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MAGA versus WWJD

By Patrick Anderson, editor

William Glasser, the late American psychiatrist who developed a technique for individual counseling called “Reality Therapy,” maintained that counselors should never ask their patients “why” they engaged in the behaviors that were problematic to them. Rather, he insisted, that focus should be relentlessly placed on the behavior itself. He said that when counselors become fixated on causes for the behavior, believing that the identification of the “why” of behavior would lead to understanding the behavior and therefore possible solutions, they push their clients to grasp for any explanation, no matter how farfetched, to satisfy the therapist’s hunger for an answer to the “why.” Glasser viewed that as a great waste of time.

I think of Glasser’s theory when considering the MAGA phenomenon, something that consumes a great deal of my energy. I wonder why in the world the great majority of Republicans who claim to be Christians, believe that Donald Trump is the savior of America, God’s chosen one to fulfill God’s plan for America. The behaviors resulting from that belief include voting for Trump regardless of what he says or does, or what he believes or does not believe.

A great many articles and books written by very insightful and knowledgeable people have sought to answer the “why” question. Two examples are Heather Cox Richardson’s *Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America* and Timothy Alberta’s *The Kingdom, The Power, and The Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism*.

Many writers make comparisons between Trump’s MAGA and the rise of Adolph Hitler’s Naziism in Germany. Historians have long explored the answer to the question, “Why/how did a strong democracy like Germany, with such a strong economy and educated population, fall for the lunacy of Hitler? How did they become virtual zombies in following that despotic madman?” Alberta’s book directly addresses the support Hitler received from a huge swath of Christianity in 20th century Germany, and how a similar swath follows Trump in 21st century America.

Like most of us, I know lots of MAGA Christians—in my family, in my church, everywhere. My efforts to understand “why” they honor Trump have been futile.

Attempts at rational conversation have been frustrating.

Perhaps the approach of Glasser holds a glimmer of hope for us. Let’s stop trying to figure out the “why” and focus instead on the behaviors. Asking “What would Jesus do?” (WWJD) is the only antidote to MAGA that I know of. I can think of no other comparison so diametrically disjointed than MAGA vs. WWJD.

In addition to Glasser, I have recently contemplated the quote, most often cited as Hanlon’s Razor: *Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity*. I really do not attribute malice to the motivations of my MAGA family and fellow churchgoers. And I know that the term “stupidity” sounds

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harsh and offensive. I have tried very hard to be open-minded to opposing viewpoints—a philosophy that has become increasingly difficult to maintain. In my mind, Hanlon’s mutually exclusive causes, malice or stupidity, gain strength. What else can it be?

New York Times columnist, David French, concluded his February 4th essay about MAGAworld’s fixation with Taylor Swift’s support for President Joseph Biden this way:

“This era of American politics will end, one way or the other. And when it does, historians are likely to debate whether its defining characteristic was stupidity or malice. I’ve gone back and forth in my mind, but I now realize that the two traits have almost fully merged. *Malice is creating stupidity, and stupidity is creating malice* (emphasis mine).”

Selah. ■

In Defense of Red Letter Christianity

by Tony Campolo

Editor's Note: Tony Campolo is one of the most influential Christians in the world. He joined the Board of Directors of Christian Ethics Today very early in the journal's existence and has been a valued advisor, advocate, contributor, and friend for more than 30 years. We honor him by occasionally re-publishing the articles he wrote especially for Christian Ethics Today. His insights are timeless. Tony is no longer active in his speaking and writing ministry due to unwanted infirmity, but he still speaks to us through his writings. His sermons have reached millions of people; many of his most famous sermons can be found online at tonycampolo.org.

Words, say experts on language, gain their meaning by how they are used within the social context that employs them. As a case in point, many theologically orthodox Christians during the first half of the 20th century had no problem using the label “fundamentalist” to define themselves. That label, however, gradually became associated with connotations which many found undesirable.

Following the famous 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee, which made rejecting Darwin's theory of evolution a defining commitment in most fundamentalist circles, those who had used the label, were viewed as anti-scientific, and even anti-intellectual.

As time went on, fundamentalists increasingly came to be viewed as Christians who embraced a pietistic lifestyle marked by strong opposition to using any kind of alcoholic beverage, dancing and, in extreme cases, going to the movies, and even the use of “make-up” by women.

More important, among fundamentalists, there was widespread affirmation of the theology of John Nelson Darby, commonly referred to as dispensationalism. This theology was popularized via the Scofield Reference Bible, which had footnotes that explained Bible verses in accord with Darby's beliefs, and became a standard text for fundamentalists. Growing up, I remember singing, along with my fundamentalist teenage friends:

*My hope is built on nothing less
than Scofield notes and
Scripture Press.*

The impact of the Scofield Reference Bible in molding the fundamentalist mindset cannot be underestimated. It is a theology that has diminished the importance of social justice activism among church people.

Finally, it must be noted that fundamentalists somewhat have gained the reputation in the opinion of many as being judgmental and, in some cases harshly

so, of anyone who differed with either their prescribed theology or designated lifestyle.

Given these realities, it is not surprising that many Christians no longer wanted to assume the label “fundamentalist” for themselves. Instead, many prominent Christian leaders, such as Billy Graham and Carl Henry (the editor of *Christianity Today* magazine) increasingly identified themselves as “evangelicals.”

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red letters to love our enemies, He
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them. And when He called for radical
sacrificial giving to the poor, as He did
in Mark 10, we believe that Jesus was
serious.*

Sadly, as of late, this new title gradually has taken on negative connotations in the secular media. As evangelicals increasingly came to be identified on television and in newspapers as being Christians who are against gays and lesbians, questioning much about the movement for women's rights, against non-Anglo immigrants and being anti-Muslim, the label “evangelical” became increasingly problematic for many Christians. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the rhetoric during the political campaigns of 2016.

A few years ago, Jim Wallis of *Sojourners* magazine called together a group of mostly young Christian leaders who faced the question as to whether the name “evangelical” had lost its meaning for us. We were still Christians who believed in the doctrines of the Apostle's Creed, declared that salvation comes via surrendering to the spiritual presence of the resurrected Christ, and held a belief that scripture was written by

persons who were inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit.

As we pondered together what to call ourselves, we came up with the name “Red Letter Christians.” It was our belief that the name was relevant for our times, primarily because the red letters of the Bible, which emphasize the words spoken by Jesus, spell out a radical counter-cultural lifestyle which orthodox believers are often prone to ignore. For instance, many of us believe that when Jesus said *“blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,”* that precluded the practice of capital punishment and, when Jesus taught us in those red letters to love our enemies, He probably meant we shouldn’t kill them. And when He called for radical sacrificial giving to the poor, as He did in Mark 10, we believe that Jesus was serious.

We think that what Jesus spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount is superior to any ethic we find in the Old Testament. We say this because Jesus declares it to be so, especially in Matthew 5. What he has to say in that chapter about such things as divorce, retaliation toward those who have hurt us, and anger, proves to be a higher standard for us to live by than even what the Hebrew prophets had to say.

There are those who try to discredit our movement by suggesting that we negate those other parts of the Bible apart from the red letters. Nothing could be further from the truth. We believe that the rest of the Bible points to Jesus and, like the early church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we find the nature and mission of Jesus spelled out throughout the entire Hebrew Bible. Beyond that, we believe that the rest of the Bible can be understood only insofar as it is read through the eyes of the Jesus revealed in the red letters.

Red Letter Christians have very few problems with the theology of evangelicals. Our problems are with the identity they have established and the politics they have embraced and, in some cases, even sanctified. We argue that Jesus is neither a Republican nor a Democrat and to cast Him as the legitimator of any political ideology is idolatry.

Given the existential situation that we face here in America, we believe that the label “Red Letter Christians” (www.redletterchristians.org) is a label whose time has come. ■

Tony Campolo is an American Baptist, sociologist, pastor, author, public speaker and former spiritual advisor to U.S. President Bill Clinton. Known primarily for his work with Red Letter Christians, and the Campolo Centre as well as authoring over 40 books including: “Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?” and “Following Jesus Without Embarrassing God.” He is an emeritus member of the Board of Christian Ethics Today.

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Bill Moyers has contributed to *Christian Ethics Today* since its inception, both through his writings and financial support. He once said:

*“Look upon these pages as you would a campfire,
around which we gather to share our life experiences—the stories,
ideals, and hopes unique to our understanding of faith.
Then imagine what we lose if the fire goes out.” ...*

The Poor You'll Always Have with You?

By K. Jason Coker

Ifight persistent rural poverty in the United States. An important part of this work is mobilizing religious organizations to participate. One response I hear repeatedly in Christian churches is a quote from Jesus: “You will always have the poor with you.” At a recent meeting I met a parishioner who bluntly remarked: “What you are trying to do is impossible.”

The impossibility, for him, was rooted in those familiar words, “You will always have the poor with you.” After hearing the same refrain for the past seven years, I decided to use my Ph.D. in New Testament and Early Christianity and do some exegesis.

Using “the poor you will always have with you” as a justification for doing nothing is the worst kind of poverty—it is poverty of the soul.

The Jesus quote regarding “the poor” is in three Gospels: Mark 14:1-11, Matthew 26:1-16, and John 12:1-8. Anyone who has taken a New Testament introduction course would immediately realize how odd this is. Most stories like this are in the Synoptic Gospels—Mark, Matthew, and Luke—but missing in John.

So why doesn't this appear in Luke? Like Matthew, Luke has a copy of Mark in front of him as he writes his Gospel, but he does not include the piece about “the poor.” Evidently, the idea that “the poor you will always have with you” doesn't fit well with Luke's divine reversal, where the “first shall be last and the last shall be first,” nor does it fit well with Luke's overall focus on helping the most vulnerable: “Blessed are the poor ... blessed are those who hunger and thirst ...” Simply put, Luke rejects this story—or at least this quote from this story—from his Gospel for decisive theological reasons.

Pious Hypocrisy

Meanwhile, Matthew takes liberty with the story and changes the audience from Mark's “some of those present” (Mark 14:4) to “the disciples” (Matthew 26:9). John, whether using oral tradition or a literary relationship with Mark and/or Matthew, changes the setting entirely and puts this in Lazarus' house, which includes Mary and Martha. In John, it is neither “those present” nor “the disciples” in general who raise the issue, but Judas Iscariot himself (John 12:5).

Where all three Gospels agree is the general setting

in Bethany which includes the story of the woman pouring expensive, perfumed oil on Jesus, the objection to this extravagant gesture; and a rebuke from Jesus to those who object.

It is in Jesus' rebuke that he says, “the poor you will always have with you” (Mark 14:7, Matthew 26:11, John 12:8). What is clear in every version is that Jesus' response is not the main issue in the story. This story is about anointing Jesus, an action that prefigures his death. Jesus' response that “the poor you will always have with you” is really a critique of those who criticized the woman who gave the extraordinary gift. Jesus is saying that the woman's detractors actually don't care about the poor anyway. In fact, according to John's account, Judas steals money from their com-

Of all the things Jesus said about poverty in the New Testament, why is this passage the only one I hear in Christian churches as a rebuttal to the necessity of my work in rural poverty in the U.S.?

mon fund and then betrays Jesus for a tenth of the cost of the perfumed oil. What Jesus is pointing out is the absurdity of the woman's critics—those present/ the disciples/Judas—who are making a pious show of wanting to sell the perfumed oil and give the proceeds to the poor. It was not a commentary on poverty in general.

Taken together, this story where it occurs in three of the canonical Gospels has nothing to do with “the poor.” Jesus' response was only highlighting the hypocrisy of those who criticized the woman's extravagant gift. They were the problem, not the poor. This whole scene, which is rightly entitled “the Anointing at Bethany” by most modern scholars, is not a story about poverty and not an instruction about how to construct our views about poverty. It certainly shouldn't be the one verse that is trotted out in contemporary society to show the inevitability of poverty. Of all the things Jesus said about poverty in the New Testament,

why is this passage the only one I hear in Christian churches as a rebuttal to the necessity of my work in rural poverty in the U.S.?

Impoverished U.S. counties number 338

Persistent rural poverty is defined as 20 percent of a rural county's population living below the Federal Poverty Line for the past 30 consecutive years or more. That is deep, generational poverty. There are 338 counties of persistent rural poverty in the U.S. (out of a total of 3,144 counties). These poor counties are clustered in large regions—in Appalachia, the Delta region, the Black Belt region, Tribal Nations, the Four Corners region, and throughout Texas. Rural poverty exists primarily where some large industry has abandoned labor through federal policy, like the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA), and through mechanization and/or automation of labor. Specifically in Tribal Nations, persistent rural poverty is the long result of genocide and forced migration. In the Delta and the Black Belt, so much of persistent rural poverty goes all the way back to enslavement. These are the areas our nonprofit, Together for Hope (TFH), is serving.

Persistent rural poverty is a dire consequence of the original sins of the U.S.—genocide and forced migration of indigenous populations and chattel slavery. These crimes against humanity are rooted in extractive economics with no sense of morality or ethics. Rural poverty is the design and result of an extractive economy that still functions in the modern U.S. Economic inequality in America is greater now than it has been since slavery was abolished. Poverty in the U.S. is not the result of individual poor decisions or individual immorality—how the U.S. continues to blame poverty on those who experience poverty. The narrative that anyone can make it in America if they simply work hard is not true today—and hasn't been true for many citizens, ever.

Poor Excuses

My grandparents worked in the cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta most of their lives. They worked harder than just about anyone I've ever known. My grandfather died at 67-years-old from lung cancer and my grandmother died at 74 from lung disease. They died with nothing. My parents worked in factories in the Mississippi Delta most of their adult lives; Mother worked clerical jobs in healthcare systems later in her working life. My father died at 65 of complications due to diabetes. His lifelong labor resulted in very little. I know from lived experience that many people in the U.S. work devastatingly hard—they work themselves to death—and they die poor.

I believe we can do better than this as a country. I believe we can do better than this as Christians. If our Christianity, or any religion, doesn't compel us to care for the most vulnerable in our society, then our Christianity is worthless—it is dead. We will certainly always have the poor with us if we do nothing about it. We will certainly always have the poor with us if we don't demand better economic policy. We will certainly always have the poor with us if we support an economic system that exploits the masses in order to care for the hyper-wealthy. The Jesus that I encounter in the New Testament isn't someone who would accept the economic status quo that so many "Christians" have built and maintained throughout the history of the U.S.

After Fatalism

Together for Hope finds and connects the good people in rural America who have committed their lives to making things better. We engage existing nonprofits and help connect them with many other good people doing good work across the country with a focus on asset-based community development, which matches

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existing local assets and competencies with the needs of the larger community or region. These coalitions share best practices across geographies of persistent rural poverty, and are transforming rural America. Focusing on our priorities of hope—education, health and nutrition, housing and environment, and social enterprise—we help create new local businesses, advocate for legislative change, and seek to get to the root of hunger, inadequate housing, lack of education and healthcare, refusing to accept the fatalistic notion that debilitating poverty must persist.

Strategically, most of our TFH partners run intervention programs like summer food programs, after-school tutoring programs, and swim camps. Our social enterprise partners are alleviating poverty through business innovation. A great example is a new brand

of sauces called Appalachian Gold developed by Jason Tartt, Sr., in McDowell County, West Virginia. Tartt's story of his family's meat sauce was featured recently on CNN's United Shades of America and also on PBS.

Basic Decency

While local interventions and entrepreneurship are vital to immediate relief and transformation, we know that long-term solutions to poverty will happen at a policy level. To this end, we have run successful efforts for SNAP incentive programs in Mississippi and campaigned for public education improvements in Florida. We are currently partnering with other national organizations to run campaigns in Mississippi, Alabama and South Carolina to expand Medicaid. If successful, nearly a million more people will have access to affordable healthcare.

"The poor you will always have with you" is a terrible and lazy excuse to do nothing. It takes Jesus' remarks out of context and upends everything that is Good News for the poor. Jesus said a lot of things in the New Testament, but one teaching endures as a crucial lens through which everything else is filtered: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This isn't unique to Jesus or Christianity. In fact, the best in all religions, and the best in no religion, always pulls humanity closer together. This inclusion impulse, this conviction that we are all caught up in the bond of human mutual-

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ity, helps us all—especially the most vulnerable. Using "the poor you will always have with you" as a justification for doing nothing is the worst kind of poverty—it is the poverty of the soul. ■

*The Rev. Dr. K. Jason Coker, '01 M.A.R. is the president of Together for Hope, a rural development coalition. After nearly two decades of life and ministry in Connecticut, Coker returned to his home state of Mississippi to work in rural areas around peace, justice and the alleviation of poverty. He earned a Ph.D. from Drew University and is the author of *James in Postcolonial Perspective: The Letter as Nativist Discourse* (Fortress Press, 2015) and *Faded Flowers: Preaching in the Aftermath of Suicide* (Smyth & Helwys, 2020). This article first appeared in *Reflections*, the magazine of Yale University Divinity School and is reprinted here with permission.*

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The Problems with Hamas, Gaza, Israel (and America?)

By David Jordan

The Hamas Problem: *Hamas is a terrorist organization.* The tragedy of October 7th with 1200 murders of mostly women, children and innocent Israeli civilians, the atrocities committed, the ongoing terror of the remaining hostages along with continued rocket attacks make clear: *Hamas is not a “resistance movement.”* This is a terror group.

Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people. Though democratically elected as a ruling coalition with Fatah in 2006, Hamas systematically disregarded democratic norms, terrorized their opponents, increasingly took control of Gaza institutions, and now control Palestinian lives through the terrorizing of their own people in Gaza.

Yes, they have followers. But the vast majority of Palestinians in Gaza have no choice, no say, no vote, and depressingly few options except to live with the reality of this entrenched, authoritarian terrorist network. Hamas does not represent the best interests of the Palestinian people. In fact, Hamas has terrorized, tortured and murdered more Palestinian people than they have Israelis.

The Gaza Problem: With a long, complex history, this once-lovely area stretches along a picturesque coastal road and borders the Mediterranean Sea. Gaza City and the larger area known as the Gaza Strip, have been controlled by various outside forces in its complicated backstory with these as most of their ruling chronology: Egyptian, Canaanite, Philistine, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Hasmonean, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, British, Egyptian, Israeli, PNA, Hamas.

Twice the size of Washington, D.C., 25 miles long and seven miles wide, or 141 square miles, its population of 2.2 million people makes it one of the most densely populated areas in the world.

Water Sources: Water for this enormous influx of Palestinian refugees, has been a significant problem for years. In 1950, the population was just under 65,000. Now, with 2.2 million, the population remains captive to outside sources of fresh water. Prior to the current war, they were able to derive 10% of their water from desalination plants. However, such plants require excessive and now unavailable energy sources from Egypt and Israel.

They had also previously purchased some fresh water from the Israeli national water company,

Mekorot. The remaining 70-90% came from ground-water wells tapped into the Coastal Aquifer. With untenable demands given the rapidly expanded population, this problematic water supply has consistently been over-extracted, salty, brackish and largely unfit for human consumption.

Now, with the tragic war in Gaza, Israel appears to be injecting sea water into the intricate web of Hamas tunnels running under the entire area. While clever as a military maneuver and much safer for Israeli soldiers, this tunnel flooding strategy will be an environmental disaster for the safety of the ground water. Experts worry that the already-exceedingly fragile aquifers will lose all future viability once forcibly exposed to millions of gallons of sea water. Given the water issues

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alone, one can imagine the resentment, anger and ongoing stress this lack of fresh, drinkable water generates and will generate among regular people.

But water is only a small portion of the ongoing difficulties the people of Gaza have experienced prior to the current horrors of this war. Gaza is considered the most isolated population in the world. Due to Israel's ongoing obstructions since Hamas took power in 2007, the people of Gaza have:

- No airport
- No seaport
- No passport
- No formal citizenship.
- Seventy percent of Gaza's people are refugees or the family of refugees since the 1948 Israeli war for Independence of the 1967 Six Day War.

The Realities for the People of Gaza: They can't travel; they have limited sewage treatment capabilities; they have diminishing fresh water and no real power generation capabilities. For the densely packed popula-

tion inhabiting this fragile ecosystem in limited space, it should be no surprise that resentments run deep. Particularly given this reality, the vast majority (70 %) of the current residents of Gaza are refugees forcibly displaced from Palestinian villages after Israeli independence in 1948 and the Six Day War in 1967.

What began as a new life for the Jewish people with the establishment of Israel in 1948, resulted in a catastrophe for the Palestinian people. Split between the West Bank and Gaza, both geographic areas suddenly became overwhelmed with gathered outcasts from homes and villages across what had been Palestine of the British Mandate (from 1918-1947 and before that, part of the Ottoman Empire for 500 years).

The Israel Problem

In May, 1939, Albert Einstein addressed a radio broadcast to the Jewish National Workers' Alliance. He said the following:

There could be no greater calamity than a permanent discord between us and the Arab people. Despite the great wrong that has been done us, we must strive for a just and lasting compromise with the Arab people.

In face of the common foe that confronts us both, this goal must be accessible. Let us recall that in former times no people lived in greater friendship with us than the ancestors of these same Arabs.

- **Albert Einstein** to the National Worker's Alliance, May 29, 1939

As a pacifist, Einstein expressed an intense desire for Jewish people to have a homeland where they could at last be safe. For too long, Jews in Europe had suffered enormous pain and indescribable indignities. The previous quote, it should be noted, was spoken before the horrors of the Holocaust. But Einstein remained a pacifist and continued to call for a Jewish homeland without an army that would be devoted to living in peace and prosperity with the residents of the land, the Palestinian Arabs of Palestine.

His quote further undercuts the popular myth that the current crisis and ongoing tension between Israel and the Palestinians is an ancient conflict. In fact, as Einstein pointed out, this is not true. While Europe and Russia, Poland and even America were discriminating and actively persecuting Jewish people, much of the Arab world was friendly, accommodating and welcoming. Therefore, something else had been emerging.

The Israel Problem: Israel itself poses significant complexities. Religious, political, ethical and geographical overtones play into every aspect of this intensely emotional issue of the land where Jesus lived. Arabs and Jews, Christians and Muslims, Israelis

and Americans and the international community see this beautiful, deeply spiritual and badly-divided part of the world through starkly different lenses.

Here are a few reasons:

The founding of Israel in 1948 was declared without asking the people who lived there. Called Palestinians, these were Arab men, women and families whose homes, villages, towns and cities had been handed down generation to generation over the centuries. Just emerging from forced rule by the Ottoman Empire following World War I and the British following World War II, the area of Palestine was filled with people of Arab descent who had been promised democracy and self-rule by the British through Lawrence of Arabia, among others; the British also made similar promises to Jewish representatives in London in a document entitled "The Balfour Declaration."

Many Jews lived among the Palestinians, but they were nowhere close to a majority. So, the natural question quickly arose and echoes mightily still: How could a minority of Jewish immigrants suddenly force the majority Palestinians to obey new rules, to forfeit

How could a minority of Jewish immigrants suddenly force the majority Palestinians to obey new rules, to forfeit self-rule and to remain quiet while losing much of what should have remained theirs? But it happened.

self-rule and to remain quiet while losing much of what should have remained theirs? But it happened.

Following the Holocaust and the horrors of World War II, the United Nations developed a partition plan to divide the land of Palestine into separate areas, one governed by a new state of Jewish people, the other to be run by Palestinians. The problem with this plan, though it appeared acceptable to many, was that no one had bothered to ask the Palestinians. Three million people would lose ancestral homes and land generations had loved and nurtured.

I once asked for a show of hands in a class I was teaching: "Think of your home and family. Who of you would agree to move away from all that you knew – your house, your neighbors, your work, your church – to go to another state where you would have to start all over again?" In the class of 30, none would agree to such a plan.

So, who could blame the Palestinians who suddenly found themselves living in a land that was no longer

theirs? They refused to comply with the demands of an outside group unconnected to and apparently unconcerned with what Palestinians would sacrifice. Yet resistance to this new normal placed them under immediate attack against a foe well-armed with the heavy guns and ammunition left over from the British occupation.

The founding of Israel displaced three million Palestinians. Many of the Arab inhabitants, both Christian and Muslim Palestinians, quickly fled, often with only what they could carry. They, like any of us, expected to be able to return to their homes once everything was safe and some kind of peace was negotiated. But there was no negotiation. Families, young and old, men, women and children ended up in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Forcibly pushed from what had been ancestral homes, they began a tenuous existence as second-class citizens, unable to have passports and with no access to citizenship. They remained refugees with no way of returning to the homes they or their ancestors had built with their own hands.

Today, in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, some refer to these areas as the largest refugee camps in the world. Though in the West Bank some creative development emerged within the sadness, the difficulty of coping with an ongoing refugee crisis continues. For the most part, the world has paid little attention, except for the Americans who insist upon supporting Israel no matter what that country's leaders do or say.

The Israelis who conquered the land continue to control the lives and destinies of over three million people in the West Bank, and 2.2 million people in Gaza. And though Gaza, before this current war, was not technically ruled by Israel, it was surrounded and periodically blockaded by Israel on three sides, and in the south, by Egypt. This little strip of land on the Mediterranean Sea is allowed no seaport, no airport and no free access to any other country in the world. The Palestinians who live there have been captive to Israeli policy and political whims. Gaza, therefore, is also considered as one of the most isolated societies anywhere on earth.

The West Bank, on the other hand, is occupied by Israel. That is why it is sometimes referred to as "occupied territory." Not only surrounded by Israeli forces, the West Bank is a variegated matrix of military roads, checkpoints, walls and barbed wire. Palestinian families attempting to visit one another or initiating any effort at viable economic activity from town to town or village to village face a logistical nightmare. The Israelis also oversee all water sources in the West Bank. The Israeli national water carrier, *Mekorot*, has

been given full control of all subterranean waters of the West Bank by the Israeli military. And as any military strategist knows, controlling water equals control of the population. Therefore, Israeli leverage over the three million Palestinians who live in the West Bank remains shockingly complete.

East Jerusalem has long been a vibrant Arab cultural center and historic home of Palestinian identity and community pride. Since the Six Day War of 1967, Israeli policies increasingly tightened control of the Palestinians of East Jerusalem. Jewish settlements, often subsidized by American monies pouring in yearly in the billions of dollars, continue to be established on confiscated Arab land. The resulting increase in Jewish population and displacement of Palestinian homes and residents multiplies resentment, anger, hopelessness and a sense of powerlessness. Some Israelis argue such policies are necessary to prevent Palestinian terror. However, others contend these strategies promote angry, sometimes violent and often tragic responses.

The same strategy of displacement and disempow-

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erment, along with the strict control of water, roads and military checkpoints, continues to be used in the broader West Bank.

And there are further problems.

Jewish settlements are illegal. The United States, the United Nations and international law each declare that land "won" in war cannot be colonized, ethnically cleansed or in any other way controlled by the conquering power. Refugees from the war are to be allowed to return to their homes, and the land is to be restored to the rightful owner once peace returns. However, such has never been the case with Israel.

Over the last 30 years, Israeli policy has increasingly relied upon "Jewish settlements," land confiscated from Arab Palestinians and turned over to Israeli developers for the "in-fill" of Jewish settlers (or colo-

nists) to inhabit this formerly Arab land. Every country but the United States understands this continued policy of Jewish settlements is against international law.

No Constitution: Governing national principles could also offer a guide. However: *Israel has never ratified a constitution*. Virtually every civilized country utilizes a nationally agreed upon constitution which should state clear requisites for just treatment of citizens and for the responsibilities of the governing power. For Israel, a constitution would force Israelis to either offer Palestinians within Israel equal rights, or to be on record for failing to do so. They would also be forced to resolve all the dangling inequities and tragic consequences of occupying the land of three million people in the West Bank. In the Israeli Parliament, the ruling Likud party's central committee unanimously endorsed a resolution that calls for the annexation of all Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

American Approval: U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the official capital of Israel in 2017 further created a clear "pro-Israel" climate. Those in Israel who want Palestinians to give up and to go away perceived they had the support they believe they need. Ethnic cleansing of the troublesome people who have lived in the land for centuries has been the goal for many in the Likud party since this political party's founding in 1973. (For helpful perspectives on this difficult topic, see Gary Burge's *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* and Ron David's *Arabs and Israel for Beginners*.)

Most of these tragic activities perpetrated by Israel toward Palestinians – although broadly condemned in the international community – have occurred with tacit American approval. In spite of rhetoric and some policies promoting human rights and democracy around the world, America's voice largely goes silent in the face of Israeli abuses. Why?

The American Problem:

Emotions run high around anything related to what many evangelical Christians would classify as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Whether about Israel, the Second Coming and the "End-Times" or what to do about the Palestinians in and around the modern country of Israel, these topics unleash a wave of highly charged opinions in certain Christian circles. Generally premised upon fascinating but often wildly unfair and inaccurate interpretations of scripture, they encourage an unabashedly pro-Israel stance and a passionate defense of land seizures.

American evangelicals (John Hagee in Texas is one popular example) also tend to use the terms "Judea and Samaria" in their sermons about end times and

biblical prophecy. These former biblical designations also happen to roughly align geographically with the Palestinian "West Bank" that Israel continues to occupy (and colonize through Jewish settlements).

The logic seems to anticipate (and hope for) the re-establishment of the Solomonic boundaries that correspond to and even exceed these current Palestinian areas. Interestingly, what many of these evangelical preachers espouse relates to a real estate transaction Jesus never mentioned and appeared to have no interest in. This evangelical voting block holds increasing power in political circles.

American Help: Americans – and America's religious leaders and faith communities – can and should condemn terrorism. We can and should call Hamas a terrorist organization. Together, we must continue to work against anything that smacks of anti-Semitism. But we need not be blindly pro-Israel any more than we should be anti-Palestinian.

We further must distinguish the clear difference between Hamas and the Palestinian people. We do

...America's voice is largely silent in the face of Israeli abuses. Why?

them and the world a mighty disservice in our failure to fully appreciate the Palestinian plight, and the sad realities of current Israeli policies.

Gaza and the Occupied West Bank will remain tense and tragic if American policy continues to turn a blind eye to Israeli abuses. Our U.S. silence and often outright support of Jewish seizure of Palestinian land blatantly disregard international law.

We can hope for, pray for and continue to advocate for a land where Jesus walked to be truly a land of peace. Better biblical interpretation, along with better-informed and more accurate lessons in history and politics, will help.

But simultaneously, and beyond the Gaza crisis, are these immediate necessities for us:

- Join the rest of the world and hold Israel accountable to international law
- Call upon Israel to develop a legitimate, clear and just constitution

Yes, it's complicated. Yes, it's hard. It's also vitally necessary. ■

Dr. David Jordan, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Decatur, GA

Anti-Zionism Is Not the Same as Antisemitism. Here's the History

By Benjamin Moser

In December 2023, amid catastrophic bloodshed in Gaza, the U.S. House of Representatives resolved that “anti-Zionism is antisemitism.” The vote was 311 to 14, with 92 members voting present, reflecting a consensus among American political elites that opposition to Zionism is equivalent to the conspiratorial hatred of Jews.

If the resolution itself had no immediate practical consequences, the consensus behind it did. The lopsided vote reflected the U.S. government’s absolute diplomatic, military and ideological support of Israel while that state, under the leadership of the most right-wing government in its history, was pursuing a campaign in response to the terrorist attack of Oct. 7 that has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians, including, in just a few weeks, at least 7,700 children.

When learning of this vote, many people familiar with Jewish history might have suppressed a sardonic laugh. Anti-Zionism, after all, was a creation of Jews, not their enemies. Before World War II, Zionism was the most divisive and heatedly debated issue in the Jewish world. Anti-Zionism had left-wing variants and right-wing variants — religious variants and secular variants — as well as variants in every country where Jews resided.

For anyone who knows this history, it is astonishing that, as the resolution would have it, opposition to Zionism has been equated with opposition to Judaism — and not only to Judaism, but to hatred of Jews themselves. But this conflation has nothing to do with history. Instead, it is political, and its purpose has been to discredit Israel’s opponents as racists.

Race has always been at the heart of the debate. Many anti-Zionists believed the Jews were, in their parlance, “a church.” This meant that, although they shared certain beliefs, traditions and affinities with co-religionists in other nations, they nonetheless belonged as fully to their own national communities as anyone else. For them, an American Jew was a Jewish American, just as an Episcopalian American or a Catholic American was an American first of all. They were unwilling to subscribe to any idea suggesting that the Jews were a race, separate and, as the anti-semites would have it, unassimilable. These people did

not consider themselves to be in exile, as the Zionists would have it. They considered themselves to be at home. They feared that the insistence on ethnicity or race could open them to the old accusations of double loyalty, undermining attempts to achieve equality.

In fact, anti-Zionist thinking predates Zionism. It emerges from the possibility that first appeared at the end of the 18th century. In 1790, in his famous letter to the Jews of Newport, R.I., George Washington declared that “all possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence

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of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens.”

Only a few years later, Napoleon offered the Jews of France the possibility of full citizenship in a secular state — and then brought this principle into the vast territories he conquered. The opening of the ghettos unleashed a burst of creativity. Jewish thinkers began to contend with an idea preserved in traditional prayers: that the Jews would return to Palestine, where, in their ancestral land, they would be ruled by a scion of the House of David, restore the sacrifices under the priesthood of the descendants of Aaron and worship in a rebuilt Temple.

Many modernizing thinkers rejected this, and many other ritual formulas, as antiquated and fanciful.

Rather than awaiting a personal messiah — one who would bring about the bodily resurrection of the dead — they hoped instead for a messianic age of peace and brotherhood. This was not conditioned on the mystical hope of a return to Zion. Instead, Jews should work in the here and now of the real world. Along with this idea came the precept that the Jews are, in the words of one rabbi, “citizens and faithful sons of the lands of their birth or adoption. They are a religious community, not a nation.” Though considered radical at first, this precept would eventually be embraced by the majority of Western Jews.

This view would ultimately find its most enthusiastic adherence in the United States. “This country is our Palestine, this city our Jerusalem, this house of God our Temple,” said Rabbi Gustavus Poznanski of Charleston, S.C., in 1841. A century later, during the Holocaust and World War II, Rabbi Samuel Schulman of Temple Emanu-El in New York stated that “the essence of Reform Judaism for me is the rejection of Jewish Nationalism, not necessarily the eating of ham.” Many Jews noted that talk of a “diaspora,” even of a “Jewish people,” resembled the calumnies of antisemites, which held that the Jews were an unasimilable foreign imperium in imperio. They noticed, as they could hardly have failed to notice, that many antisemites were fervently pro-Zionist: the better to get rid of the Jews. After the Balfour Declaration of 1917, promising a Jewish homeland to the tiny minority of Jews then living in Palestine, Edwin Montagu, the only Jew in the British cabinet, observed: “The policy of His Majesty’s Government is anti-Semitic in result and will prove a rallying ground for anti-Semites in every country in the world.”

Only a catastrophe as overwhelming as the Nazi Holocaust could have papered over these divisions. No matter how the Jews thought of themselves, the Zionists argued, the Gentiles would never accept them. No matter how much they felt at home, no matter how much loyalty they expressed, no matter how many of them died defending their country, they would always, eventually, be persecuted. It didn’t matter whether they called themselves a people or a race or a church; it didn’t matter whether they thought of themselves as Germans or Romanians or Canadians. The outside world saw only Jews.

This calamitous reality proved that the Jews could rely only on themselves, that they needed their own land, their own army, their own state, which needed to exist in Palestine. The Holocaust seemed to prove the Zionist argument. For nearly all Jews, the rise of the state of Israel, only three years after the defeat of Hitler, seemed to be a miraculous resurrection. Israel’s

spectacular military victories over its apparently much more powerful enemies were a guarantee that the Jews would never again suffer what they had suffered. For many Jews throughout the world — even Jews who had never set foot in Israel — pride in Israel replaced a faith that many of them had lost. After the long night of exile — *galut* — brilliant dawn had come at last.

Yet beneath this apparent unanimity, Zionism remained controversial. It was controversial among certain strict religious communities that believed that only the Messiah could usher the Jews back into the Holy Land and rejected what they saw as the materialism and impiety of the Zionist settlers. It was controversial among socialists and communists, who rejected all forms of nationalism. But after the foundation of the state of Israel, the debate took a different turn. The heart of the objection was among those horrified by what Israel had meant for the native population of Palestine. For these people, the lesson of antisemitism was a rejection of all forms of racism, and especially of the kinds of atrocities that had been visited upon the

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Jews. They were dismayed that another people, one that bore no responsibility for the Nazi crimes, would be forced to pay for them. And their commitment to universalism brought them into conflict with the Jewish state. For decades, and particularly given the danger that Israel continued to face from its neighbors, their arguments were seldom heard and often ignored, and they themselves were described as “self-hating” or even “mentally ill.”

Even thinkers who continued to view the establishment of Israel as a mistake nevertheless hoped that the question could be resolved with a peaceful partition. The Oslo Accords pointed toward this possibility. But the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the direct consequence of those agreements, put paid to that assumption and brought to power a series of increasingly right-wing governments. Their policies rendered a future Palestinian state impossible.

As a result, anti-Zionism, rather than decreasing,

has increased. No other state in the world has seen its “right to exist” as frequently questioned. This lack of recognition has been a major, perhaps *the* major, preoccupation of Israeli diplomacy. It might sometimes be the result of the rejection of people who hate the Jews, but among Jews it is the rejection of the idea of Zionism. It is a rejection of the idea of ethnic nationalism. It is a rejection of the idea of citizenship tied to race. Israel, far more than any other country that defines itself as “Western” or “democratic,” is still based on these ideas. And because it has increasingly, and now officially, come to define itself as a *Jewish* state, its defenders have often described its opponents as antisemites. The problem with this description? Many of those who share these convictions are, and always have been, Jews.

“There is no debate,” said Jonathan Greenblatt, the chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League, in December. “Anti-Zionism is predicated on one concept, the denial of rights to one people.” To people who know nothing about one of the oldest and most persistent debates in Jewish history, this might sound plausible. Anyone who does can only admire the panache required in presenting such a deeply divisive question — one that, for two centuries, has gone to the

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very heart of the identity of the Jews — as unanimous. Never has the debate been louder than it is now. ■

Benjamin Moser is the author of “Sontag: Her Life and Work,” for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for biography. His latest book, “The Upside-Down World: Meetings With the Dutch Masters,” was published in October. Born in Houston, Texas he is a respected writer and translator; he resides in the Netherlands with his partner. This article first appeared in The Conversation on January 2, 2024 and is reprinted with permission.

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Why All Civilian Lives Matter

By Jessica Wolfendale

Some commentators have criticized Israel for causing what is claimed to be disproportionate harm to civilians in its military response to Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack.

Others have defended Israel's actions, claiming that such force – and the risk to civilians involved – is necessary to eliminate Hamas, which some Israelis believe poses an existential threat to Israel.

As of January 12, 2024, according to health officials in the Gaza Strip, more than 23,357 Palestinians had been killed (one % of the population of Gaza), the majority of whom were women and children.

But one of the arguments given by defenders of Israel's actions is that, tragic though these deaths are, the harm inflicted on civilians is proportionate because it is outweighed by the importance of destroying Hamas.

But what does “proportionate” mean in the context of civilian deaths? And how should we assess Israel's claims of proportionality against critics who argue that Israel's actions have caused disproportionate harm to civilians? As a scholar of war crimes and military ethics, I argue that to assess these claims requires careful thought about what it really means to value civilian lives. If all civilian lives are morally equal, as international law holds, then the lives of civilians on both sides of a conflict should be treated with the same degree of respect.

Why targeting civilians is wrong

International humanitarian law, or IHL, prohibits direct attacks on noncombatants – a category that includes civilians as well as wounded and surrendered soldiers. IHL also prohibits direct attacks on civilian objects such as schools, religious centers and hospitals and other civilian infrastructure.

However, because it is impossible to avoid all harm to civilians in a war zone, IHL permits attacks on military targets that are likely to cause harm to civilians if two conditions are met: First, the foreseeable harm to civilians must be proportionate to the military advantage sought by the attack. And second, the choice of tactics and weapons – what is referred to in IHL as the “means and methods” – must also aim to minimize risk to civilians, even if it means putting more soldiers in harm's way.

The prohibitions on directly targeting civilians and exposing civilians to disproportionate risk of harm exist because, under IHL, civilians have protected status as long as they take “no active part in the hostilities.” This means that, as stated in the Geneva Conventions – the set of international treaties governing the conduct of armed conflict – all civilians must be “treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, color, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.”

Directly targeting civilians or exposing them to disproportionate harm is therefore wrong for the same reasons that it is wrong to kill or harm innocent people in peacetime. People who pose no threat to others deserve respect and protection from violence,

How should the lives of innocent people be weighed against important military objectives?

regardless of their nationality or group identity. To violate that respect in war is not only a war crime but a moral crime, which is why Hamas' massacre of at least 1,200 Israeli citizens and the taking of 240 hostages is rightly condemned as an atrocity.

How should the lives of innocent people be weighed against important military objectives?

Proportionality and moral assessment

The condemnation of Hamas' crimes is based on the same moral principle as the laws that protect noncombatants in war: All innocent people deserve protection.

However, scholars and legal experts disagree about how the legal framework laid out in the Geneva Conventions should be applied in war zones.

For example, in 1987 the International Committee of the Red Cross argued that the definition of “military advantage” – the advantage against which potential civilian harm must be weighed – should only include “ground gained” and “annihilating or weakening the enemy armed forces.”

But the 2016 U.S. Department of Defense Law of War Manual claimed that “military advantage” should

also include other goals such as “diverting enemy forces’ resources and attention.”

cThere is also disagreement about what counts as “civilian harm.” For example, scholar Emanuela-Chiara Gillard argues that “civilian harm” should include psychological and physical harms; legal expert Dr. Beth Van Schaack argues that long-term harms should also be considered.

In short, there are no easy answers to questions about how to weigh harms against civilians against the value of military objectives. But while answers are difficult, there is a different way to frame this question: What does it mean – not just legally, but morally – to treat all civilian lives as equal, as the law requires?

As scholar Matthew Talbert and I argue, the first step in answering this question is to ask what a military force would accept if it were “their” civilians who were at risk of harm from military action.

That is the standard we should apply when assessing potential military actions that threaten harm to enemy civilians. We call this standard the “principle of the moral equality of noncombatants.” For example, Israel argued that its November 15 attack on Shifa hospital was justified because, it claimed, Hamas was hiding a command base and weapons under the hospital.

The hospital, which was running low on fuel, food and water, housed patients, including premature babies, and civilians seeking refuge from the conflict. According to footage shown in news reports, the attack left the hospital seriously damaged, filled with debris and lacking essential supplies for the remaining patients, who include the elderly and infirm.

Israel has released footage supporting its claim that there was a Hamas command center under the hospital. Does that mean Israel’s attack on the hospital meets the requirements of proportionality? In other words, was the harm to civilians caused by the attack – including the ongoing harm resulting from the loss of a major hospital – proportionate to the military value of destroying a Hamas command base?

In applying the principle Talbert and I proposed in our paper, the question would be phrased as follows: If Hamas was hiding a control base under an Israeli hospital and it was Israeli civilians at risk, would Israel think that attacking the hospital would be justified? If the answer is “no,” then the attack against Shifa hospital is also not justified. Nor would attacks on refugee camps or residential areas be justified if the civilian death toll resulting from these attacks would be viewed as unacceptable if it were Israeli civilians who were at risk.

This is because if the risk to Israeli lives outweighs the benefits of capturing a Hamas command base, then

the risk to Palestinian lives should be given the same weight and lead to the same conclusion. Under IHL, all civilians are legally entitled to the same protection, regardless of their nationality.

Taking civilian lives seriously

Unfortunately, the debate about proportionality in the conflict between Israel and Palestine is only the latest of many debates about proportionality and civilian deaths in war zones.

For example, since 2001, the United States’ drone program has killed at least 22,000 civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and elsewhere. A New York Times report on these deaths found multiple instances of “flawed intelligence,” cover-ups and cases of mistaken identity. Despite this record, civilians’ deaths still occur.

Using the principle of the moral equality of noncombatants to assess this track record would reveal whether the U.S. military is taking sufficient care to avoid harm to civilians. If the U.S. military would not accept these deaths – and the policies and practices that contribute to them – if U.S. civilians were at risk, then these deaths are unjustified.

This would mean that the drone program must change in order to treat civilians in Syria, Pakistan and elsewhere with the respect to which they are legally and morally entitled. This example illustrates that to meet the standards of IHL and the moral principles that underlie those standards, military forces must apply the principle of the moral equality of noncombatants. There is no legal or moral justification, I argue, for treating some civilians’ lives as less important than others.

This is a demanding principle. Applying it would be difficult - military and political leaders would have to accept that there might be military objectives that are not important enough to justify the risk to civilian lives. And it would require acknowledging that some military objectives might be so important that even harm to “their” civilians might be justified.

But one of the functions of IHL is to “limit the suffering and damage caused by armed conflict.” This principle reflects the moral and legal status of civilians in IHL and could lead to greater respect for and protection of all civilians during conflict.

Jessica Wolfendale is Professor of Philosophy at Case Western Reserve University and is a military ethicist. This essay was first published in The Conversation on December 1, 2023 and has been revised for Christian Ethics Today.

What the Bible Actually Says about Abortion May Surprise You

By Melanie A. Howard

In the days since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which had established the constitutional right to an abortion, some Christians have cited the Bible to argue why this decision should either be celebrated or lamented. But here's the problem: This 2,000-year-old text says nothing about abortion.

As a university professor of biblical studies, I am familiar with faith-based arguments Christians use to back up views of abortion, whether for or against. Many people seem to assume the Bible discusses the topic head-on, which is not the case.

Ancient context

Abortions were known and practiced in biblical times, although the methods differed significantly from modern ones. The second-century Greek physician Soranus, for example, recommended fasting, bloodletting, vigorous jumping and carrying heavy loads as ways to end a pregnancy.

Soranus' treatise on gynecology acknowledged different schools of thought on the topic. Some medical practitioners forbade the use of any abortive methods. Others permitted them, but not in cases in which they were intended to cover up an adulterous liaison or simply to preserve the mother's good looks.

In other words, the Bible was written in a world in which abortion was practiced and viewed with nuance. Yet the Hebrew and Greek equivalents of the word "abortion" do not appear in either the Old or New Testament of the Bible. That is, the topic simply is not directly mentioned.

What the Bible says

The absence of an explicit reference to abortion, however, has not stopped its opponents or proponents from looking to the Bible for support of their positions.

Abortion opponents turn to several biblical texts that, taken together, seem to suggest that human life has value before birth. For example, the Bible opens by describing the creation of humans "in the image of God": a way to explain the value of human life, presumably even before people are born. Likewise, the Bible describes several important figures, including the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah and the Christian Apostle Paul, as having being called to their sacred tasks since their time in the womb. Psalm 139 asserts that God "knit me together in my mother's womb."

However, abortion opponents are not the only ones who can appeal to the Bible for support. Supporters

can point to other biblical texts that would seem to count as evidence in their favor.

Exodus 21, for example, suggests that a pregnant woman's life is more valuable than that of the fetus. This text describes a scenario in which men who are fighting strike a pregnant woman and cause her to miscarry. A monetary fine is imposed if the woman suffers no other harm beyond the miscarriage. However, if the woman suffers additional harm, the perpetrator's punishment is to suffer reciprocal harm, up to life for life.

There are other biblical texts that seem to celebrate the choices that women make for their bodies, even in contexts in which such choices would have been socially shunned. The fifth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, for example, describes a woman with a gynecological ailment that has made her bleed continuously taking a great risk: She reaches out to touch Jesus' cloak in hopes that it will heal her, even though the touch of a menstruating woman was believed to cause ritual contamination. However, Jesus commends her choice and praises her faith.

Similarly, in the Gospel of John, Jesus' follower Mary seemingly wastes resources by pouring an entire container of costly ointment on his feet and using her own hair to wipe them. But he defends her decision to break the social taboo around touching an unrelated man so intimately.

Beyond the Bible

In the response to the Supreme Court's decision, Christians on both sides of the partisan divide have appealed to any number of texts to assert that their particular brand of politics is biblically backed. However, if they claim the Bible specifically condemns or approves of abortion, they are skewing the textual evidence to fit their position.

Of course, Christians can develop their own faith-based arguments about modern political issues, whether or not the Bible speaks directly to them. But it is important to recognize that although the Bible was written at a time when abortion was practiced, it never directly addresses the issue. ■

Melanie A. Howard is Associate Professor of Biblical & Theological Studies, Fresno Pacific University. This essay first appeared in The Conversation on July 25, 2022 and is reprinted here with permission.

Us? The “Moral Ones”? - The Other Side of the Abortion Ban Coin

By Sandra Cook

I remember the day *Roe* fell. It was one of those “where were you when. . . ?” days, especially shockingly marked by all the women crying - crying for joy, but also crying for what millions and millions experienced as an instant “stroke-of-the-pen” total redefinition of who they are now in the world they occupy.

That Sounds heavy and dramatic, but it’s real non-the-less. The Supreme Court decision of that day will challenge and shape the experience of being female in America for generations, maybe forever.

Recently, since that ruling I have seen the feelings of appalled women on protest signs with angry words: “We are NOT breeding chattel!” and “Keep your laws out of our uteruses!” One even referenced feeling subordinated to little more than an “ejaculation vessel.”

The sociologist in me craved to explore this primal-scream angst—to mine the deep recesses of a human mind upon learning that women no longer will have full-personhood and self-rule, feeling their bodies are now “owned and controlled” by others (mostly men). I have considered myself to be an evangelical Christian. I have spent months inquiring and investigating what the demise of *Roe* means to evangelicals, but also what it means for U.S. Constitution-embracing citizens, fully aware of our republic-democracy’s historically developed and promoted ideals.

“In the world, but not of it,” right? This involves stepping in and out of two world-view paradigms - both constitutionally legitimate, right? The endeavor to apply the Apostle Paul’s admonition to “*let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others*” (Phil 2:4), took me to viewing abortion bans as a coin with two affecting sides - two affecting realities.

As evangelicals, too many of us have restricted and isolated ourselves in the anti-abortion perspective, its pet quotes and invocations, making us disinterested in an “in the weeds” dive into the evangelical pro-choice perspective held by very many of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should not be afraid to genuinely and empathetically confront and explore the pro-choice perspective. In my case, I found some “come let us reason together,” cold, hard realities to consider in

contrast to those from the celebratory feelings shared by the anti-abortion believers:

When anti-abortion evangelicals celebrate the enactment of abortion bans, we need to remember they are also at the same time celebrating the government’s being able to seize the bodies of women and girls against their will, forcing them under the command and purposes of government without their consent.

When anti-choice Christians hug each other over all the microscopic two-inch, 12-week pictures of pregnancies, the population that comprises 93% of all abortions, and celebrate the fact

As evangelicals, too many of us have restricted and isolated ourselves in the anti-abortion perspective, its pet quotes and invocations, making us disinterested in an “in the weeds” dive into the evangelical pro-choice perspective held by very many of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

that any potential abortion within that group can now be prevented, we need to be mindful they are also hugging each other over the resulting removal of female full-personhood, full-citizenship, full-humanity and self-rule, as no woman can continue to authentically fundamentally retain those standings under this level of required government bodily regulation, surveillance, tracking, monitoring and what’s experienced as uterine confiscation.

When “pro-life” legislating Christians among us thank God for the victory of anti-abortion laws, we need to note they are also thanking God for what millions of women and girls will now experience as repeated sexual assault due to the unwanted coerced / forced vaginal-pelvic

exams required during abortion ban enforcement investigations; forced-birth; forced prenatal care exams; forced-birth; forced labor multiple cervix measurement exams; and the labor-related forced vaginal cutting and stitching episiotomies (forced genital mutilation) imposed on them against their wills.

Additionally, being joyful over government-enforced pregnancy translates to being joyful over what very many women and girls will now experience as disempowerment, dependency, desperation, invalidation, subjugation and all the trauma, fear, suffering, torture and possibly even bodily/organ impairment and death that accompanies it.

When anti-choice Christians congratulate one another on passing essentially total abortion bans (six week), we need to remember they are also congratulating themselves over what has evolved into women and girls now being medically subordinated to their pregnancies - now being medically and legislatively considered acceptably expendable collateral damage in the “superior quest” to elevate even first trimester pregnancies above the lives, health and worth of the fully formed, fully conscious, fully sentient, fully present women and girls walking among us, standing right in front of us.

Evangelicals brave enough and who might seek full-disclosure can google the words: “medical care being denied to pregnancy complications due to doctor’s fears of arrest.” This search will provide multiple articles documenting the increasing life and death reality facing too many women and girls (God’s daughters) just a year and a half post *Roe*. For instance, doctors treating women for cancer existing prior to pregnancy are placed in an untenable dilemma by state laws that prohibit any termination of pregnancy, to either cease chemotherapy care which would help a woman survive cancer or face being arrested and imprisoned. The woman would need to be nearly dead before an abortion would be permissible.

As Tennessee’s Dr. Zahedi-Sprung expresses this transparent, growing fear:

“I don’t know anybody that would feel comfortable treating a pregnant patient with cancer because I don’t feel like they’re nearly dead enough... The threshold that I am holding in order to provide abortion care is basically almost dead to try to avoid being arrested and jailed.”

“Pro-life” laws, when legislated and enforced by Christian evangelicals, actually result in unconstitutional and unbiblical use of secular law to idolatrously bow down and worship six- or 12-week pregnancies, while dismissing and even abusing the women and girls who carry them.

When anti-abortion evangelicals rejoice the overturning of *Roe*, we need to keep in mind that the joy expressed is for the reinstatement of a form of birth-enslavement in the United States of America, in the 21st century, unconstitutionally and unbiblically proclaimed in the name of Jesus.

Whether we accept it or not, all the above are just some of the expressed reasons why pro-choice evangelicals and pro-choice Americans in general will only claim and support “pro-life” on a personal level and

Evangelicals brave enough and who might seek full-disclosure can google the words: “medical care being denied to pregnancy complications due to doctor’s fears of arrest.”

not on a legislation level. They view “the end” here as not righteously justifying the oppressive immoral “means” employed on women and girls to achieve it. They view faith as a personal moral consciousness shift and not a domination directive to unconstitutionally impose on the entire population - to impose on those of other faiths and those of no faith who do not agree. ■

Sandra Cook is a seminary-trained sociologist, retired co-pastor, speaker and writer. As an evangelical Christian, she has engaged in domestic abuse education in the church and wider community.

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You Want Me to Do WHAT?? How the Doctrine of Forgiveness Can Both Help and Harm Sexual Assault Survivors

By Weston Calbreath

In my time as a counselor of young people, I've had the unfortunate experience of accumulating a great deal of knowledge in helping students recover from acts of sexual violence. According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, one in seven young women and one in 25 young men will be victims of sexual violence before graduating from high school. Sexual violence covers a range of non-consensual acts, including forced kissing, inappropriate touching, molestation, and sex acts such as oral sex, anal/vaginal penetration, and rape. Survivors face a barrage of intense scrutiny from family, law enforcement, and society at large that can make the survivor's healing trajectory worse rather than better. Shame, guilt, feeling a loss of control, self-hatred, fear, nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, self-blame, and aftershocks of these feelings (self-harm, eating disorders, drug abuse, etc.) can be big obstacles to overcome for the sexual assault survivor.

Sexual violence victims who are Christians have heard of the doctrine of forgiveness. It's not just a doctrine; it's an expectation. We as Christians strive to live our lives by Christ's example, and forgiveness is an inherent part. So, on top of the "secular" mental health issues, a Christian victim, when encouraged to forgive the person who harmed them in one of the most horrifying ways possible, can sink further into self-blame. They find additional fault with themselves because they are so hurt that forgiveness can't be found.

A counselor who encourages forgiveness as the first reaction fails the victim due to misconceptions about what forgiveness "must" be. Forgiveness is often internalized as a binary, polarized act. You either do it all the way or you haven't done it. The mantra "forgive and forget" is etched in our brains. To a victim, forgiveness could mean that they are saying they are okay and that what happened wasn't a big deal and doesn't bother them any more when the truth is anything but that. A victim of sexual assault has experienced a severe loss of control, and that very is definitely a big deal. Survivors of sexual violence have documented difficulties in a variety of domains. A problem with the "forget" concept is that forgetting

is neither probable nor advisable. Victims of sexual trauma can experience involuntary flashbacks, nightmares, and panic attacks; their body and brain remember what happened despite the victim's best efforts to forget. From a therapeutic standpoint, trying to forget can lead to dissociative tendencies that disrupt some major life functions. Forgetting can also cause victims to miss grooming signs and then be re-traumatized by someone who grooms them for victimization.

A second reason that emphasizing forgiveness too early can do more harm than good is because the

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effects of sexual violence can linger for a lifetime; and it's hard to forgive a perpetrator who stole so much joy from your life. Pushing forgiveness of the perpetrator exacerbates self-blame and self-hatred in victims with Christian up-bringing. When the survivor is unable to forgive, their inner monologue whispers in their ear, "you're a bad Christian"; the victim is already so traumatized and fearful that forgiveness is a speck on a distant horizon. This additional negative thought reinforces the current negative self-talk already present in the mind of a sexual assault victim. It becomes an evil twin with phrases like "it's your fault" or "why didn't you stop it" constantly rolling through the mind of a survivor. And when society piles on with victim-blaming, it compounds these feelings.

Another reason forgiveness presents a challenge is that “earthly” consequences play a role in making it difficult. Survivors of sexual assault often see their abusers go unpunished. The behavior gets rationalized, covered up, ignored, or denied. In cases without physical evidence, prosecutors and judges hesitate to prosecute or bring the full weight of the law down upon the abuser. As a counselor, I saw a young lady who was the victim of her mom’s boyfriend. When she was in middle school he coerced/forced her to perform oral sex on him over and over. He did get convicted of sexual exploitation of a minor; but she was not the only victim. The perpetrator had a pending charge for the same offense with another victim. He was convicted of both offenses and served a TOTAL of 90 days in jail for BOTH offenses, served concurrently. So, as the young lady progressed through high school she wrestled with a lot of sadness. Why did she (the victim) let it happen? Was she complicit? Where was God when this was happening? Why did her mother choose this animal over her own daughter? This man walked around free while she still suffered the pain and grief from the lost innocence of her childhood. How can she be expected to fulfill her Christian mandate to forgive when he suffered no ill effects of what he did to her? And what kind of religion would ask her to do such a thing? These are the real inner monologues of real victims and a glimpse into why espousing unconditional and all-encompassing forgiveness can drive victims away from the church

Zone of Proximal Development

Sociocultural theorist, Ziv Vygotsky, proposed a continuum along which a person’s capabilities to perform tasks can lie, especially for children. Basically, Vygotsky teaches that tasks fall into three categories: tasks which a person can complete independently, tasks which require some assistance, and tasks which are out of reach at that particular point in time. The hope in this system is that, with support, a person can learn to perform tasks which are out of reach, and tasks which require support can begin to be performed independently.

This continuum can also be applied to the concept of forgiveness in the case of sexual trauma survivors. To expect a victim to immediately and completely forgive the offending person is likely an unreasonable expectation. Think about how people learn to swim. Some parents throw their child in the deep end first thing and the kid figures it out. It’s likely though that the child already had the tools they needed to swim independently on some level. For other children, this strategy could be wildly unsuccessful because the task cannot be handled with 100% independence. They require

some level of support or scaffolding in order to reach independence. The wounds of a trauma victim may be so raw that they are not in a place to even consider how this concept could be beneficial. So, inserting this construct prematurely could cause them to drown in an emotional sense.

How the concept of forgiveness can be beneficial

The inner monologue of a sexual abuse survivor can contain self-blame as a running theme:

“Why didn’t I stop it?? How could I have been so stupid? What did I do to deserve this?” “If I had been a better daughter/son/partner it wouldn’t have come to this.”

“I gave in because (s)he said (s)he’d _____ if I didn’t sleep with him/her.”

“Why didn’t I say something?”

“I should have just done what (s)he said and it wouldn’t have turned out this way.”

“I disobeyed my parents by drinking at a party and passed out; God is punishing my disobedience.”

Once a survivor identifies a feeling of self-blame, there is an opening for talk of forgiveness...not forgiveness of the perpetrator, but forgiveness of self.

These are all statements I’ve heard uttered by rape victims. They are hard to write as there is a face in my memory that goes with each of these. Each child not only was dealing with the physical and emotional trauma from losing control over their own body, but that trauma was compounded by the self-assigned blame for the trauma.

Once a survivor identifies a feeling of self-blame, there is an opening for talk of forgiveness...not forgiveness of the perpetrator, but forgiveness of self. The 18-year-old student reflecting on her abuse at the hands of mom’s boyfriend was ready to hear about self-forgiveness. She needed to hear that the 11-year-old version of herself wasn’t equipped to know what to do when a trusted adult authority demanded she perform sex acts. The 15-year-old girl on a date faced with the prospect of being blackmailed into sex has limited capacity to choose a course that will safely extract her from the situation. She needs to absolve herself from the guilt of not handling it the way her older self would have.

From a therapeutic standpoint we want to move the

survivor from a point of self-blame to a more balanced perspective on what their responsibilities are and are not. Two events that happen sequentially do not create a causal relationship between the two; correlation doesn't equal causation. The abuser is in control of his or her own actions and they made a choice to force a sex act onto a person who didn't want it. The survivor may have passed out from alcohol consumption, but that did not cause the rape...rape was the choice of the rapist. So, the beginning of the path to healing often starts with self-forgiveness in the form of breaking the cycle of self-blame. It's important to note that self-forgiveness in these situations isn't about the misconception that the survivor caused their own harm; in fact, it's quite the opposite. It's about forgiveness for blaming oneself for something that isn't the survivor's fault; it's about breaking the cycle of self-abuse, both mental and physical for which the survivor is not responsible.

There are other areas where concepts of forgiveness can be beneficial in the healing process. When a child is sexually abused, it can wreck a family in a variety of ways. In more than 90% of cases, an abuser is known to the family. And predators use purposeful tactics on those in the circle of the victim that cast doubt on any report of sexual assault. An abuser in the family challenges the bonds of the family members. Parents of victims can feel immense guilt due to exposing their child to an abuser. Their response can be an impediment to healing. Relationships between a parent and an abused child can be heavily strained. Sometimes it erupts into a spiral of hostility with the sexual assault incident at the head of the spiral. Here are a few scenarios where this plays out:

- A teen is sexually assaulted by a relative so a parent begins to worry and hover afterwards out of concern and/or feelings of guilt. They become more intrusive, and set tighter boundaries. The child, out of hurt from the past can be resentful. "Why weren't you this attentive and protective when I needed it?"

- A parent is so wracked with guilt that they can't communicate about the assault. They refuse to talk about it. They may not have the skills to construct a recuperative environment for the child. To the child it looks like the parent doesn't care or doesn't believe them and so there is reciprocal, spiraling conflict.

- A survivor's response to "normal" parenting feedback and limits is heightened because there is perceived judgment about the abuse event

attached to the current feedback. The heightened response escalates the parent's response and the conflict escalates.

- The parent asks "What can I do so you'll forgive me?" and the survivor can't name anything. What the survivor really wants is to go back in time and have a different outcome. But that's not possible. So they remain resentful. The parent wants the same thing; to go back in time. But neither party connects the fact that they both want the same thing, and they both give up on each other.

So, where can we use the concept of forgiveness productively within this dynamic? One of the ways to implement forgiveness is by acknowledging the ways in which each family member is continuing to punish each other and forgiving that. Forgive the parent for not connecting what's happening in that moment with the past. Forgive the child for connecting the past event to the present. Forgive the parent for not knowing how to respond in a way that makes things better. Help the child forgive themselves for all the self-imposed

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Is this the "right" way to exercise true Christian forgiveness? I don't know...I think I've said that many times when a victim asked me why this is happening to them through their tears. What I know is that there are responses that can worsen the healing trajectory of sexual assault victims. There are things we ask of them that they can't do at that moment in time. We need to meet them where they are and respond with love and support throughout our involvement with them. ■

Wes Calbreath holds an M.Ed. in counseling and has worked in public schools for 22 years. He currently assists school counselors from his base at Appalachian State University. He is an active member of Boone United Methodist Church in Boone, NC, and a member of the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force of OASIS, Inc.

Book Reviews

The Ethics of Tainted Legacies: Human Flourishing after Traumatic Pasts

by Karen Guth, Cambridge Press, 2022, 300 pages
Reviewed by Stephen Fox

In March of 2000, Jim Guth, Furman political science professor published an article in the *Christian Century* coming to the defense of Bob Jones University (BJU), five miles across the north side of town from Furman, in Greenville S.C. George W. Bush was running for president and made national news that spotlighted BJU history as racially exclusive. Now Guth's daughter Karen (FU 2001), who first came to national attention with her essay "Claims on Bonhoeffer," in the *Century*, is gaining further notoriety with the publication of her book, *The Ethics of Tainted Legacies*. Karen was active in Greenville's First Baptist Church, a key congregation in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, where her parents remain active member

For purposes of this review, I want to focus on the pages in *Tainted Legacy* dealing with Guth's spotlight on Furman's past association with slavery and its time with the South Carolina Southern Baptist Convention.

In the mid-20th century, 50 percent of Furman's students were Southern Baptists and products of the textile culture of the Piedmont Carolinas and North Georgia. Roger Milliken was deeply involved in the politics of Goldwater, Nixon and Strom Thurmond. It was Mr. Charles Daniel, a South Carolina industrialist and Democratic U.S. senator, succeeded by Strom Thurmond, for whom the chapel and dining hall at Furman are named, who introduced Milliken to Strom Thurmond in 1956. In 2015, *Politico* published a major article, "The Man Who Launched the GOP's Civil War: How a Textile Magnate Turned the Party of Lincoln into the Party of Trump."

Milliken was Nixon's largest financial backer in America in 1972. Nixon spent the night in the Daniel mansion which was later designated as the Furman president's residence.

About 25 years ago, Furman professor, Dr. Jim Guth confided in me that about two years after Guth joined the Furman faculty, Milliken tried to place Gary North on the Furman faculty. North was a right-wing Christian reconstructionist and key member of

the Council for National Policy, a secretive organization which included the two main architects of the fundamentalists' takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson. North was to teach economics and politics. North came to campus and was interviewed by several faculty who dismissed him as unsuitable for the faculty. To my knowledge, Milliken was satisfied by the decision and continued to make donations to Furman in scholarships and other ways.

Milliken's son, Roger, Jr. and I, were great friends the summer of 1970, working at the Gaffney Peach Shed. Public reports claim Roger Jr. donated a quarter million dollars to Obama in 2012.

The recently deceased chaplain of Furman, Jim Pitts, was engaged with Furman for a half century. He shared his reservations with me about the focus on Joseph Vaughn, the first person of color to enroll and graduate from Furman, by erecting a statue of Vaughn to honor him. Pitts knew Vaughn and said Joe would not have sought this attention.

Furman religion professors, Helen Lee Turner and Sam Britt, joined to offer tributes to Pitts in the collection, *Walk with Me*, published in Pitts' honor in late 2021.

Furman long ago changed from being an institution whose main purpose was to train future Baptist preachers; but not everyone conceded that priority and have rewritten the university's history. Quoting:

"We have picked over our predecessors in a manner that is not only impious, but also hypocritical. We have reimagined an origin story that has emphasized the failures of Furman's founders and overlooked even their meager virtues. But the longevity of any community requires learning how to live with the dead, which include those flawed souls who erred, but who, by the grace of God, still fashioned a place of learning, a place wherein we all remain both saints and sinners."

Furman's Seeking Abraham Initiative is an examination of the slave holding history of Furman's founders; but it says nothing about the climate of Furman during the latter part of the time of Jim Crow. In 1956, Southern Baptists' firebrand pastor, W. A. Criswell of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, spoke to the pastor's conference in Columbia, SC, and said such things as "I wouldn't let my daughter within two city blocks of a big black buck; and you wouldn't call a chigger a

‘chiggrow,’ now would ya?”

The next day, Strom Thurmond had him speak to a joint session of the South Carolina legislature. Just 10 years later, Gordon Blackwell became the president of Furman with a mandate to integrate the university. That first black student was Joe Vaughn, admitted in 1964, against the wishes of the S.C. SBC.

Pitts, Turner and Britt offered some strong reservations regarding the efforts to acknowledge the role of Baptists in remembrances of Furman regarding race. However, Scotty Bryan, as editor of the *Furman Paladin*, the student newspaper, had a parting thought. She reported that there is a framed headline in the Paladin office, “Furman vows to fight Baptists,” dating from the early 1990s that shared the voices of Furman students from a campus populated by students much different from mid-20th century students. She wrote that history is ingrained in the campus and worthy of being revisited by each class of Furman students.

And as late as 1972, the movie *Gone with the Wind* was shown annually to a packed house of students and Greenvillians at Furman’s McCallister Auditorium.

I have come to disagree in part with Pitts regarding the statue and its annual commemoration. I participated in the annual march from the chapel to the library in honor of Vaughn and the statue. Seeing for the first time the report of Seeking Abraham, Furman’s concerted effort to deal with the slaveholder founder and apologist Richard Furman, and others, I now see the whole matter in the bigger picture. Furman historian Courtney Tollison Hartness’ 20-page piece on Furman and S.C. Baptists, from her University of South Carolina dissertation titled *Seeking Excellence*, makes it clear without Vaughn’s admission to Furman, pivotal 60s President Gordon Blackwell would never have become the president.

Vaughn’s arrival as a Furman student was a key

moment in Furman’s history. The integration of the university, against the wishes of the South Carolina SBC, presaged the national fundamentalist takeover of the SBC to follow in the 1980s.

For Furman’s trustees, the racial animus of Southern Baptists was too much for Furman to be bothered with and ties with the SBC were severed in 1992.

The fall 2023 edition of the *Furman Alumni Magazine* gives Guth and her book a short promotional blurb saying this: “Constructing a typology of responses to compromised thinkers, traditions and institutions, she demonstrates the relevance of age-old debates in Christian theology for those who confront legacies tarnished by the traumas of slavery, racism and sexual violence.”

While she mentions her *alma mater*, Furman, in passing regarding institutions’ tainted legacies, her institutional focus is on the Catholic church, especially Georgetown University and its history with slavery. Her individual explorations focus on Bill Cosby and Howard Yoder. In a footnote, she compares Yoder to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., about whom she says she is often asked. Guth’s response: “...the sexual violations of over 100 women (Yoder) and consensual sex outside marriage are different types of violation. Some legacies are more tainted than others”

At a hundred dollars, *Tainted Legacies* is a little pricey for individuals. However, I think it should be a part of every progressive congregational church library worth its name. ■

Stephen M. Fox is a 1975 graduate of Furman. A longer version of this review and a likely sequel bringing the righteous indignation of Seeking Abraham up to Furman’s present is at Fox’s blog www.foxofbama.blogspot.com; or google search for asfoxseesit.

Enough by Cassidy Hutchinson
(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2023). 362 pages.
Reviewed by William Powell Tuck

Enough is more than a memoir about her life's journey, but a revelation about the radical challenge Cassidy Hutchinson faced while serving as a special assistant to President Donald Trump and his then Chief of Staff Mark Meadows.

She recounts that after a childhood visit to Washington, D. C., she had an aspiration to find some way to serve her country. She grew up in a working-class family in Pennington, New Jersey, and was the only one in her family to graduate from college. Although it had not been her first choice, she graduated from Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. Even in high school, she had felt a gravitational pull toward politics and the Republican Party. College became for her a means to reach her goal of somehow going into politics.

In her junior year in college, she applied for an internship in Congress with the Republican party and received an offer to serve as a summer intern with Rep. Dennis Scalise of Louisiana and later with Ted Cruz. This experience confirmed her desire to find a way to serve in the government. After graduating from college, she began her full-time governmental work with Ben Howard, director of the Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA) House team.

She worked in several other capacities until Mark Meadows, the chief of staff to the president, asked her to work as his special assistant. Her desk was only a few steps from the president's office where she was able to be privy to much that happened in that area.

The book recounts how well she performed her duties and the strong affirmation she received from all the senators, congressional representatives, staffers, and even the president himself. She was a strong supporter of President Trump until January 6, 2021 when, at the age of 24, she had to make a decision to be loyal to President Trump and his administration or to be loyal to the country and our constitution.

She faced a difficult decision when she was asked to appear before the January 6 House Committee. In her first appearance, a Trump lawyer instructed her to answer, when she could with, "I don't recall." Following this interview with the committee, she was troubled, and began to struggle with her desire to be fully truthful. After some conversation with Liz Cheney, she was subpoenaed to appear before the

committee again. She had been inspired by reading the book about Alex Butterfield's experience during the Nixon trial and his quest to be truthful even at personal political cost. Even her father had discouraged her appearing before the committee again. She wanted to do it, but struggled with what to do until she found some lawyers who would work for her "pro bono" since she had no funds to pay an attorney.

She recounts her struggles with those who wanted her to convey the party line and with her personal pressure to defend American democracy. She describes her preparation for her second appearance before the committee and her revelations about the lies that many had told about the efforts to overthrow an election and their involvement in the January 6 riot. "Her bravery and patriotism," Liz Cheney observed, "were awesome to behold."

After her second appearance before the committee, she recounts how Mark Meadows and others disowned her and her need to have protection for her life and her own personal financial struggles. But her desire to be

The book is a gripping account of how a young woman faced the most difficult decision of her life with many pushing her to not be honest, yet having the courage, after much inner conflict, to make the right, courageous decision.

truthful would now allow her, she said, "to look at herself in the mirror."

The book is a gripping account of how a young woman faced the most difficult decision of her life with many pushing her to not be honest, yet having the courage, after much inner conflict, to make the right, courageous decision.

The book not only recounts one person's personal struggle, but summons the reader to examine his or her own struggle to face one's political dilemma about our democracy today. ■

William Powell Tuck is a Baptist minister at Large living in Richmond, Virginia.

‘You Keep Speaking, and I’ll Stand Guard’

In the summer of 2021, I received a quite direct threat after I’d written a series of pieces opposing bans on teaching critical race theory in public schools. Someone sent my wife an email threatening to shoot me in the face.

My wife and I knew that it was almost certainly a bluff. But we also knew that white nationalists had our home address, both of us were out of town and the only person home that night was my college-age son. So, we called the local sheriff, shared the threat, and asked if the department could send someone to check our house.

Minutes later, a young deputy called to tell me all was quiet at our home. When I asked if he would mind checking back frequently, he said he’d stay in front of our house all night. Then he asked, “Why did you get this threat?”

I hesitated before I told him. Our community is so MAGA that I had a pang of concern about his response. “I’m a columnist,” I said, “and we’ve had lots of threats ever since I wrote against Donald Trump.”

The deputy paused for a moment. “I’m a vet,” he said, “and I volunteered to serve because I believe in our Constitution. I believe in free speech.” And then he said words I’ll never forget: “You keep speaking, and I’ll stand guard.”

I didn’t know that deputy’s politics and I didn’t need to. When I heard his words, I thought, that’s it. That’s the way through. Sometimes we are called to speak. Sometimes we are called to stand guard. All the time we can at least comfort those under threat, telling them with words and deeds that they are not alone. If we do that, we can persevere. Otherwise, the fear will be too much for good people to bear.

SOURCE: An excerpt from a must-read article: David French, “MAGA’s Violent Threats Are Warping Life in America”, The New York Times, February 18, 2024.

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