective social critic then has "insider" understandings of various associations or pluralistic "selves."<sup>36</sup> This builds empathy for other groups, because we can better enter into their very real circumstances, not merely philosophical ones. "The outsider can become a *social* critic only if he manages to get himself inside, enters imaginatively into local practices and arrangements."<sup>37</sup> As Walzer has said, conversations about justice come from the real speech of everyday life. Such conversations have limits, but multiple voices in the conversation help the process of criticism: "Arguing with one another, we interpret, revise, elaborate, and also call into question the paradigms that shape our thinking. So we arrive at some conception of a just society (say) through a conversation that is constrained, indeed, by the ordinary constraints of everyday life: the pressure of time, the structure of authority, the discipline of parties and movements, the patterns of socialization and education, the established procedures of institutional life."<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, Walzer does not call people to see "the full moral significance of the other cultures," but rather, "Minimalism depends on something less: most simply, perhaps, on the fact that we have expectations about the behavior not only of our fellows but of strangers too."<sup>39</sup> This does not mean drowning out a person's particular circumstances or life history, but rather making room for all voices, so no voice has the final say.<sup>40</sup> This means that we can see the need for justice in other cultures, even when we do not understand all aspects of the culture, precisely because of the way justice is embedded in our own culture.<sup>41</sup>

Will the circumstances of an

American child mirror those of a child in Nigeria, Burma, the Philippines, North Korea, Brazil or South Sudan? In short, no. Each culture comes with a maximal understanding of childhood and that understanding is not sacrificed by the CRC. Instead, the CRC helps us to better live out our maximal understanding of God's purposes for justice.<sup>42</sup> As my colleague Dave Scott argues, "Rather than rejecting rights wholly, as Christians working with children around the world, we should feel we have every reason to engage with rights as a tool for accomplishing God's purposes in that world."<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

It is ironic and saddening, that the United States, which in many ways enjoys supportive conditions for most of its children, is the only nation in the world that fails to recognize the need for internationally agreed upon human rights for children.<sup>44</sup> It is even more disheartening that Christians are often the CRC's leading opposition, vilifying the act and ignoring the context of many of the world's children. Michael Walzer teaches corrections for our failures that allow us to march in the parades of children everywhere, corrections that allow us to sketch a minimal understanding of justice along with the global community, even if as Christians, we find more detailed, beautiful expressions of child justice in our own traditions and understandings.<sup>45</sup> With decreasing support of the United Nations in a presidency supported by many of the same evangelicals, we must become even more vocal of justice for children—not less. Will we join the parades of children everywhere or ignore them, and in doing so, fail to march even our own parade? ■

*Laura Rector is a professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. The footnotes can be found on the version of the article found at [www.christianethicstoday.com](http://www.christianethicstoday.com)*

# American Evolution: Teddy Roosevelt and Our National Experiment

By David Jordan

**W**e Americans are still trying to figure ourselves out. Who are we really? What does it mean to be a citizen of this country? And how are we to view the world?

Dignity, honor, respect and understanding remain crucial in our personal, national and international relationships. How we conduct ourselves among ourselves and others will determine much during the tumultuous days of this current administration.

Teddy Roosevelt, that wildly energetic president in the early and heady days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, embodies well the evolution of our current needs and perspectives. His life offers both the bold, optimistic zeal rising with the American experiment, along with a highly public but less discussed world view. It is this latter perspective that Roosevelt then and many others now, continue to cling to.

The broad scope of James Bradley's well-researched book, *The Imperial Cruise*, reveals a much less familiar Teddy Roosevelt. Impetuous, ego-centric and highly influenced by the ubiquitous Anglo-Saxon supremacy myth, Roosevelt secretly negotiated "deals" with the Japanese in 1905. In Bradley's assessment, and with an enormous treasure trove of previously untapped evidence, Roosevelt's subversive dealings with foreign powers outside the constraints of State Department and governmental oversight, gave tacit permission, even encouragement, to the Japanese to take over the entire Korean peninsula for Japanese imperial oversight and exploitation.

Allegedly, Teddy hoped Japan's Korean takeover would pave the way

for speedy industrialization there, along with increased openness to Western (American) industry, and a ready market for American goods. Bradley asserts these secret agreements and back room deals Roosevelt initiated set the stage for World War II and the unimaginable horrors that would be unleashed in the coming three decades.

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*Roosevelt's world view at the time understood that the white race was simply preeminent, and that white supremacy was self-evident, and that Asian, Slavic, Latino and African societies were inferior.*

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Roosevelt's world view at the time understood that the white race was simply preeminent, and that white supremacy was self-evident, and that Asian, Slavic, Latino and African societies were inferior. It was therefore the "White Man's burden" to help them rise in order to be "taught" and ultimately exploited by Anglo-Saxon superiors. Numerous speeches, letters and secret documents support Bradley's premise: Roosevelt exhibited a world view based on a fundamental understanding of white supremacy, yielding a future controlled and run by Anglo-Saxon descendants. His world view largely reflected the perspectives of white America as a whole. And the damage from both contrib-

uted to untold misery for countless people.

But Roosevelt evolved. And so would the country he struggled to represent.

In Candice Millard's *The River of Doubt: Theodore Roosevelt's Darkest Journey*, we hear of a different, more reflective Teddy. Following his embarrassing defeat in the 1912 election that undermined his Republican party and set the stage for Woodrow Wilson's presidency, Roosevelt crashed. Struggling with depression and desperately looking for an adventure that would revive his spirits and regenerate his carefully manufactured "Rough Rider" image, he settled upon a journey into the Amazon jungles of Brazil. Doing so would change him. It would also almost kill him.

Millard's excellent recounting of Roosevelt's journey into the wilderness pulls the reader into the wild, vast, untamed and unexplored reaches of human endurance. In her telling, Roosevelt's courage, endurance, honor and emerging cultural appreciation stand in contrast with his narrow, bigoted view of non-white humanity in 1905. His learning occurs by daily, hourly exposure to men of skill, courage and honor who were not white. The eclectic, multi-ethnic group of Brazilians accompanying Roosevelt, his son Kermit, and his other American escorts, demonstrate remarkable discipline. They also live with a wisdom and dignity that helps the former president view the world through different eyes.

His near-death and the risks these courageous "non-whites" endured to save him taught him invaluable lessons. While this successful jour-

ney cemented his image as the consummate adventurer/explorer and naturalist, and his return facilitated broader understanding of the mysterious Amazon rainforest, he failed in a broader sense. Sadly, Roosevelt did little following his adventure to further the cause of race relations or to share overtly the clear lesson of racial equity and its potential for international cooperation.

In these strange and divisive days, our nation stands in need of similar reminders.

Roosevelt's journey could have opened new arenas of understanding and broadened views of dignity and honor. His new sense of equity and his deeper appreciation of another culture different from his should have ushered in a more enlightened era of equality at home. Sadly, during and following Roosevelt's adventures, Jim Crow laws in the southern United States increased in their scope and intensity. African-Americans throughout the American South suffered mightily as white privilege expanded and white prejudice became more pathological.

Isabel Wilkerson, in her very important book, *The Warmth of Other*

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*African-Americans throughout the American South suffered mightily as white privilege expanded and white prejudice became more pathological.*

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*Suns*, reminds us of a stunning fact: During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an average of four black men were killed in public *every day* in the South. White people had total power. No trial. No jury. Lynching, burning and torture at the whim of white southerners were ubiquitous, often for perceived slights or misinterpreted or misrepresented or misheard remarks from a black man to a white woman. The KKK, revamped and on active duty, terrorized the black community with impunity.

Meanwhile, statues of southern generals and confederate leaders began to be erected. Note that these statues were not called for following defeat in 1865. Instead, this was less about honoring southern heroes and more

about reasserting southern, white authority. The message to African-Americans seemed to be: "We lost the war, but we still control you."

The creation of these "monuments" increased in intensity and ubiquity during the very time Teddy was learning his important lessons. He could have and he should have assisted his growing nation to be a better, more open, inclusive and caring land. Roosevelt could have been a transformative catalyst of vision and hope in a society bereft of calm, wise voices of moderation.

Instead, we have reaped the whirlwind from long decades of tragic racial tensions, economic disparities and lack of racial justice. Let us not waste the clear and present opportunities now afforded us in these important days. Let our voices and experiences speak. Doing so might well facilitate the humble beginning of a more equitable society, an arena of compassion and understanding in our time so necessary for all time. ■

*David Jordan is senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Decatur, GA.*

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# Winter Depression

by Marion D. Aldridge

Thirty years ago, I began to notice the predictable pattern of my own depression each Winter. I've kept a journal periodically over the years. So, all I needed to do was look back at previous Winters to see, sure enough, the same behavioral blueprint. It wasn't hard to figure out.

The excitement of Christmas was over.

The days were shorter.

There was illness in the air.

We stayed indoors more.

The obituary list in the newspaper was longer.

Winter depression is no secret.

While situational sadness is not the same as clinical despondency or hopelessness, still, I learned to take the symptoms seriously. My first clue was the television series *Northern Exposure*, which aired an episode on Seasonal

Affective Disorder (SAD).<sup>[1]</sup>

While it's not the same as cabin fever, limited access to the outdoors still plays a part in the problem. While spending the last two winters in New England, I was surprised at how much more of the winter season these hardy souls spend outdoors than we Southerners do: ice skating, snow skiing, snowmobiling and ice fishing. I was amazed.

For me, a big chunk of the Winter blues was good old-fashioned post-Christmas melancholy—rather like post-partum depression. All the excitement—the church in overdrive, holiday parties, gift giving and receiving, travel, Christmas tree-decorating and dismantling—came to a screeching halt.

Winter is also a time of reality checking. Why else do we make

resolutions? We've eaten too much, spent too much and formed bad habits that need to be broken. Yuk! The fantasy of living as if there are no consequences comes to a demoralizing end. We're going to have to make some changes. No wonder we are dispirited.

No magic list here of "Ten Ways to Get Out of Your Winter Funk." There are probably a thousand websites to tell you that. The great insight for me was simply to name the demon. I wasn't just randomly depressed for no good reason. There were a dozen causes for the Winter doldrums, and I needed to pay attention. ■

Marion Aldridge can be followed at <https://marionaldridge.wordpress.com/>

## Interesting quote:

"The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much."

—Marlow, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*



# Breakthrough

by Lawrence Brazier

We can only hope that our spiritual clean-up proceeds smoothly, bringing us into ever-closer intimacy with God, God's purpose for us and God's love. The immensely loving factor is that we are, at last, out of our own hands and in God's. Of course, any kind of breakthrough, or real change, however hard we try – and woe to those who stop trying – cannot be brought about by works. Whatever you do instinctively, without thinking, is likely to be as close as you'll get to personal reality, thus far. You then say "sorry" and keep going.

It should be stated that the unobserved self can be a blessing or – let's face it, only God is good – that which leads to a really painful eye-opener.

What joy it was for this writer to 'get it wrong' but at the same time 'get it right' in respect to racism. My logical mind told me that the color of someone's skin should be of no consequence, but I was never really sure if logic was enough to keep my wobbly inner world on track. I was on my toes, all right, and never made a conscious mistake. But I often wondered (myself being my own worst enemy) if I was perhaps trying too hard. Then God was kind.

An American magazine of some repute ran a story under the headline: "Universities Need More Professors of Color." I misread and misunderstood, the message. I was, in fact, blessed with simple-mindedness. I automatically thought the article was about art—that more teachers dealing with color were needed. The penny quickly dropped, of course, but I did experience a curious feeling of relief. It was as if an age-old problem that had been gumming up my inner world had suddenly been resolved and I felt an enormous burden being

lifted. I had read the word 'color' without any interfering connotation, no euphemism. I did not automatically think "race;" I simply imagined an artist with a palette full of paint. I wonder, now, if one could relate this occurrence to the Biblical admonition in Matthew 5:37, New King James Version: *But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.*

I wondered if being a bit of a

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*It was the celebrated Jewish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer, who said that if you wish to become a loving person, keep practicing. This would imply getting your mind involved.*

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dunce, as far as this world is concerned, was possibly useful. After all, it did seem to obviate "spin," or what my American colleagues would call "hoopla." I have to tell you, I was mighty pleased with myself. I was at long last color-blind, and that without even trying. No more would I feel obliged to say, "*Some of my best friends are...Jews, Negroes, Asians, women, even other writers (joke).*" Mind you, I had already been through this on an earlier occasion.

When writing for a jazz magazine, I had unthinkingly used the word *negro*. The editor (himself a negro) shot back a message that he and his folk prefer the expression African-American or simply "black."

Just as quickly I responded in an e-mail saying, "So what do I do with

the word *Caucasian*?" He acceded, even adding that he got the point. I felt deeply wise (only kidding!) but very aware that I had been lucky to have had such an understanding editor.

Quite obviously we can't simply stop thinking, but I found the notion of the "*peace that passeth all understanding*" immensely attractive. Moreover, I rather fancied tripping lightly through life, singing a happy tune like Danny Kay or Mary Poppins or...*running across a meadow, pickin' up lots of forget-me-nots*. What it did mean, however, is that we are often talking nonsense in a futile attempt at avoiding reality.

The peace that passeth all understanding? I suppose I have reached a point of not wishing to understand anything. The reason why has become a nuisance. (Ah, the Tree.) Most things in this world are none of my business anyway. It would appear that to be in this world, but not of it would be entirely practical from a Christian viewpoint. As writer on religious matters, I could write a thousand words straight off on that theme.

It was the celebrated Jewish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer, who said that if you wish to become a loving person, keep practicing. This would imply getting your mind involved. But who cares? If it works, go for it! Nevertheless, I am now convinced that God will root out uncertainty and foolishness and give us the grace to experience God's own brand of freedom—the freedom from self, from imagination and, above all, from a scheming mind.

There is no hoopla in the Gospels! Jesus addresses our personal needs, and that with an obviousness that is hard to ignore. His proclamations

stun the mind. You can't *reason* your way around them. Nevertheless, I have noticed that my mind switches into automatic, looking for a way out when confronted with an obvious truth that sets off my danger-to-self signal. It is at this point, I feel, that faith as a part of Christian living becomes so obvious. That little prod of panic needs either appeasement or surrender to grace. Appeasement doesn't work for long, at least not for this writer.

I remember when my "still small voice" was gently urging me to clear up a matter that was wrecking my life. I resisted, afraid. The urging became more insistent. I pleaded: "I'll do anything You ask, but not *that*." God knew what *that* was. The urge persisted. I wrestled with God for hours, sweated and suffered. I finally cracked and surrendered. I really meant it! The pressure exploded and I was blessed with a pervasive stillness. Inside, I heard, "It's all right Lawrence, you don't need to do it. I just wanted you to be willing." The crisis was over. The problem disappeared. I went through the rest of the day in deep peace.

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*I recently mentioned to my wife that I had reached a point of actually wanting to be wrong.*

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It was then that I knew that first comes the peace that passeth all understanding, and then comes "the still small voice." In that deep peace, that day, I realized that I should have no ambition to become a brain surgeon or a jet pilot unless God willed it. The Tree of Knowledge part of Genesis then became obvious. We can easily transcend with thought (up, up and away, read "imagination") and figure we can shake the hand of God. Basically, though, God simply wants us to take out the garbage—our garbage, that is; nobody else's.

I recently mentioned to my wife that I had reached a point of actually wanting to be wrong.

"How come?" my wife asked, carefully.

"If I am right about everything I see

going on in the world, heaven help us. I really hope I'm wrong."

"Don't think about it," she said.

"Let us simply go on our way exercising our faith. Let us not be known by words alone. Especially not by words."

"But I am a writer," I protested.

"Sure you are darling. Just don't let it go to your head."

I wondered if she was really aware of what she had said.

Nevertheless, the Lord had just ushered in our spiritual phase two—being in the world, but not of it! ■

*Lawrence Brazier was born in Oxford, England (U.S. style given). He is married and has five children and now lives in Austria. He is a German/English translator and a widely travelled and published journalist, mostly on religious affairs. Lawrence and his wife, Romana, translate voluntarily texts from the German for diverse Third World agencies. Published in Interreligious Insight, World Journal of Faiths, Crisis Magazine, The Fountain – plus many other publications to other themes – mostly humor/travell/politics. Published clips available in all categories.*

## **Do You Believe...**

*...That God is the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;*

*...That God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;*

*...That God calls the church to follow God's efforts to bring justice to the oppressed and to give food to the hungry?*

*...That God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;*

*...That the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream?*

## **Do you believe?**

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# Sincere Ignorance and Enthusiastic Stupidity

By Johnny White

Recently I visited the new Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in downtown Jackson, Mississippi. You might recall the recent controversial dedication. Notable civil rights leaders who knew and marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., refused to attend with President Trump. Over this past MLK Weekend 2018 there have been unprecedented further reasons to question whether the president of the United States is racist. Just like the vast majority of Americans, without taking sides, never did I expect that question to be asked about a sitting president.

Following President Trump's most recent alleged race-tainted remarks, former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young, a colleague of Dr. King who became mayor of their home city of Atlanta, was interviewed on *Meet the Press*. When asked about the president's remarks he rather graciously offered, "We were all born in a very complex multicultural situation..." which he preferred to call ethnocentrism.

He quoted Dr. King who said: "We were born in an unjust world, and none of us can take any virtue in being born black, white, liberal, or conservative." Young quoted Dr. King further: "Nothing is more dangerous in all the world than sincere ignorance and enthusiastic stupidity."

I could not help myself! Along with Chuck Todd, moderator of *Meet the Press*, I began to laugh out loud at the presumed implications about President Trump. But then Ambassador Young quickly added, perhaps admonished, most graciously, "That could be applied not just to one person, but to everybody."

Asked by Todd if he felt President Trump was redeemable, Ambassador

Young again graciously responded: "I'm a Christian. I have to believe everybody is redeemable." I could not help but feel that Dr. King would have been very proud of his former colleague in the civil rights movement. On multiple levels, he remained true to the noble cause.

More than ever, given the unexpected turn of events in our day, I recommend to anyone and everyone that they visit the Mississippi Civil Rights

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*He quoted Dr. King who said: "We were born in an unjust world, and none of us can take any virtue in being born black, white, liberal, or conservative." Young quoted Dr. King further: "Nothing is more dangerous in all the world than sincere ignorance and enthusiastic stupidity."*

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Museum. It will be an educational and perhaps spiritual experience. For those of us who actually lived in Mississippi during the 50s and 60s, this museum arouses memories that are painful truths about the heroes, the villains and the complicit bystanders of the civil rights era.

Most of the heroes, with an exception or two, remain unknown to most of us. Many of the villains, lamentably, were at one time heroes to many of us who lived in Mississippi. Then there are the complicit bystanders. I don't know if that is the kindest or the harshest descriptor I can muster,

but it represents the majority of us. However, we were far more than just complicit. We did far more than just stand by and watch while the civil rights movement was happening. In Dr. King's words from the Birmingham jail: "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people." Our complicity was far greater than mere silence.

This is the main message I took away from my visit to the museum: We were all victims of an evil system whether we realized it or not. There were no innocent bystanders. That included President Kennedy who finally stood up to segregationist Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett. And it included the paperboy who delivered newspapers in a "Leave It to Beaver" segregated neighborhood. President Kennedy and that paperboy occupied only one-half of the unapologetic segregated world that existed at the time. We knew little about the pain of the other half.

In one small video vignette in the museum, I watched uniformed Jackson police officers confiscating boycott signs from black protestors outside the downtown Woolworth store. The year was 1963 when I was age 13. One afternoon after school, I witnessed a similar sit-in incident at the Woolworth's in west Jackson. I shudder to remember what I thought and felt at that time. I was definitely a complicit bystander in the evil system.

It struck me as I watched that brief video: Some of those police officers, ostensibly the villains, were the parents of friends I grew up with. I knew some of those men. They were community leaders and church-going fam-

ily men. Their wives were active in the PTA. They were acting on behalf of an evil system, but they were not evil men. Whether they would agree or not, they were also victims born into that evil system just as Dr. King said.

I cannot help but wonder: If those officers were still living, and if they saw those black and white video images of themselves, how would they feel? What would their explanations be? How do their children, my childhood friends, feel if they see those video images of their dads? It really wasn't so long ago.

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*I cannot help but wonder: If those officers were still living, and if they saw those black and white video images of themselves, how would they feel? What would their explanations be?*

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Those questions remind me once again of what I have known for a long time. I grew up in what I call "The Mississippi Paradox." Good Christian people who did really bad things—just like everybody else. Sincerely ignorant. Enthusiastically stupid. Always redeemable. ■

*Johnny White, recently retired senior pastor at the Interdenominational Church at Horseshoe Bay, TX, and who, as a boy, delivered newspapers in the "Leave It To Beaver" segregated neighborhood in west Jackson, MS.*

## Yearning for Hope

*by Earl Martin*

Today's news beyond our scope:  
Violence, wars, refugees fleeing.  
One may wonder, where is hope?  
Look deep into faith foreseeing.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast,"  
The words of Alexander Pope.  
Sooth the soul sorely depressed,  
Knowing, "where there's life there's hope."

When life's dark the Poet\* opines,  
"When it's dark enough you can see the stars."  
Look well upward for heavenly signs,  
And cling to the faith that is ours.

\*Ralph Waldo Emerson

*This poem, written by Earl Martin, was sent to his family on New Year's Eve.*

# Anti-Semitism and Criticism of Israel Are Not the Same

By Miguel De La Torre

A full page advertisement ran in the Sept. 20 edition of the *New York Times* sponsored by the World Jewish Congress. The advertisement made four points, two with which I agree wholeheartedly, one with which I lack sufficient knowledge to make a decision, and one with which I totally disagree because of the danger it poses to justice.

The two with which I concur are: 1) “We should never have to be afraid to practice our faith,” and 2) “We must never be silent (while people of any faith are attacked).” Amen and amen! The one for which I am not knowledgeable enough to respond is, “We are one people.” I’m not sure if my Jewish colleagues would agree. I’ll simply punt to them to discuss, although I would be greatly interested in the discourse.

The point which deeply troubles me is, “Anti-Semitism and anti-Israel lies must be fought.” The advertisement elaborates by stating: “The age-old hatred of Jews today now disguises itself as anti-Zionism, an irrational hatred of Israel we’ve seen in the halls of the U.N. and on college campuses in the form of the BDS— Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions—movement. The hatred must end now.”

First, I totally agree that lies must be confronted. Our failure to do so has led to a Trump presidency. I also totally agree anti-Semitism is on the rise, demonstrated by tiki torch-carrying thugs in Charlottesville whose irrational obsession with Jews led to chants of “Jews will not replace us.” And if I can tie this observation to the advertisement’s point of never being silent, then all people — whether of faith or not — cannot be silent bystanders to anti-Semitism.

However, I do take great issue with

the attempt to link critique of a secular nation state by movements like BDS with anti-Semitism. To critique a government can never be equated with hating a people. For example, I have been critical of the Castro regime of Cuba; this does not make me anti-Latinx. There is something barbaric about the mantra “my country, right or wrong,” whether that country is Israel, the United States or my beloved Cuba.

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*While I stand against the oppression caused by anti-Semitism, I also stand against the secular State of Israel, mainly due to Prime Minister Netanyahu’s policies.*

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I would argue those who are the most pro-Israel — evangelicals — are also the most anti-Semitic, believing Jews will not be saved during the rapture and will eventually burn in a lake of fire at the end of times for rejecting Jesus the Messiah. Motivated by an interpretation that Jesus’ second coming will occur after the Jerusalem Temple is rebuilt, they support Israel in achieving this goal, regardless of tactics employed.

Their support for Israel exists in spite of their hatred for Jews best demonstrated in their belief and hope of an apocalyptic genocide (read the *Left Behind* series). The unwavering loyalty of the U.S. to a foreign nation (distinguished from a people of faith) is complicit with the continuous injustices occurring in that corner of the world. Specifically, we must hold accountable

both evangelicals who misunderstand the Book of Revelation and politicians who do not misunderstand the power of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

I recognize our anti-Semitic history, cognizant of how our Jewish sisters and brothers suffered at the hands of Christians for centuries; but this does not excuse the oppressed of history wielding the power of the oppressors. While I stand against the oppression caused by anti-Semitism, I also stand against the secular State of Israel, mainly due to Prime Minister Netanyahu’s policies. For decades he has undermined peace negotiations by encouraging settlements on Palestinian-designated lands. In addition, his attempt to suppress Arab-Israeli votes exposes his Jim Crow tactics to disenfranchise a segment of the citizenship due to their racial characteristics. Both institutional and physical violence against the Palestinians must be voiced and condemned. Israel’s anti-peace and anti-Arab administration requires denouncement.

But let’s be clear: Standing against Israel does not mean I automatically stand with the Palestinians oblivious of how they too have fallen short of the mark. Again, we need to become more sophisticated in our analysis and be able to criticize their actions, denounce the violence of the past and its use in the present. Blatant anti-Semitic rhetoric, which I find in several of their denunciations, only fuels the fires of hatred and distrust. And yet, my preferential option toward the Palestinians is because, overall, they are the ones who are suffering economic and political oppression. As a liberation theologian, I must stand with Palestinians while remaining



ready to also criticize their policies. And more importantly, I must be clear that the unjustifiable death of one Palestinian or one Israeli is one death too many, a tragic waste of those created in the image of God.

If we are for reducing (or, dare we dream, eliminating) violence, if we support the two-state solution as the best roadmap toward peace, if we are against the oppression of the least among us, then we must voice our distress at governments, whether Israeli or Palestinian, when their actions and pronouncements lead to greater mistrust, greater oppression and, most importantly, greater violence.

To say that critique of a nation state

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*To say that critique of a nation state is akin to anti-Semitism is simply naïve, disingenuous and wrong.*

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is akin to anti-Semitism is simply naïve, disingenuous and wrong. The Netanyahu administration leaves me no choice but to stand against his hawkish policies and its oppressive tactics. I challenge the government of Israel for its settler colonialism and apartheid policies. And one nonviolent response might very well be by

supporting BDS, a Palestine movement inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement. ■

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## Hookworm Returns as a Poverty-Related Disease

Hookworm falls under the umbrella of “neglected tropical diseases,” which don’t receive much attention and are associated with extreme poverty.

It’s not known precisely how many people have hookworm in the U.S. It’s not even clear how many are infected in Lowndes County, Alabama where a study published in 2017 found at least one-third of the homes with failing failing septic systems, and 15 percent without any system at all...Lead investigator Rojelio Mejia had to walk from house to house, asking for stool samples and understandably few people wanted to provide them. In the end, he got samples from 55 people...One-third of the people tested had hookworm, a result that stunned the authors.

Not all the neglected diseases in America are associated with raw sewage. Others include *toxocariasis*, a parasitic worm infection transmitted from dogs and cats and thought to affect tens of millions of people, especially poor African-Americans; *Chagas*, a parasitic infection that may cause heart failure, infecting 300,000 across the country; as well as flu-like, mosquito-borne diseases such as *dengue* and *chikungunya*, which are growing threats in warmer climates. *Zika*, a mosquito-borne disease linked to severe birth defects, is sometimes included among these diseases, too.

There may be as many as 12 million Americans living with at least one neglected disease, according to Dr. Peter Hotez, an authority on these illnesses and dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. Hotez considers the country’s poorest 20 million to be at greatest risk, and points to Texas, the Gulf Coast and the South as areas with especially vulnerable pockets of poverty.

Source: Anna Leah in Huffpost

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# Send in the Women

By Teresa L. Smallwood    *Text: Jeremiah 19*

Clearly there is a war going on in our nation. There is a fight between good and evil that is prominent in American culture. It is a fact that in every war there are casualties. In every contest there is a need for strategic planning, direct action, and preparation. This afternoon, many of you will be tuned in to a football contest, a war of sorts. At that contest, you expect that there will be a fight for the title: Super Bowl Champions. From the perspective of strategic planning, I am sure the season prepared the teams that will compete, but the real test of their ability to be the champions will happen on the field. On the field, the teams must perform their plays with stupendous execution. There will be challenges. In every contest there are challenges: the risk of injury, the risk of failure, the risk of penalty, and the risk of disappointment to those who support each team. Despite the significant risks, the possibility of rewards serves as a driver. It drives the participants to the fight.

I have been very interested in how, in the face of so much scientific evidence of the long-term danger and serious injury known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy – a neurological disease linked to head injuries to the players in sports like football, people would take that risk. Perhaps, Colin Kaepernick's taking a knee signifies an act of racial justice on an even deeper level; but, that is another story, for another day. This situation – the risk of permanent injury and indeed death *is* however, analogous to what Israel was up against in the Jeremiah 19 text that we read. Now please be clear, we thank God for Jesus. It is not my intention to cause people trepidation with the threat of annihilation by an angry God. I am not here to focus

upon eating the flesh of children or any of the things the text enumerates as consequence of the nation's sin. The issue of theodicy comes up; but, that is not my focus. Our focus is upon the situation that led to God's position as prophesied by Jeremiah. Jeremiah, the prophet, the son of Hilkiah (who was a high priest of the Temple of Jerusalem and who discovered the "book of the law)," was chosen by God to deliver God's message to the

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*As I reflect upon the story of Jeremiah the prophet and the fate of Israel, our present situation in America is eerily parallel.*

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people. Jeremiah, a Levitical priest, was set aside by God to prophesy admonition to Israel. His message was simple: Return to God's covenant.

In our situational text, we find Israel being given a pronouncement of the coming destruction by their enemies from the north. The people had resorted to the worship of false gods that they called Baal. They had begun to build altars to Baal and were burning children as offerings. Jeremiah was charged with the responsibility to warn the people first, that God would withdraw their blessings and second, that God would allow their enemies to destroy them. As the nation became increasingly more obstinate, Jeremiah's warnings described more deleterious actions. For instance, earlier in the chapter, the nation was warned about famine and starvation; plunder and captivity. Eventually, Babylon would

invade Jerusalem and destroy it causing the total collapse of the nation.

Fortunately, with the promise of destruction came also the promise of restoration. In fact, we see evidence of this in the chapter just before our focus text. Jeremiah 18:7-8 reveals God's heart where it reads "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it." In other words, God warns, but at the same time, God provides a means of escape.

As I reflect upon the story of Jeremiah the prophet and the fate of Israel, our present situation in America is eerily parallel. The false god of patriotism has blinded the people to the real issues of human flourishing. Our enemies to the north are a serious threat to our destruction. Patriotism has preempted the ability for the constitutional exercise of free speech. The patriotism that is promoted is one of totalitarian, dictatorial, imperialistic and ideological populism. The leadership of this nation stokes the fire of white nationalism, the KKK, and neo-Nazi terror. This administration rewards the alt-right with high level positions – literally forming principalities in high places. Child molesters, sexual abusers practicing fraudulent and dangerous individualism dictate the ethos of this country. Hatemongers run the Justice Department, the inept is in charge of education, the ill-informed in charge of Housing and Urban Development and all of this is against the backdrop of greed and avarice in the halls of Congress, many state houses and municipal governments.

Just like in the valley of the son of Hinnom or Tophet, south of Jerusalem, where human victims were offered, and children made to pass through the fire, in honor of Molech, the children of America are subjected to (gun)fire (Sandy Hook), torture in sex trafficking, and morbidity in the face of CHIP and other sources for their healthcare being threatened. Moreover, if they are Dreamers, they are threatened with deportation to places, which in some cases, they have not visited since arriving here decades ago. In the face of this type of behavior, God sends a warning to Israel that promises to make the ears of those who hear it tingle.

Now in Jeremiah 9, the solution put forth by God was to call for mourning and lamentation. In that instance, Israel was told to call for the mourning women to lament. These were professional mourners whose job it was to bring forth public grief and shouts of passionate sorrow at the conditions. But, as the situation of Israel's sinful behavior persisted in chapter 19, there was no call for the mourners. It reminds me of the song "Stand." "After you have done all you can, stand." The songwriter says after you have "prayed and cried and prayed and cried; then, you just stand."

Well, in chapter 19, the time had come for God that the actions of a sinful nation, Israel, could not be assuaged with the wailing women. I do not know about you, but I am tired of crying. It's time now for a contest. It is time for a fight. It's time to rumble! I am tired of seeing mothers crying over dead children laying in the streets with holes from gunshots riddling their bodies. (In the case of LaQuan McDonald in Chicago, the government engaged in a cover-up of the circumstances surrounding the death of a young man who was walking away from the police when the officer unloaded a clip of 16 bullets in his body). I am tired of crying over so many of our children caged in prisons

all over America. I am tired of crying over modern-day lynching in the form of vehicular homicide dispatched to pick off counter-protests of white supremacists. I am tired of the possibility that a lone gunman could walk into a church and kill nine worshippers including the pastor. I am tired of losing the contest between good and evil. It's time for a fight; a street fight. And, like the Super Bowl you will watch today, there is a need for some specialty teams to be sent in to the contest. The question becomes who will you send in? Send in the women.

In football, the role of specialty teams is four-fold. First, they handle punts, kickoffs, and punt returns.

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*I am convinced that America is in a Kairos moment. We are in need of some specialty teams to turn this situation around. Send in the Women.*

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Second, they handle field goals and extra point attempts. Third, they take care of kickoff returns; and fourth, they are the teams that attempt to block field goals and extra point attempts. Specialty teams are sent in to turn the situation around. Specialty teams help to maintain good field position for their team and to keep the opposition in bad field position. In the contest we face as a nation, I stand in prophetic authority to say to you: Send in the Women!

I am convinced that America is in a *Kairos* moment. We are in need of some specialty teams to turn this situation around. Send in the Women. Send in the ones who, history shows us, are full of the Spirit of God and able to carry the ball. I am reminded of the memoir of Old Elizabeth – a slave woman born on or about 1766.

Old Elizabeth tells the story of her life at age 97 in a writing that she dictated entitled *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, Coloured Woman*. On the cover is printed Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." I am sure Old Elizabeth had to seal that truth in her heart as she walked out her vocation and conviction.

It is amazing to me the number of people who still do not regard women as worthy to mount the sacred desk. I had a minister challenge me once on the subject. He pointed me to the passage where the Apostle Paul required women to be silent and not be given the privilege to exercise a pastoral position over a man. I told the brother it was evident that he was reading the Bible, but to come back to me when he was finished. When it comes to women preachers we cannot cherry pick the scriptures. Old Elizabeth in the 18<sup>th</sup> century understood this. She understood the Joel prophecy "and it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And, also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit" (Joel 2: 28-29).

Old Elizabeth relates that she was born to enslaved parents. At age 11, she was traded to another plantation away from her parents and siblings. One time she ran away from that plantation and walked 20 miles to find her parents. When she returned to the plantation from which she had run, she was tied with a rope and given some stripes which lingered for several weeks. While visiting her mother, Old Elizabeth reports that her mother told her she had "nobody in the wide world to look to but God." That stuck with Old Elizabeth and she developed a relationship with God that led her

to preaching. Old Elizabeth survived slavery and lived to be 100 years old. Old Elizabeth is a great example of the prophetic tradition that represents truth-telling, resistance, survival and redemption. Based upon her example, “Send in the Women” because they are prepared with the Spirit of God to fight, to block the assignment of the enemy, which is “to kill, to steal, and to destroy.” Old Elizabeth tells the story of a meeting she was holding in a house when an overseer/watchman came in to break up the meeting. *A feeling of weakness came over me for a short time, but I soon grew warm and courageous in the Spirit. The man then said to me, “I was sent here to break up your meeting. Complaint has been made to me that the people round here cannot sleep for the racket.” I replied, “a good racket is better than a bad racket. How do they rest when the ungodly are dancing and fiddling till midnight? Why are not they molested by the watchmen? and why should we be for praising God, our Maker? Are we worthy of greater punishment for praying to Him? and are we to be prohibited from doing so, that sinners may remain slumbering in their sins?” While speaking these few words I grew warm with heavenly zeal, and laid my hand upon him and addressed him with gospel truth, “how do sinners sleep in hell, after slumbering in their sins here, and crying, ‘let me rest, let me rest,’ while sporting on the very brink of hell? Is the cause of God to be destroyed for this purpose?” Speaking several words more to this amount, he turned pale and trembled, and begged my pardon, acknowledging that it was not his wish to interrupt us, and that he would never disturb a religious assembly again. He*

*then took leave of me in a comely manner and wished us success.*

This morning, I want to encourage your heart that the battle is not ours, but it’s the Lord’s. You have to suit up and show up on the field. (Put on your whole armor – your breastplate of righteousness... Ephesians 6:10-19) and God will fight our battles against evil. If you show up, God will hold you up so that you can stand up and fight. Our fight is in need of some specialty teams to block the punts of the enemy; to push the opponent back. I charge us to *Send in the Women*.

Old Elizabeth represents a long legacy of women who have studied

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*Old Elizabeth represents a long legacy of women who have studied to show themselves approved. She is an example of what it means to be empowered by the Spirit of God to stand against tyranny.*

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to show themselves approved. She is an example of what it means to be empowered by the Spirit of God to stand against tyranny. She survived enslavement and taught others because she had a deep and abiding relationship with God that was fostered as a child at 11 years old. And the prophetic voice of those like Old Elizabeth should inspire us. In the

same way that Ida B. Wells-Barnette rose up to fight that lynching be abolished by drawing national attention to it, that same Spirit can help the team today.

Send in the women. Send in those like Harriet Tubman whose underground railroad transported folks to freedom. She took them voluntarily and sometimes by show of force with that rifle she carried. Send in the women like Ella Baker who took the blows to her head for the right for her people to vote. Send in the women like Nannie Helen Burroughs who understood the need to educate her people.

Send in the women. Send in the women who will stand flat-footed and prophesy deliverance. Send in the women who will speak truth to power and not back down over a donation to the building fund. Send in the women who are capable of turning the situation around and changing the position we have on the field. For we are on the battlefield for our Lord, “we have to fight, although we have to fight. We have to hold-up the bloodstained banner, we have to hold it up until we die.” If we are to be victors, and indeed, we are already victors, we must send in the women. ■

*Teresa L. Smallwood JD, PhD is Postdoctoral Fellow and Associate Director of Public Theology and Racial Justice Collaborative at Vanderbilt Divinity School. This sermon was preached on Super Bowl Sunday, and the first Sunday of Black History Month, February 4, 2018, at New Millennium Church in Little Rock, Arkansas.*



# Why I Care...a Brief Explanation

By John Ragland

“Silence in the face of injustice is complicity with the oppressor.” – Ginetta Sagan<sup>1</sup>

I grew up a privileged American. During the 50s, 60s and early 70s, Beirut was a haven for expats. There were tens of thousands of Americans – businessmen, diplomats, missionaries, spies and their families (which explains how this “missionary kid” came to be). Beirut defied many of the stereotypes Americans, even now, still cling to about the “exotic” Middle East.

There were mosques and churches everywhere, sometimes right across the street from each other. There were all sorts of different religions and ethnicities and languages and customs, all jumbled and tumbled into a unique mélange that even now defines the restless quirkiness that is Beirut. Not far from my high school, near the American embassy, there was a thousand-year-old Jewish neighborhood with an ancient synagogue and storefront signs in both Hebrew and Arabic. There was even a street named after President Kennedy.

But, like too many Americans I have known, I didn’t really pay enough attention to this exciting, exhilarating world I was growing up in. Chalk some of it up to youthful introversion, but there was an unhealthy heap of American arrogance all mixed in, too. I hate to admit it, but yes, I was an “Ugly American” – one of those Americans who spent decades abroad but never abandoned their hubris, their provincial, exceptionalist sense that they were somehow innately better than everyone else.

Missionary kids weren’t rich, but we weren’t poor either. Most expats in those days had maids and drivers

and some even had their own cooks and gardeners. We were often chauffeured past sprawling Palestinian refugee camps (even now, after 70 years, they’re scattered all over Lebanon and Syria and Jordan and even the still-occupied areas of Palestine). But I never really saw or understood or cared. I was an American. My parents were American. I was surrounded by Americans and educated by Americans, at a school that was popu-

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*Less than 10 years after my last happy splash in that exclusive pool, some of those children I laughed at – maybe all of them – were probably buried there in that mass grave,*

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lated primarily by and for Americans. Even as we drove by those squalid camps, the misery and humiliation of too many desperately poor families, living in tiny shacks made from cardboard and flattened tin cans – well, it was just scenery to me, part of an abstract background rushing by.

I never saw, never heard, never bothered to understand the real, suffering people in those camps, or the gross injustice that had forced them to become my reluctant, unwelcome neighbors. That these were fellow humans who were, even then, enduring their second and third generations of exile was unimportant to me and to most Americans like me.<sup>2</sup>

We used to go swimming at a fancy athletic center called Cité Sportive. Its pool was an Olympic-sized beauty

surrounded by manicured lawns and a high wall. A Palestinian refugee camp (can you still call it a “camp” decades later?) had sprung up next door, but the pool was completely off-limits to those nearby “campers” – a gatekeeper made sure no one got in but Westerners and well-heeled (rich) Lebanese.

On the inside, up against the wall in one corner, there was a small hamburger stand. Next to it were window-like openings in the wall that looked out toward the refugee camp. I can still remember now how we stood there casually munching our burgers and “freedom” fries while we gazed scornfully (and oh-so blindly) at the Palestinian children playing outside, blissfully naked and gleeful in the green, scummy runoff from “our” crystal-clear pool.

More than 40 years later, that memory still haunts me. A stone’s throw from that very spot where we munched and mocked is the unmarked mass grave for hundreds, maybe thousands of innocent victims of the infamous 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre<sup>3</sup>, one of the most horrific, shameful, iconic events in a generally horrible, shameful, brutal civil war that lasted 15 years. American diplomats had explicitly guaranteed the safety of hundreds of children, women and men; but recently declassified documents reveal that US diplomats were told by the Israelis what they and their allies might be up to.

Less than 10 years after my last happy splash in that exclusive pool, some of those children I laughed at – maybe all of them – were probably buried there in that mass grave, their stinking, hacked, bloated and blackened bodies bulldozed into a hastily-dug pit.



My blindness and indifference then is a big part of what drives me now to try to understand and care more, especially about that part of the world I failed to see while I was still in it. But what may have started out as an exercise in exorcising the demons of remorse, for the callous indifferences of my youth, has become an obsession – an ongoing passion for opposing injustice and intolerance everywhere, against Palestinians specifically, and Arabs and Muslims generally.<sup>4</sup>

Here in America, and throughout what we call the Judeo-Christian, lily-white “West”, a barely latent racism and xenophobia have resurfaced, this time fueled and focused by 9-11 anger, Fox News and a fundamentalist frenzy that demands complete allegiance to Israel, no matter what, and a wacky eschatology that waxes rapturous about Armageddon.

One of the side effects of really caring about something is that you then hunger for knowledge, for the truth that will set you free. And when you know more, you cannot be a silent bystander. The more I know, the more I am compelled to speak and write and rant to anyone who will listen. I have to. It’s become a bit trite, a bit cliché, but silence really is complicity... ■

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1 “Silence in the face of injustice is complicity with the oppressor.” Ginetta Sagan (1925 – 2000, the “Topolino” or “Little Mouse” who was imprisoned, raped and tortured by Italian fascists during World War II but survived to help build Amnesty International and battle the abuse of political prisoners around the world.

2 “It is one of the commonest of mistakes to consider that the limit of our

power of perception is also the limit of all there is to perceive.” C. W. Leadbeater (1847 – 1934), controversial occultist, clairvoyant, co-founder of the Liberal Catholic Church.

3 See, in addition to many other articles “The United States Was Responsible for the 1982 Massacre of Palestinians in Beirut”, By Rashid Khalidi *The Nation* September 14, 2017.

4 “You know, you have such a stunningly superficial knowledge of what went on that it’s almost embarrassing to listen to you.” Zbigniew Brzezinski, former U.S. National Security Adviser, to Joe Scarborough on MSNBC’s Morning Joe 12/30/2008.

5 See: Maria Holt, *Women and Conflict in the Middle East: Palestinian Refugees and the Response to Violence* (2013) <https://books.google.com/books?isbn=1780761015> See also, [www.thedailybeast.com/among-the-refugees](http://www.thedailybeast.com/among-the-refugees)

#### Addendum

- Wonderment as a child, during a Beirut Baptist School (BBS) playground game of world conquest (played with a pocketknife thrown into a circle drawn in the dirt), when one player chose to play for “his” Lebanon rather than a “winning is everything” superpower like America or the USSR.
- Incredulity/embarrassment at widespread, uncritical acceptance of really bad eschatology that favors Israel and castigates Arabs/Muslims (see Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* and the more recent crop of gilded TV evangelists/charlatans).
- Shock/disgust at the immediate reaction to the Oklahoma City bombing, when first suspicions were Arab terrorists must be responsible.

- 9-11 and the rise of nationalism/fascism in America, along with overt prejudice against Arabs/Muslims/immigrants. The abandonment of peace initiatives between Israel and Palestine and regional neighbors, a rush to crush/occupy/proselytize (in that order) Iraq on WMD pretense, 2006 rape of Lebanon, 2007 rape of Nahr al-Bared refugee camp<sup>5</sup> (north of Tripoli), 2008/2012/2014 rape of Gaza, and unchecked expansion of Israeli settlements.

- Dismay at Americans’ eagerness to torture (we want to believe in the efficacy of fictional Jack Bauer’s outrageous brutality), dismay at finding out we’ve been behaving this way against Muslims for more than a century (see Twain’s account of soldiers slaughtering in the Philippines).
- Learning about 1950s CIA involvement in Iran (from retired agent Ray Close, no less), etc.
- Rise of the Tea Party movement, birthed to oppose/impeach the black president in White House, accuse him of being African, Muslim, Communist, etc.
- Local (state, community) efforts to embrace revised secular history and establish Christian (Judeo-Christian) fundamentalism as basis for governance (David Barton comes to Hot Springs to tutor new tea party government).
- USA’s tepid/hypocritical/confused response to “Arab Spring” (Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria) and continued overt favoritism towards Israel.

**Random milestones along my political/social “road to Damascus” conversion experience:**

## John Ragland: a short biography

John Ragland is a working curmudgeon with a cat-killing curiosity in politics, religion, history and other manifestations of irrational human behavior. He resides in Hot Springs, Arkansas, a semi-autonomous region of the United States (a waning political experiment on the third planet of a minor solar system in a remote corner of the Milky Way galaxy) with his wife, a mutt named Bernie, and other assorted wildlife.

Ragland is a son and grandson of Baptist missionaries and educators. He was born in Beirut, Lebanon, where his father was a school headmaster for more than 30 years (and before that, a B-17 navigator during the last months of WW2). He grew up in the Middle East during the turbulent 50s, 60s, and 70s, but left just before Lebanon's nightmare 15-year civil war began

in earnest. Most reputable historians do not associate the onset of that tragic conflict with his departure.

After attending college in Oklahoma and working for a large energy company now forever identified with the dark lord Dick Cheney, he moved his family to Hot Springs in 1994 (hard to believe it's been more than 20 years). While not laboring to keep his family fed and out of the rain, Ragland spends most of his time reading, following world affairs, blogging (at <http://levantium.com>) under a barely-disguised snotty French pseudonym, and staring at the sun. He works tirelessly for the OAFS (Obsessive Alliteration-Fondness Syndrome) Foundation, as both its only benefactor and sole beneficiary.

Ragland's political pilgrimage has

meandered across much of the left-right continuum. Once a staunch conservative (by all the standard litmus tests), he found himself suddenly adrift when the rest of the country lurched hard-right after 9-11. He is a frequent critic of our national love affair with wars, rampant nationalism in general, and the resurgent, xenophobic frenzy that masquerades as patriotism.

He once defined his religious confession as Zen Baptist, a burgeoning movement (of one) that is seeking to reclaim the mantle of Christian orthodoxy from fevered fundamentalists just itching for Armageddon. He is now an Episcopalian. Ragland may be reached by sending him questions telepathically, or by sending him money. He prefers the latter. ■

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

## Clarence Jordan: A Radical Pilgrimage in Scorn of the Consequences

by Frederick L. Downing (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2017, 307 pages)

Reviewed by Walter B. Shurden

Asked to be buried in an unmarked grave, Clarence Jordan's friends put him in a cedar crate in his work clothes and laid him in the red Georgia dirt he loved so dearly. Sadly for the rest of us, Jordan lived a short 57 years. He died, said his brother Frank, "of a broken heart." Later generations of Christians would extoll those Jordan years as "prophetic," "saintly," "courageous," and "radical." This life lived "in scorn of the consequences" has been waiting for this literary gift from Fred Downing. It is a comprehensive, engrossing, and challenging account of the life, ministry and thought of Clarence Jordan.

Born and reared in Talbot County, Georgia, soaked in Southern culture, and pickled in the Baptist faith, Jordan graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in agriculture. He entered the Christian ministry and before he finished theological studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary he had earned a Ph. D. in the Greek New Testament, a book he would later translate into Southern colloquial speech known as *The Cotton Patch Version of the New Testament*. (Every Southern Christian should own a copy.) At Southern, Edward A. McDowell, a New Testament professor, taught Jordan how to read and relate the teachings of Jesus to the surrounding culture. Good theological education matters. Jordan, in keeping with his Baptist tradition, became a magnetic, powerful preacher. His preaching not only

spread his fame, it helped fund his later visionary experience in Christian communal living.

By the time he had finished Southern, a radical gospel had seared Jordan's conscience with non-violence, racial equality, anti-materialism, passion for the poor, and the far-reaching idea that the church had become a slave to culture. With that explosive gospel, he and his wife, Florence, along with Martin and Mabel England, bought 400 acres of land in

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*Andrew Young echoed King: "When we first heard about Clarence Jordan and Koinonia," he said, "we considered it too radical, too dangerous."*

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Sumter County, near Americus, GA. Armed with an abundance of idealism and audacity, they built an interracial community on that dilapidated farm. They called it *Koinonia*. They found the word and the model for their community, of course, from the Book of Acts.

All of this was in 1942, more than a decade before the Civil Rights Movement and a dozen years before *Brown v. Board of Education*! MLK, Jr., called Jordan "my friend, my mentor, and my inspiration." Andrew Young echoed King: "When we first heard about Clarence Jordan and Koinonia," he said, "we considered it too radical, too dangerous." Young went on to say that he and King were trying to get people the right to ride on a bus or shop in the local stores,

"but here was Clarence—smack dab in the middle of Ku Klux Klan country—going for the whole loaf! Clarence put the rest of us to shame until we did something about it."

Predictably, this experience in interracial living in Southwest Georgia conjured tons of hostility. First it was intimidation, next rejection, then terrorization, and finally outright violence. Rehoboth Baptist Church excommunicated the Jordans. The business community of Americus boycotted *Koinonia*. A Grand Jury, the FBI and the GBI investigated them on the scurrilous charges that they were a communist front. And the KKK came in the night with bullets.

The bibliography and footnotes clearly indicate that Fred Downing, head of the department of philosophy and religious studies at Valdosta State University in Valdosta, GA, spent years researching the book. He utilizes sources never before mined for a study of Jordan, and he borrows a theoretical approach from Eric Erickson, James Fowler, Donald Capps, and Walter Brueggemann that adds uniqueness to his interpretation. Downing drills into Jordan's childhood, especially his relationship to his mother, to find a major source of his moral sensitivities. In that childhood, Downing finds a theme of "abandonment and community" that marked Jordan for life. In addition to this exploration of his growing-up years, Downing relates familiar Clarence Jordan stories that formed Jordan's life for the future: the impact of the night cries of the chain gang in the Talbot County jail behind his home; the refusal in his senior year of the ROTC commission at the University of Georgia; his spiritual awakening while ministering at the Haymarket in Louisville, KY; his excommuni-

cation from his Baptist people; his eventual partnership with Millard Fuller and the founding of Habitat for Humanity.

Downing contextualizes Jordan, comparing him in a surprising way with other leaders of his time. These leaders include George Wallace, W. A. Criswell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mohandas K. Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The author also has an extensive and intriguing chapter on *Koinonia Theology*—how Jordan read and interpreted the Bible. He selected the Sermon on the Mount as his biblical manifesto, unlimited love his theological theme.

Some popular interpretations of Jordan get stuck with the “early theological Jordan,” those first years at *Koinonia* before he was alienated from the surrounding community and the idealism dimmed. Downing depicts a dynamic Jordan who kept moving theologically, one who became more and more radical in his later years. He summarizes the legend and legacy of Clarence Jordan in two very helpful chapters. Jordan left us with *The Cotton Patch* translation of the New

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*Like a good sermon, this book evokes. My bet, if you take Jesus seriously, is that you will put it down several times to ponder your own life. It will make you wonder, if you are my age, what you would do if you had your entire life to live over again.*

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Testament, Habitat for Humanity, created with Millard Fuller, *Koinonia* Partners, and an exemplary life that continually shames religion in the South. One of those 10-talent people that we all envy, Jordan thought brilliantly, felt deeply, preached powerfully, wrote creatively, and lived bravely.

Like a good sermon, this book evokes. My bet, if you take Jesus seriously, is that you will put it down several times to ponder your own life. It will make you wonder, if you are my age, what you would do if you had your entire life to live over again.

You will tell others about it. You will scrutinize your spiritual commitments. Clarence Jordan, said Robert Parham, was a Southern Saint in denim britches. But Downing is clear that Jordan is more. Clarence Jordan is a “dangerous memory,” confronting and rebuking our racism, materialism and militarism. It takes courage to live well. Jordan lived well. The story of Clarence Jordan, Downing says, can be understood as “something like a ‘scream’ in a dark night while other of us have been asleep.”

I guess you could if you tried hard, but I don’t know how you could write a bad book about Clarence Jordan. This remarkable study of Jordan is Downing’s third in a trilogy of religious biographies. The other two focused on Martin Luther King, Jr., and Elie Wiesel. They won awards. I expect no less from *Clarence Jordan: A Radical Pilgrimage in Scorn of the Consequences*. ■

*Walter B. Shurden is Minister-at-Large at Mercer University in Macon, GA*

## **I Choose Love...**

*In the midst of pain, I choose love.*

*In the midst of pain, sorrow falling down like rain, I await the sun again, I choose love.*

*In the midst of war, I choose peace.*

*In the midst of war, hate and anger keeping score, I will seek the good once more, I choose peace.*

*When my world falls down, I will rise.*

*When my world falls down, explanations can't be found, I will climb to holy ground, I will rise.*

Written by Mark A. Miller in 2015 in response to the Charleston church shooting



# Glimpses of the Great

By James A. Langley

A cornucopia to us is given  
In music, deeds, and tales well told,  
By which with diligence our lives may fold  
True riches by the gifted who have greatly striven.

With soul fire and courage they countered the odds  
Undeterred by low counsel of a well-meaning friend,  
Or opposition regardless how it might descend,  
And seized the challenges as stirring prods.

Whether the past abides as weight or wings,  
Bringing loss or a gain to nature and man,  
Much depends through all on one's aim and *élan*,  
From the source imbibing whence all good springs.

Man's full measure, the moods we shun or hold dear,  
From ways of commoners to kings, dazzlingly discern,  
The ages his wit and wisdom confirm,  
And hail with wonder the mastery of Shakespeare.

A genius from youth in math and science,  
Pascal's brilliant *pensées*, his compassion for the poor,  
His passion for truth, and exemplar of the pure,  
Make him a true guide for the ultimate, with prescience.

What insights Tolstoy reveals of life and death!  
Quest unceasing for a healing means in a hidden lair,  
Madame Curie yielded not to danger or despair;  
And Lincoln inspires to our last breath.

Thrice trapped by darkness in a hopeless world,  
Anne Sullivan enabled her to break free from the dark,  
"The greatest woman since Joan of Arc,"  
Judged Clemens of Helen Keller, who made a shining world.

The only da Vinci painting in America depicts its due,  
*Ginevra's* reverse side a Leonardo still life,

While she portrays the genius's rife  
Solomonic gift of beauty through virtue.

In Wilberforce's small, sickly frame a great heart beat  
To rid the world of the scourge of trade  
In slaves; the power of Parliament he made  
To serve this noble end in a towering feat.

Vivaldi forgotten! Blessed rediscovery!  
J.S. Bach, moved profoundly by the master,  
Composing in his style, making our wealth the  
vaster, Reviving his  
driving rhythm and rhapsodic melody.

The courage of Niemoeller to stand  
Against Hitler will forever shine and inspire,  
Resistance where oppressors conspire,  
The action which justice and freedom demand.

Convinced that much disease is microbe borne, he  
persevered;  
Pasteur was scorned, and attacked with derision,  
Creating vaccines, he was threatened with prison,  
Even death, but through cures he became revered.

Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance* is a fount  
Of wisdom as she holds the balance before  
A painting of *The Last Judgment* to underscore  
Weighing this life for the ultimate account.

Soul-stirred by suffering on an epic scale,  
Clara Barton plunged into the maelstrom  
Of civil war, cherished for aid and comfort from  
The Union Army's Nightingale.

Continuously in the cross-hairs of fervid racists,  
Martin Luther King, Jr. courageously persevered  
Non-violently in his rights dream until martyred,  
Seminally advancing the liberation of all races.

When law is perverted by beliefs bizarre,  
A bishop's compassion transforms a Jean Valjean,  
As Victor Hugo vivifies the tragic yet hopeful scene,  
Never has the light from candlesticks shone so far!

Emily Dickinson, unrecognized in her time,  
Breaking old forms, and many things defining,  
Widely held as a paragon of poetic opining,  
Her bravura compelling, she set a new clime.

With rare and clear vision he saw the hell  
Of war and carnage fueled by his creation,  
From which wealth he now advances every nation  
Through coveted awards bearing his name Nobel.

Marked by compassion and courage of the highest order,  
Raoul Wallenberg, a wealthy Swedish diplomat,  
Saved thousands of Hungarian Jews; after the *apparat*  
Of the Soviets arrested him, he vanished beyond the border.

Malala Yousafzai, youthful icon of courage,  
Shot at eleven because she attended school,  
Seeks feminine education worldwide as the rule,  
Bravely undermining anti-feminist rage.

In beauty gloriously exalting the great price pearl,  
Handel's *Messiah*, with sacred texts, is as near perfection,  
Drawing believers and seekers to the Savior's reception,  
As only the highest music may offer in this world.

Out of poverty, growing deafness, his mother's death  
And father's drunkenness, the music of Beethoven,  
Profound in depth and range, titanicly driven,  
Enrapturing, conveys the aura of divine breath.

With the world in peril, Churchill rose to the fore,  
Defeatism, surrender, not in his lexicon,

His language eloquent and riveting to the host he won,  
As Britain stood alone, he gave the lion's roar.

Enduring more than a quarter century  
In a harsh prison, Nelson Mandela would mold  
His nation, and far beyond, for ages to behold,  
Toward justice, with magnanimity.

Defying stupendous odds, Wilbur and Orville Wright  
Doggedly persist, with extraordinary skill  
Mastering wing design, proved at Kill Devil Hill,  
At high risk, becoming the first in powered flight.

From early attic experiments, Marconi would astound,  
Using advances in electro-magnetism to explore  
New ventures, he successfully connected ships to shore,  
Then the race by wireless and radio, with world renown.

Relativity theories by the genius Einstein,  
His probes of light, famed energy equation,  
Unified field insight, and space-time relation,  
Ushered in the atomic age, for good or evil design.

Brilliant line of pathbreakers, of dreamer and achiever mind,  
Forerunners for Neil Armstrong and crew of Apollo Eleven  
In their epic landing on the moon, forever graven  
In heroic history as 'one giant leap for mankind'.

Late coming to faith, C. S. Lewis, a Medieval  
And Renaissance authority, by joy surprised,  
Presenting the faith profoundly, winsomely disguised;  
Christianity he merely shows without a rival. ■

## Many thanks to all of our readers who contributed to *Christian Ethics Today* in 2017\*

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# Christian Ethics Today

## A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

### MISSION

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

### PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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