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Christian Virtues: What Really Matters

By Albert L. Blackwell

I continue to embrace my Christian tradition in part because I find salvation by grace through trust—which I understand as trusting Christ's way of repentance, forgiveness and amendment of life—a healing doctrine.

The virtues enter this healing process at two points: at the beginning, when honestly comparing our lives to these transcendent ideals leads us to repentance; and at the end, when these ideals guide us in our attempts to amend our lives. These roles of the virtues explain why Paul, the great preacher of salvation by grace, gives us list after list of virtues that should guide the faithful—and also some graphic lists of vices to avoid.

Paul's lists of Christian virtues include the four classical virtues: prudence (or discernment), temperance (or self-control), justice (or righteousness), and fortitude (or steadfastness). And Paul originates the triad of Christian graces: faith, hope and love. But this traditional list of seven by no means exhausts Paul's recommendations of virtue.

A few summers ago, to celebrate our wedding anniversary, Marian and I took off on a lark to satisfy our shared interest in amateur star-gazing. Knowing that we would have to escape the humid haze of our eastern summers, we took down the Almanac and looked up the average driest place in the country for the first week in August. It was Death Valley. (No, no—not the Clemson football stadium; the original Death Valley, way out West.) So we picked the second driest place in the country, Boise, Idaho, and sure enough, we had one good and two wonderful nights to view the stars, though the smoke of range and forest fires kept us on the move. Marian worked at the constellations on the macro level, and I wrestled with our son Christopher's 16-power telescope to search the firmament at the micro level.

In one of those moments that give me goosebumps even in recollection, we focused attention on the constellation of the seven sisters, The Pleiades—singled out by the book of Job (9.9; 38.31) and the prophet Amos (5.8) as a particular splendor of God's vast creation. Among and around the seven points of light visible to the naked eye, our little scope disclosed a dazzling larger cluster of sister stars.

And so it is with the virtues. Through the lens of New Testament writings, we find around the seven cardinal virtues a multitude of ancillary virtues to guide the faithful—repentant, thankful for their forgiveness, and resolved to amend their lives. Are these exclusively Christian virtues? Heavens no! No more than the stars are Christian stars. They are a host of transcendent virtues, radiant above us all, brought nearer and made clearer by the lens of Judeo-Christian scripture, as also by lenses of other traditions.

I would like to conclude with a partial survey of this cluster of ancillary virtues—qualities of character that make us good; qualities that really matter. In alphabetical order:

Compassion really matters, virtually defined for Christian tradition by the Samaritan's care for a stripped traveler, beaten and left for dead on the road to Jericho (Luke 10.25–37).

Fidelity really matters, such as the Apostle Peter who taught by failing at it so miserably in the high priest's courtyard (Matthew 26.69–75; Mark 14.66–72; Luke 22.54–62) and the three Marys exemplified so courageously by being last at the cross and first at the tomb (Matthew 27.55–61; 28.1–10; Mark 15.40–41, 47; Luke 23.48–49; 24.1–12).

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Forbearance really matters, such as Christ's repeatedly showing His non-comprehending disciples who, despite their "little faith" (Matthew 6.30; 8.26; 14.31; 16.8; Luke 12.28), had in truth left their homes and followed him (Matthew 19.24–29; Mark 10.23–30; Luke 18.25–30).

Forgiveness really matters, as we learn when Peter asks, "How often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" and Jesus responds with hyperbole: "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven times" (Mt 18.21–22; Luke 17.3–4).

Fortitude really matters, like that of the intrepid Abigail as she rode her donkey into the profanity of King David's anger to soften his implacable will and domesticate his savage heart (1 Samuel 25.18–35).

Gentleness really matters, like the gentleness

mitigating the imagery of post-exilic prophets when they compare chastened Israel to an untrained calf or a wayward son or daughter (Jeremiah 31.16–20), whereas before the sufferings of the Exile, the prophets had upbraided the Israelites for being greedy "cows" and "lusty stallions" neighing after neighbors' wives (Jeremiah 5.7–8; Amos 4.1).

Graciousness really matters, like the graciousness transforming the tense meeting between Peter the Jew and Cornelius the Gentile, thus accounting for my standing before you this evening as a Gentile grafted into the salvation-history of Judaism (Acts 10.17–38).

Harmony really matters, echoing the spiritual harmony among the disciples at Pentecost so strong as to overcome the discord of nationalities that has disrupted human solidarity since the tower of Babel (Acts 2.1–21).

Honorableness really matters, like that of Joseph of Arimathea, who withheld his consent from dishonorable proceedings of the legal body of which he was a member, and asked Pilate for the body of Christ to give it an honorable burial (Luke 23.50–56).

Kindness really matters, such as the naive islanders of Malta showed in kindling a fire for the shipwrecked Paul and his shivering companions and welcoming them with hospitality (Acts 28.1–7).

Liberality really matters, like that of Job, who supported widows and orphans and street people, not withholding "anything that the poor desired" (Job 31.16–23; cf. Deuteronomy 15.10–11).

Meekness really matters, as when royal David's descendant insists on welcoming little children, "even infants," to His arms and His blessing (Matthew 19.13–15; Mark 10.13–16; Luke 18.15–17).

Mercy really matters, as when, in the only capital case to come before him, Christ voids the sentence of a woman caught in adultery (John 8.1–11).

Patience really matters, like that of the sower of kingdom seeds who awaits their sprouting and growing—"he does not know how"—into the blade and then the ear and then the full grain in the ear (Mark 4.26–29).

Peacemaking really matters, as Christ directly declares: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5.9).

Purity really matters, like the Canaanite woman's purity of heart that willed one thing despite two abrasive dismissals by Christ, finally to win His wonder for her great faith (Matthew 15.21–28).

Reverence really matters, such as Christ taught his disciples—"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6.9; Luke 11.2)—and prayed amidst His own anguish, "not my will but yours be done" (Matthew 26.39; Mark 14.38; Luke 22.42).

Self-examination really matters, lest we presume to remove a speck from our neighbor's eye when we have a log in our own (Matthew 7.1–5; Luke 6.41–42).

Sympathy really matters, like that dazzling shaft of sympathy that flashes across the narrative of Deborah's gloating victory song to illumine the camp of the enemy, where we see the mother of Sisera awaiting, in desperate self-deception, the return of her murdered warrior son (Judges 5.26–30).

Tenderheartedness really matters, such as that which Mary and Martha witnessed in Christ as He wept on his way to view the dead body of Lazarus, their brother and His friend (John 11.32–35).

Thankfulness really matters, like that of the one leper of 10, and he a Samaritan, who alone returned to thank Christ for his healing (Luke 17.11–16).

Truthfulness really matters, as Ananias and Sapphira learned too late to save them from the falsehood that poisoned their hearts (Acts 4.32–5.11).

Wisdom really matters—She who heartens us with a promise that we hardly dare to trust: "I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me" (Proverbs 8.17).

Having reached the end of the alphabet, let us give the words to the Apostle Paul:

And now, my friends, all that is true, all that is honorable, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, all that is gracious—if there is any virtue, if there is anything worthy of praise, fill your thoughts with these things. And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4.8–9). ■

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New Testament listings of ***virtues*** can be found at Matthew 5.1–11; Luke 6.20–38; Acts 24.24–25; Romans 5.3–5; Romans 12.9–21; 1 Corinthians 13.1–13; 2 Corinthians 6.6–7; Galatians 5.22–23; Ephesians 4.32; Colossians 3.12–17; 1 Timothy 6.11; James 3.17–18; 2 Peter 1.5–7.

New Testament listings of ***vices*** can be found at Matthew 15.18–20; Mark 7.20–23; Romans 1.28–31; 1 Corinthians 6.9–10; 2 Corinthians 12.20–21; Galatians 5.19–21; 2 Timothy 3.2–6.

Kairos and the Rivers of Justice

By Allan Boesak

"Nothing we know is sweeter than justice," John Calvin writes in his commentary on Amos, "when everyone gains his own right; for this serves much to preserve peace. Hence nothing can be more gratifying to us, than when uprightness and equity prevail."[1] When justice is not done however, when "they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals;" when they "trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth," (Amos 2:6,7) when as a result of perpetual injustice and perpetual impoverishment life becomes bitter as wormwood for the poor and afflicted, then God's judgment, as God's justice in defense of the weak and the wronged, shall be "a violent stream," writes Calvin:

The LORD will certainly show to you how precious righteousness is. It shall therefore run down as violent waters, as an impetuous stream. 'Judgement,' Amos says, 'shall rush upon you and overwhelm you.'[2]

There are good reasons why I find Amos so intriguing a prophet and what he says so resonant with our times. First, Amos presents a relentless contestation of two powers: the power of oppression and the power of justice, the power exercised by the elites of Israel and the power of Yahweh—for Amos, above all the God of justice.

Second, like our world, his world is filled with the incessant rhetoric of domination: the voices of power and privilege, of supremacy and control which dominate this world, drowning out the whispers of fear and cries of suffering which are seemingly heard only by Yahweh. The noise of power is backed up by the noise of official religiosity, on the one hand providing legitimation for oppression and exploitation, and on the other acting as opiate for the people whose deep need for God's presence was not considered holy, but exploited as a useful tool for control. Religion flourished in the nation. "The populace thronged the shrines at festival time to practice an elaborate sacrificial ritual. Yahweh was trusted and patronized with presumptuous arrogance."[3]

Third, Amos depicts two drastically different worlds: one of abject poverty and unending misery, and another of wealth, comfort, bottomless prosperity and the endless pursuit of personal happiness at the cost of the life of the poor. In their prosperity they "were immersed, as it were, in their pleasures," writes Calvin, "and satiety, as it ever happens, made them ferocious."[4]

Fourth, Amos' time was celebrated as a time of peace and prosperity. Jeroboam was one of a long line of rulers who, in the judgment of the Deuteronomist, "did evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Kings 14:24). Yet under Jeroboam II, Israel knew her best years of prosperity and peace. The same is true for the kingdom of Judah. We are dealing with a period of both triumphant expansion and a series of military successes for both kingdoms.[5] The international situation was auspicious; Assyria's imperial power had waned, the kingdom of Damascus had not yet fully recovered from earlier

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defeats by Assyria, and Jeroboam had made excellent use of the favourable international situation.[6] Yet the biblical judgement is not complimentary. The peace dividend does not benefit the whole population; it did not bring justice and equality and dignity to all, and precisely therein lies the "evil in the sight of the LORD." The elites prospered while the impoverishment of the masses worsened. As in our day, the gap between the rich and the poor was unprecedented, unsustainable and, in terms of covenantal politics, intolerable. "The result was the stark contrast between the luxury of the rich and misery of the poor which Amos repeatedly indicts."[7] The peace and prosperity of the privileged came at the cost of the devastation and ruin of the weak and defenseless. As in our times, the politics of opportunism missed the opportunity for politics to allow peace and justice to embrace. However, the prophet does not make the mistake of equating the prosperity of the few with the justice Yahweh requires nor with the shalom Yahweh promises.

Fifth, Amos describes an obscene obsessiveness with making money. "The markets of Jeroboam's kingdom traded in human misery,"[8] James Luther Mays writes as if describing our 21st century global capitalist systems. The new moon and the Sabbath, when they could not carry on business, became an intolerable intrusion in the flow of business, and this while they have been instructed in the Sabbath economics Yahweh requires and that brings justice.[9] Their greed makes the one day lost to doing business seem like a year, is Calvin's interpretation. "If an hour is lost; they think that a whole year has passed away… 'How is it,' they say, 'there is no merchant coming? I have now rested one day, and I have not gained a farthing!'"[10] Calvin pushes beyond this and points at the core of the sin of profits over people and what today would be called "manipulation of the markets":

[T]hey expected corn to be every month dearer; as those robbers in our day gape for gain, who from every quarter heap together corn, and thus reduce us to want; frost or rain may come, some disaster may take place; when spring passes away, there may come some hail or mildew; in short, they are, as it were, laying in wait for some evil… and the corn was then dearer, when there was no crop. Thus then there was a prey, as it were, provided for the avaricious and the extortioners.[11]

Calvin's choice of words here is unadorned and startlingly deliberate: robbers who gape for gain, who reduce us to want; disaster; laying in wait; prey that is provided. The evil purposefulness is undeniable and inescapable. He not only knows how the economic system works, he recognizes its greed, its inherently violent nature and despises it.

Sixth, all this prosperity, economic growth and peace, while the normal way of life for the elites, constituted a crisis of enormous proportions for the poor and vulnerable. In the eyes of Israel's God it was a scandalous situation and this is what Amos comes to condemn. For the elites, however, the scandal was not in the gap between the rich and the poor, the oppression of the innocent, or in the hypocrisy of the national religion which Amos, in almost shocking terms, denounces as an affront to God. For them, the scandal was in the words of the prophet of the south who was not intimidated by might and power, not beguiled by wealth and status, not impressed with false religiosity.

As with the prophet Micah (Micah 2:6), they did not hear him gladly, the rulers in Jerusalem, the payrolled priests under the leadership of Amaziah, and those "cows of Bashan" who ate and drank and made merry while they "oppressed the poor and crushed the needy." He was not polite, Calvin observes, "but proved that he had to do with those who were not to be treated as men, but as brute beasts; yea, worse in obstinacy than brute beasts…" They were "all stubbornness and wholly untamable…" The situation called for someone not ruled by diplomatic ambiguity, but who would "exercise towards them his native rusticity."[12] Their response was to get rid of him. "O seer, go; flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there…" (7:12)

They did not want to hear a prophetic word from the LORD. They wanted a prosperity gospel that suited their contented lives and their prosperous life style, uplifted their hearts and soothed their consciences; a gospel that praised the peace their politics had wrought, even though that peace was a slow death for the powerless and the excluded. They did not want to hear that their wealth was not a blessing from God but rather the result of shameless exploitation and greed. They wanted a gospel that blessed their conspicuous consumerism and their reveling in luxury while they had not a thought for the poor whose lives they have

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ruined: the "ruin of Joseph," Amos calls them (6:4-7). They wanted a gospel that assured them that their "ebullient confidence"[13] in their prosperous economy and their political success was a sign of their trust in Yahweh and that their religious fervor was pleasing to God. It is not even that they did not want prophets; like in our imperial reality, they only wanted them to be patriotic.

In the face of the overpowering bombast of the powerful, the oppressed and the downtrodden are made voiceless and powerless, their head "trampled into the dust of the earth." It is not that the poor cannot speak for themselves or that they have nothing to say. They are made voiceless by incessant oppression. They are drained of life even as they are drained by life. They are crushed by taxes and levies from which the rich built "houses of hewn stone," and they are brought to ruin by the insatiable greed of those who govern them. They do not count, are deemed the price of "a pair of sandals." The law offers them no protection, for the

judges take bribes, which means they profit from the systems of oppression and exploitation under which the poor suffer. There is no justice in their courts; their judgments are meant to uphold the system from which they benefit. As a result, the needy are "pushed aside at the gate." It is not mere benign neglect we are seeing here; it is passionate, aggressive malevolence. One must feel the violence in that "pushed aside," a phrase Amos uses more than once. Amos is talking about the law being turned into systemic lawlessness in the eyes of God, before the very eyes of God.

In their defense against the outrage of the poor and the judgment of God, the powerful are throwing up the barricades. The poor, whose heads are "trampled into the dust" are speechless in the face of this rhetoric of the barricades and hearing their wordless cries is the beginning of justice. But those who dare to step into the breach, who speak up for truth and righteousness in the gates are "hated" and "abhorred." The religious festivals in which they revel are not worship; they are a raucous assault upon the holiness and worthiness of God. These are evil times, and "the prudent" are counseled to "keep silent," an unknown voice, perhaps reflecting on the nature of such times seems to warn, as if - deliberately creating an intrusive pause in the text - wanting to hold the prophet, of Amos' time and for all such times - back for her own good (5:13). This cautionary note out of nowhere is not for nothing: All that clamor of cacophonous consent has but one purpose: to "command" the prophets, "You shall not prophesy" (2:12).

Into this din of oppressive falsity and arrogance Yahweh speaks. And it is for this reason that Amos does not begin his prophetic ministry with the customary formula, "This the LORD has whispered into my ear." In Amos, the LORD does not "whisper;" Yahweh "roars." The word invokes the sound of rolling, growling thunder that reverberates throughout the book. It is a sound that rends the heavens and scorches the earth. As in every kairos moment, the stakes are high. Yahweh speaks for the silenced and the voiceless, determined that they shall be heard. Yahweh speaks for justice and against injustice. Therefore Amos' language is strong, passionate, vibrating with holy indignation. Yahweh's voice conjures up searing droughts, withering pastures, all-consuming fires. The poetic, rhythmic repetition of the "woes" and the condemnations is compelling and relentless: "For three transgressions… and for four…" It is a prophetic word that pulsates with divine power, divine anger and divine lamentation. Again, as with Micah, this is an outraged, wounded, mourning God who speaks. God is outraged at injustice; God is wounded in the wounds of God's wounded people; God laments the unrelieved pain, the ruined lives and the hardened hearts. This divine voice pulverizes all excuses, all justifications, all resistance. By the time Amos takes a breath with his rhetorical question, "Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" (2:11) the reader is already left almost breathless.

In arguably the most well-known oracle from this book, Amos speaks of justice (sedaqa) that should, and will, rush down "like waters," and righteousness (mishpat) like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24). What is striking here in his dream of another, different world is the juxtaposition with the omnivorous greed of the elites, their wealth and insatiable hunger for power; the omnipresent but false religious fervor which Amos describes as in all ways extravagant and in screaming contrast to the silenced misery of the people, their paucity of life and their trivialized dignity. Over against this is the justice Yahweh demands which must "roll down like waters." It is an exuberant abundance that will sweep away the injustices, set things right in the courts, in the community and in all relationships.

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Here there is no room for a theory of "trickle-down" economics. "Justice and righteousness must roll down like the floods after the winter rains, and persist like those few wadis whose streams do not fail in the summer drought."[14] This is the life in all its fullness Jesus speaks of as he fulfills the promise made to the prophet Isaiah not to rest or grow weary until justice is established in the earth (Is. 42:1-5; Matt. 12:15-21). Here, there is no talk of small "windows of opportunity" the privileged grudgingly hold open for those from the

"middle class" if they will only work hard, pull themselves up by their boot straps, "play by the rules" and not challenge the systemic oppression that excludes the poor, and not believe that greed is violence against the poor.[15] No, here is the image of the doors flung open wide by a God "who opens and no one will shut" (Rev. 3:7,8).

So in the celebration of the coming of justice Amos is unrestrained: "The one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed" (9:13). The hyperbole of the prophet's language – "the mountains shall drip sweet wine and the hills shall flow with it" – says Calvin, means that "there will be no common or ordinary abundance" of God's blessings. They will "exceed belief."[16] This is the vision of a different world that prophet sees despite the present, and God's people should not be allowed to forget this. In their present state of oppression the people may find that hard to believe, and the powerful may think it absurd even to imagine, but the prophet, in holding up an alternative reality, insists, "The time is surely coming, says the LORD…" ■

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God in a Technological Society

By Tony Campolo

I just returned from Lisbon, Portugal, were I shared my thinking about God at a convention that brought together 70,000 computer experts. The convention was called the *Web Summit* and my responsibility was to speak at a seminar in which I was asked to make a case for God in an advanced technological society. To my surprise, more than 2000, mostly young empirically- minded conference attendees squeezed into a lecture hall to hear what might be said on this intriguing subject.

Before the discussion got underway, the moderator asked how many in the audience still believed in God. Sadly, only a scarce handful of hands went up. This highly-secularized gathering of men and women was not nevertheless hostile toward my message. Though not religious, they mostly still claimed to be "spiritual," and were intensely interested in what I had to say about God. They seemed hungry for a belief in something that transcended their world wherein everything that is real was being reduced to numbers and algorithms.

I first pointed out that religion has evolved over the last century and now has as one of its primary concerns, the task of creating and maintaining our humanity, over and against the challenges of what I believe to be the dehumanization being posed by positivism and technology. In making this point, I cited the renowned psychologist and author, Erich Fromm, who once declared that in our increasingly technological world, we more and more have machines that function like human beings, and have human beings that behave like machines.[1] During pre-industrial times, there were artisans who worked with tools rather than operating machines. The often-routinized work of machine operators tends to turn workers into extensions of their machines. Whereas artisans once used tools that enabled them to express their individuality in creative labor, workers now increasingly are becoming people who are learning how to adapt to machines. In doing so, their motions become mechanical. They became, in modern industrial processes, interchangeable entities who, like the parts of the machines they operate are easily replaced. Distinctive personhood is lost in all of this and, as Karl Marx pointed out so well in his early writings, dehumanization increases.

Higher education has adapted to this move towards an increased technological and mechanized social system with its curricula that leave little room for what we call "the humanities." Harold Bloom pointed this out a couple of decades ago in his book, *The Closing of The American Mind*. He stated convincingly that universities are less and less nurturing students in courses of study that enhance their humanness. Instead, the emphasis has shifted to such fields as computer programming and the development of a positivistic approaches to life.[2] The world in higher education increasingly is understood and analyzed in purely empirical terms; and while there is nothing inherently evil about this, it does have a spiritually deadening effect and a diminishing of humanness.

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Humanness, I argued, is created and maintained through face-to-face relationships which have spiritual dimensions to them. On a rational level, some atheists and agnostics may deny God, but often in their deepest interpersonal relationships, they may experience God unaware. Although they may not recognize the presence of God in interpersonal relationships, God, nevertheless, may be an undefined presence they sometimes feel in the context of intimacy. I believe some important dimensions of humanizing relationships are being diminished in our increasingly mechanized society and an emotional and spiritual deadness is more and more evident in people's lives. "This age," said Soren Kierkegaard prophetically, "will die, not from sin but from lack of passion."[3]

That life in a technologically conditioned world is threatening the kind of interpersonal relationships that make us human can be easily observed. Consider a handsome couple I saw in a restaurant waiting for

their food to be served. They were not empathetically involved. Instead each was focused on their I-phones. Mechanical communications with them was interfering with the possibility of a humanizing relationship. Also, consider teenagers and children who no longer play games with each other but spend inordinate amounts of time transfixed on the screens of computer games.

God may be experienced in various ways; but I believe that one primary way is in those "sacred" interpersonal moments that the Jewish philosopher/theologian Martin Buber, called, "I-Thou encounters."[4] It can be said that they are mystical moments when we no longer look *at* each other, "as through a glass darkly, but then face to face" (I Cor. 13:12). In such moments, time may seem suspended while we feel our ways into the depths of each other's being. In such moments, we might experience something of what Rudolf Otto called "the holy."[5] I say that God is being experienced in such moments! There may be a reluctance to call what is being experienced, God. But it *is* God!

Those I-Thou encounters, referred to by Buber, are what lift us out of the mundane and provide us with a spiritual awareness that humanizes us. In these relationships, transcendence is experienced in ways that lifts us out of the mechanical world of technology with its limited empirical reality, and creates for those of us involved a sense of experiencing something supernatural. God is what happens, according to Buber, in the contexts of I-Thou encounters, and I believe he is right! The more society adapts to the encroachments of a technological world into our consciousness, the more there is a tendency for us to lose our humanness and view ourselves and one another as only organic machines. The spiritually evident in I-Thou encounters is, I believe, an antidote to the objectification of ourselves and others that overwhelms us in a world that reduces everything to what can be analyzed and understood only objectively and quantitatively.

In I-Thou encounters wherein a unique kind of love is experienced, I believe God is being experienced. A useful Biblical reference that I think validates this claim is found in I John 4, where we read that "God is love." As I read through that entire chapter of scripture I sensed that it told me that wherever love occurs, as in an I-Thou encounter, that something of God is there. This I believe even though the persons involved might not recognize God in what is happening between them. Being a Christian, I affirm that the sense of transcendence that becomes real in I-Thou encounters has the name of "Jesus." I believe being open to His mystical presence can transform what Buber calls "I-It" relationships, in which other persons are known only as objects surrounded by things, into I-Thou encounters.

A second essential role that I believe that God plays in our increasingly technological and rationalized society is that God provides a countervailing power against what many of us feel is an increasing loss of freedom. Explaining why this is so, consider what Jacque Ellul had to say in his book, *The Technological Society*. There, Ellul pointed out that there is only one most efficient way of doing anything.[6] This means that in a rationalized competitive society wherein each party, in order to win out, will seek the most efficient means of acting or doing anything, regardless of the operation or task. The result is that eventually everybody, everywhere will end up doing everything in exactly the same manner via the same means. For instance, this tendency is presently noticeable to those who travel widely. Cities in different countries increasingly all look alike. The efficiency in optimizing valuable real estate in the downtowns of the world's great cities requires the building of tall buildings. Skyscrapers, consequently, are inevitable, and in seeking to build efficiently, there are increasing similarities in how people build them and what building materials they will use. We are pleased when architects do innovative designing; but in their efforts to make buildings attractive and somewhat unique, they inevitably sacrifice what would be economically most efficient.

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The great German sociologist, Max Weber, recognized this and declared that because of what he called, "the increasing tendency to rationalization," all societies would end up in what he said was an "iron cage of sameness." Spontaneity eventually would be minimized and freedom for any unique expression would be stifled in that brave new world. This is a major point that he makes in his classic work, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*.[7] Following up on Weber's theory is the opening line of Herbert

Marcuse's book, *One Dimensional Man*, in which he points out that we are all being socialized into a comfortable, smooth, reasonable democratic form of unfreedom.[8]

It would be irrational to behave in ways that deviate from the ways of the optimized efficiency that are prescribed by a rationalized technological society, and therein lies our slavery. God, on the other hand, as we religionists point out, is a God of endless variety and spontaneity, to which nature itself testifies. Consider the diversity evident throughout all creation. Among those who are into spirituality there are many who find a feeling of God in creation, and that feeling can give them the energy to break out of Weber's iron cage and into a freedom that affirms their humanity. Indeed, without that spiritual dimension our society becomes one dimensional. Spirituality, I contend, defies conformity, and therein lies the possibility of freedom.

Finally, without God, I affirmed, there would be no "morals" but only what anthropologists and sociologists call "mores." By definition, mores are norms and patterns of behavior that emerge through human interactions within a given society, and primarily have relevance *only* within the society that creates them. Morals, on the other hand, are deemed universal, and generally require transcendentalized legitimation.[9] A society that only has rules to govern behavior that emerge *sui generis* from social interaction would have rules that would be limited only to the society that creates them. Obviously, in this latter case, there could be no absolutizing of right and wrong in a way that would be universally binding. What would be considered right in one societal system might not be considered right within another social system. All values would come to be seen as relative *only* within the societies that established them. Behavioral rules would be mores rather than being morals, in that morals require transcendent legitimation. As Dmitri declares in Dostoyevsky's novel, Brothers Karamazov, "Without God, anything becomes permissible."

For those of us in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is God who establishes the absolutes of right and wrong. Yet most people, including those who claim that all values are relative, still, nevertheless, believe in absolute values and, consequently, believe that such behavioral patterns as racism, sexism, homophobia, ethno-nationalistic triumphalism and any other "isms" that lead to discrimination ought to be abolished. That judgement, however, requires a universalistic ethic that only transcendentally legitimated imperatives are able to provide. This, it can be argued, can offer a cure for the social maladies related to ethical relativism. Certainly the Declaration of Human Rights established by the United Nations posits such a universalistic ethic, and even most atheists affirm its truth. They do so even for those who deny anything that suggests that there is a transcendental reality.

All that I have asserted in this essay does not make for a religious apologetic. It does, however, aim to make the case that in our increasingly rationalized technological world, God still is essential for our humanity and social wellbeing. Sociologists look for the function of ideas and beliefs within societies and, as a sociologist, I have outlined what I believe are some of the functions of the belief in God in an ever more overpowering technological society. I am sure there are more. ■

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All footnotes can be found on the web edition of CET at www.christinethicstoday.com

Nonviolence and the Atonement

By Ronald J Sider

The foundation of Christian nonviolence lies not in some calculation of effectiveness. It rests in the cross. The ultimate ground of the biblical summons to love enemies is the nature of God, revealed first in Jesus' teaching and life and then most powerfully in His death and resurrection.

Jesus did not say that one should practice loving nonviolence because it would always transform vicious enemies into bosom friends. The cross stands as a harsh reminder that love for enemies does not always work—at least not in the short run. Jesus grounded His call to love enemies in the very nature of God: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45, emphasis added; compare to 5:9). God loves God's enemies. Instead of promptly destroying sinners, God continues to shower the good gifts of creation upon them. Since that is the way God acts, those who want to be God's sons and daughters must do likewise. Jesus' concept of the suffering Messiah who goes to the cross as a ransom for sinners underlines most powerfully His teaching on God's way of dealing with enemies.

That the cross is the ultimate demonstration that God deals with God's enemies through suffering love receives its clearest theological expression in Paul: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son" (Romans 5:8, 10, emphasis added). Jesus' vicarious cross for sinners is the foundation and deepest expression of Jesus' command to love one's enemies. As the substitutionary view of the atonement indicates, we are enemies in the double sense that sinful persons are hostile to God and that the just, holy Creator hates sin (Romans 1:18). On the cross, the One who knew no sin was made sin for us sinful enemies (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:10-14).

Divine Child Abuse

But to say this plunges one into the midst of intense modern debate about the nature of the atonement. Is the "violence" of the cross inconsistent with Jesus' teaching on nonviolence? Is the cross divine child abuse? Have we misunderstood Paul's concept of sin? As a result, is the idea that Jesus' death paid the penalty for our sins a mistake? Is the widespread evangelical idea of substitutionary atonement—that is, that Jesus took our sins upon Himself, becoming our substitute so that we might receive salvation—really what the New Testament says? And if Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross is the primary or only purpose of Jesus' coming to earth (as some evangelicals claim), is there any connection between the atonement and Christian ethics? Let's consider some of these questions.

J. Denny Weaver argues that Jesus' death "accomplishes nothing for the salvation of sinners." Weaver insists that Jesus did not come to die and God did not will Jesus' death on the cross. "Satisfaction atonement in any form depends on divinely sanctioned violence," he writes[1]. Such a view, Weaver claims, makes God the author of Jesus' death, which is divine child abuse. It is a picture, Sharon Baker claims, of "a cruel father who demands the blood of an innocent person."[2]

God loves God's enemies. Instead of promptly destroying sinners, God continues to shower the good gifts of creation upon them. Since that is the way God acts, those who want to be God's sons and daughters must do likewise.

Furthermore, it nurtures unhealthy attitudes among Christians, encouraging women to accept abuse and minorities to accept domination. Finally, it involves a heretical doctrine of the Trinity.[3]

I find these views fundamentally unbiblical at many points. They simply ignore large parts of the New Testament. Jesus said he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Gospels, Acts, and the epistles all say that Jesus' death on the cross was according to the eternal will of God (for example, Acts 2:23).

The claim that Jesus' death has no significance for

our salvation contradicts numerous New Testament statements. Paul regularly argues that we are reconciled to God by the death of Christ (Romans 3:21-25, 5:9-10; Galatians 3:13-14).

What about divine child abuse? If we see an angry God bludgeoning the innocent man Jesus, then this surely is divine child abuse. But that ignores the fact that the Trinity is present at the cross. The Father and the Spirit suffer the agony of the cross every bit as much as the Son. The Trinity wills the cross.

What about the argument that we are involved in logical contradiction and a heretical doctrine of the Trinity if we say both that Jesus taught nonviolence and God willed Jesus' death? This would be a logical contradiction only if Jesus condemns violence in precisely the same way that God uses violence at the cross. But that is not the case. The action of an infinite God substituting Godself for sinful persons at the cross is not identical with the action of finite persons using violence against other persons.

It is very important to note that Jesus did not see any contradiction here. Jesus clearly said His followers should love their enemies, thus being children of the heavenly Father (Matthew 5:43-48). But the same Jesus talked about God's wrath against sinners, divine punishment of evildoers, and eternal separation from God (Matthew 25:41-46). Jesus does not find these two ideas to be contradictory.

Nor does the rest of the New Testament. As we will see below, the teaching that God is angry at and punishes sin is all through the New Testament—right alongside the most amazing statements about God's overflowing love. We ought to submit to what Jesus and the New Testament tell us about God punishing sinners and the Son taking our place at the cross rather than reject (on the basis of some alleged logical contradiction) one part of what Jesus and the New Testament teach.

It is also important to remember that the Bible calls on believers to imitate God at some points and not at others. Finite human beings are radically different from God. We do not create out of nothing. Our understanding of how holiness and love, justice and mercy, fit together in perfect harmony is dreadfully incomplete.

One of the places where the New Testament specifically forbids persons from imitating God is just at this point. God, the New Testament teaches more than once, does rightly execute vengeance on evildoers. But the New Testament explicitly says that Christians should not do that (Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30; 1 Peter 2:23). Finite human beings simply do not know enough to rightly combine holiness and love in a way that punishes evil the way God justly does. Yet that does not mean that God should not. Nor does it mean there is a contradiction in the Trinity or in Jesus' own teaching when the incarnate One tells us that the trinitarian God loves God's enemies and also punishes sinners. Only an infinite, all-knowing, all-lovingand holy God knows how holiness and love fit together perfectly in the very being of God.

One final point: Weaver and others, such as Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, seem to think that the satisfaction view of the atonement encourages women to submit passively to abuse and the oppressed to passively accept oppression.[4] But that is to claim too much. One can and should agree that an understanding of the atonement that focuses exclusively on Christ as our substitute on the cross so that we can be forgiven by a holy God does cut the link with ethics. It does make it easy for white racists and male chauvinists to continue in their sin. It does run the danger of nurturing passivity in the face of abuse and oppression. But none of those problems follow if one has a fully biblical understanding of the cross and salvation. Christ not only came to die as a substitute for us. He also came to bring the inbreaking reign of God; to combat and break the power of evil, including sexism and racism; to transform and empower us so that believers now can live according to the norms of Christ's dawning kingdom and join Christ in the battle against all that enslaves, abuses and destroys people.

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The solution to the inadequacies of an exclusively substitutionary view of the atonement is not to throw away what that view rightly teaches. It is rather to see that metaphor in the much larger context of everything the New Testament teaches about the atonement. It is also to place all of that within Jesus' proclamation that

the messianic kingdom has begun and His disciples can and should even now live the life of that new kingdom. The goal of the atonement is not only forgiveness of sins, but also freedom from the power of sin so we can now live the kingdom life that Jesus taught.

C. H. Dodd, "sins," and Sin.

Many scholars have argued that, for Paul, God's wrath is not divine anger at sins committed, but rather an "inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe."[5] What the cross needs to accomplish, therefore, is not forgiveness of sins, but liberation and deliverance, from the enslaving power of Sin. Consequently, the atonement involves Christ conquering evil, not Christ offering Himself as a substitute for our sins.

That the New Testament does sometimes talk of Christ's atoning work in this way is clear (as in John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14-15).[6] But an exclusive emphasis on this understanding of the atonement ignores other clear texts that speak of "sins" in the plural and say that Christ became our substitute to offer sinners forgiveness for our sins. And Christ's substitutionary death happened because God, who is both holiness and love and hates and punishes sins, freely chose out of unfathomable love to accomplish our forgiveness that way.

Frequently Paul talks about sins in the plural (Romans 4:7; 11:27; 1 Corinthians 15:3). Furthermore, Paul quite clearly says that Jesus became a substitute and a curse for us, taking the guilt for our sins upon himself (Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:10-13).

The result? God no longer reckons or imputes our sins to us (2 Corinthians 5:19). When we trust not in our good deeds but in God, "who justifies the ungodly," our faith is credited as justification (Romans 4:4-6). And Paul goes on to explain what that justification means by quoting Psalm 32:1-2, which says that someone is blessed whose sins are forgiven rather than being counted against such a person (Romans 4:7-8). And, as Paul has explained a bit earlier, that justification comes through faith in Jesus' death on the cross (3:21-26).

God's wrath

Does Jesus' cross deal with God's wrath? Does God's wrath require Jesus' death so that God may forgive sinful enemies? And if so, does that contradict Jesus' teaching that God loves God's enemies?

Many modern people want to dismiss the idea of God's wrath and speak only of God's love. But the New Testament speaks of God's wrath at least 30 times (as in Romans 1:18; 2:1-8; 3:5). But does that mean God is angry at sinners?

C. H. Dodd and others, as reported above, have argued that God's wrath is an impersonal process of cause and effect built into the structure of the universe. As Paul says in Romans 1, God gives sinners over to the natural destructive consequences of their evil acts (1:24, 26, 28). The fact that sinful actions produce destructive results does not mean, it is said, that God is angry at sinners. God is only angry at sin.

It is true that sometimes the object of God's wrath is sin itself (as in Romans 1:18). But in other passages, the object of God's wrath is evildoers (Luke 21:23; John 3:36; Romans 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:16). Sin, as David recognized so clearly in confessing his adultery, is first of all an offense against God (Psalm 51:4). After listing a number of sins, Ephesians 5:6 says: "Because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."

Repeatedly the Bible says that death is a central aspect of the punishment of sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). But Christ has taken the curse of sin upon Himself, dying as our substitute so that those who have faith in Christ are now justified, forgiven, and thus free from God's wrath against sinners.

But the crucifixion of God incarnate does not mean that was the only way God could forgive us. It simply reveals in a most amazing way that God is both holiness and love. An infinite, all-knowing, all-loving God could have chosen any number of ways to forgive us.

But does this mean that God could not have forgiven us unless Christ had died as our substitute? Some evangelicals say that. They say that God could not have forgiven us if Christ had not died for us.[7]

I believe the New Testament clearly says that God did accomplish our justification through Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. But I know of no biblical passage claiming that was the only way our holy God could forgive us. That the trinitarian God chose to substitute Godself in a most astounding way underlines that God is both love and holiness. It demonstrates more clearly than anything I can imagine that sin is a terrible reality that our holy God refuses to ignore. But the crucifixion of God incarnate does not mean that was the only way God could forgive us. It

simply reveals in a most amazing way that God is both holiness and love. An infinite, all-knowing, all-loving God could have chosen any number of ways to forgive us.

But does not Hebrews 9:22 say that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"? Some think this verse means that God could not forgive our sins unless Jesus died for us. To interpret the statement in that way, however, ignores the first part of the verse: "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (emphasis added). The text is talking about the situation in the Old Testament. And even then, the text says, there were exceptions.

It is striking that on Israel's annual day of atonement, when the high priest made atonement for all the sins of the Israelites, the goat bearing those sins was not even killed (Leviticus 16:21-22)! Jesus repeatedly declared—on His own authority and without any requirement that sacrifice must be offered at the temple—that people's sins are forgiven (Mark 2:1-12). Clearly, both Testaments teach us that God normally uses sacrifices (animals in the Old Testament, Jesus' death in the New Testament) as God forgives sins, yet also that God sometimes forgives sins without any blood sacrifice.

The fact that God chose to accomplish our forgiveness through the incarnate Son's death on the cross reveals most vividly that God is both love and holiness. But that does not mean God's wrath against sin and sinners is equal to God's love for everyone. God is love in a way that God is not wrath.

Exodus 34:6-7 declares that whereas God's punishment for sin lasts only briefly, God's steadfast love (khesed) endures for a thousand generations! Again and again and again, various psalms declare that God's "love endures forever" (Psalm 106:1, 107:1, 118:1-4). God's "anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime" (30:5).

The Trinity is love from all eternity. Before creation, God had no wrath. God's holy wrath follows human sin. In fact, it is God's love that prompts God's anger at sinners. Precisely because God loves all people with unfathomable love, God is angry when people harm and destroy themselves and others. Mary Schertz rightly says that "the wrath of God is the truth-telling force of God's love."[8] And God's love continues even as God punishes (Jeremiah 9:10). Nowhere is God's love more powerfully revealed than at the cross, where the Trinity somehow experiences crucifixion as the eternal Son becomes a curse for us and dies for our sins.

If crucifixion were the end of the story, then we would need to conclude that God's wrath is at least equal to God's love. But the story continues on Easter morning. The resurrection loudly declares that God's love for sinful enemies far outweighs God's wrath against sinners. The resurrection of the one who died for our sins proves that Jesus was right in teaching that God is like the father of the prodigal son. God stands with arms stretched wide open, eager to forgive our sins and welcome us back as forgiven sons and daughters.

Multiple metaphors of the atonement

I agree with the many theologians and biblical scholars who find all the biblical metaphors of the atonement complementary and important.[9] Rejecting any one metaphor involves ignoring or denying a significant part of what the New Testament says about the atonement. It is only when we take one view and emphasize it in a one-sided or exclusive way that we have problems. Rather, we need to see how the moral, substitutionary, and Christus Victor views of the atonement complement each other. And placing them in the context of the gospel of the kingdom helps us understand Jesus' interrelated roles as teacher, victor, and substitute.

But the fact that God substitutes Godself for us at the cross demonstrates that God's wrath is but for a moment and God's love is everlasting.

As messianic proclaimer of the kingdom of God, Jesus taught a radical ethic of love (the moral metaphor). From His Sermon on the Mount through His death on the cross, He taught and modeled the way of love, even for enemies. Living His costly ethics, however, is possible only for forgiven sinners who are empowered by the Spirit.

As nonviolent messianic conqueror, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom, battling with Satan and all the forces of evil (the Christus Victor metaphor). He conquered diseases and demons in His public ministry. On the cross, He broke the power of Satan, and on Easter morning He arose triumphant over death itself, enabling His disciples, in the power of the Spirit, to live Jesus' kingdom ethics now.

As Isaiah's suffering servant, Jesus died on the cross as our substitute (the substitutionary metaphor). As a

result, we can stand before our holy God despite our sins.

Understanding the atonement in the context of Jesus' gospel of the kingdom underlines the community-building aspect of Jesus' saving work. Jesus not only preached the gospel of the kingdom; He also formed a new kingdom community of women and men, prostitutes and royal servants, tax collectors and respectable folk. A reconciled community is central to God's plan of salvation (Titus 2:14). Scot McKnight is right: the "atonement is all about creating a society in which God's will is actualized—on planet earth, in the here and now."[10] And that includes loving our enemies.

That God incarnate died for sinful enemies is the deepest foundation for Jesus' call to love our enemies. Rather than being a problem for a nonviolent Christian ethic, the atonement provides the most solid foundation. The cross is not an angry God bludgeoning an innocent man. It is the three persons of the Trinity together embracing the agony of Roman crucifixion to accomplish our salvation. That the Trinity chose such awful reality to accomplish our forgiveness demonstrates with unspeakable clarity that God is both holy and loving. But the fact that God substitutes Godself for us at the cross demonstrates that God's wrath is but for a moment and God's love is everlasting.

If one claims that the substitutionary view of the atonement is the only important view, then one truly cuts the link between the atonement and ethics. But that is a one-sided, unbiblical position. It ignores the clear New Testament teaching on the moral and Christus Victor metaphors of the atonement. And it fails to place the cross in the context of Jesus' gospel of the kingdom. At the heart of Jesus' gospel is the teaching that the members of Jesus' dawning kingdom should love their enemies. And the fact that the Trinity somehow embraces Roman crucifixion for sinful enemies is the deepest foundation for that teaching.

It is a tragedy of our time that many of those who appropriate the biblical understanding of Christ's vicarious cross fail to see its direct implications for the problem of war and violence. And it is equally tragic that some of those who emphasize pacifism and nonviolence fail to ground it in Christ's atonement. Since Jesus commanded His followers to love their enemies and then died as the incarnate Son to demonstrate that God reconciles God's enemies by suffering love, any rejection of the nonviolent way in human relations seems to me to involve an inadequate doctrine of the atonement. If God in Christ has reconciled God's enemies by God's suffering servanthood, should not those who want to follow Christ also treat their enemies in the same way?

This essay is excerpted from Ronald Sider's forthcoming *Speak Your Peace: What the Bible Says About Loving Our Enemies* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2020), used with permission. A longer text with elaborate footnotes is in chapter 12 of Ronald J Sider, *If Jesus is Lord: Loving Our Enemies in an Age of Violence* (Grand Rapids:BakerAcademic, 2019).

All footnotes can be found on the web edition of CET at www.christinethicstoday.com

Understanding the Endangered Christian Identity

By Wendell Griffen

Donald Trump's path to the presidency and the overwhelming support from self-identified "conservative evangelical Christians" realizes dangers Cornel West identified in his book, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). Writing during the first term of President George W. Bush, 12 years before Donald Trump swept into the presidency of the United States, West predicted our current situation. He saw it coming.

West understood early that just as demagogic and antidemocratic fundamentalisms have gained prominence in Israel (Zionism) and the Islamic world (religious fundamentalism), so too has a fundamentalist strain of Christianity gained far too much power in our political system, and in the hearts and minds of a swath of its citizens, people I refer to as "Hateful Faithful." Christian fundamentalism is exercising an undue influence over our government's policies, both in the way relations are managed in the Middle East and here at home. Plus, America's political leadership is violating essential principles enshrined in the Constitution. It is also providing support and "cover" for the imperialist aims of empire.

The three dogmas that are leading to the imperial destruction of democracy in America – free market fundamentalism, aggressive militarism, and escalating authoritarianism – are often justified by the religious rhetoric of Christian fundamentalism. Most ironically – and sadly – this fundamentalism is subverting the most profound, seminal teachings of Christianity, those being that we should live with humility, love our neighbors, and do unto others as we would have them do unto us. The battle for the soul of American democracy is, in large part, a battle for the soul of American Christianity. The dominant forms of Christian fundamentalism are a threat to the tolerance and openness necessary for sustaining any democracy.

West connects this development to the Constantinian vs. Prophetic understanding of Christianity. The choice we make between Constantinian Christianity and prophetic Christianity is determinative for the future of American democracy.

America is undeniably a highly religious country, and the dominant religion by far is Christianity, and much of American Christianity is a form of Constantinian Christianity. In American Christendom, the central battle between democracy and empire is echoed in the struggle between this Constantinian Christianity and prophetic Christianity. [*Democracy Matters*, pp. 146-146]

As West correctly observed,

"Constantinian Christianity has always been at odds with the prophetic legacy of Jesus Christ…The corruption of a faith fundamentally based on tolerance and compassion by the strong arm of imperial authoritarianism invested Christianity with an insidious schizophrenia with which it has been battling ever since."

In the United States, the schizophrenia West identified allowed what he termed "strains of Constantinianism" to be "woven into the fabric of America's Christian identity from the start." And West added this observation:

In American Christendom, the central battle between democracy and empire is echoed in the struggle between this Constantinian Christianity and prophetic Christianity. [Democracy Matters, pp. 146-146]

"Most American Constantinian Christians are unaware of their imperialistic identity because they do not see the parallel between the Roman Empire that put Jesus to death and the American Empire they celebrate. As long as they can worship freely and pursue the American dream, they see the American government as a force for good and American imperialism as a desirable force for spreading that good. They proudly profess their allegiance to the flag and the cross not realizing that just as the cross was a bloody indictment of the Roman empire, it is a powerful critique of the American empire, and they fail to acknowledge that the cozy relation between their Christian leaders and imperial American rulers may mirror the intimate ties between the religious leaders and imperial Roman rulers who crucified their Savior." [p.150]

Although I heartily recommend *Democracy Matters*

(and especially Chapter 5 which is titled "The Crisis of Christian Identity in America") to anyone interested in a thorough analysis of the Hateful Faithful mindset, I disagree with Cornel West on his assertion that "American Constantinian Christians are unaware of their imperialistic identity." The elections of Ronald Reagan, George H. Bush, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump conclusively prove that American Constantinian Christians are quite aware of their imperialistic identity. After all, Trump's campaign slogan – "Make America Great Again" – is an explicit adoration of empire.

We need not quibble about whether Franklin Graham, Jerry Falwell, Jr., Robert Jeffress, Mike Huckabee, and other nationally known Constantinian Christians "see the parallel between the Roman empire that put Jesus to death and the American empire they celebrate." That does not mean they are "unaware of their imperialistic identity." Instead, Constantinian Christians knowingly reject the prophetic identity of Jesus. As Cornel West observed,

"Constantinian Christians fail to appreciate their violation of Christian love and justice because Constantinian Christianity in America places such a strong emphasis on personal conversion, individual piety, and philanthropic service and has lost its fervor for the suspicion of worldly authorities and for doing justice in the service of the most vulnerable among us, which are central to the faith."[p.150]

I contend that the Hateful Faithful are heretics because Constantinian Christianity is heretical to the gospel of Jesus. At best, in the face of the disconnect between the teachings of Jesus and the policies of American government, Hateful Faithful claims of allegiance to Jesus are ill-conceived. At worst, their claims of allegiance to Jesus are fraudulent. To claim that Jesus is at the center of one's faith and living, while simultaneously condoning bigotry against immigrants, denial of access to healthcare services to people who are needy, and the mistreatment of vulnerable persons amounts to moral and ethical nonsense.

The hard truth is that the Hateful Faithful are indeed faithful, but not to Jesus nor to American democracy. Like Constantine, they have hijacked the gospel of Jesus and are fraudulently using Christian identity as a disguise for patently unchristian policies and behaviors. I agree with Cornel West as he wrote in *Democracy Matters* near the end of his analysis about the crisis of Christian identity in America:

"To see the Gospel of Jesus Christ bastardized by imperial Christians and pulverized by Constantinian believers and then exploited by nihilistic elites of the American empire makes my blood boil… I do not want to be numbered among those who sold their souls for a mess of pottage – who surrendered their democratic Christian identity for a comfortable place at the table of the American empire while, like Lazarus, the least of these cried out and I was too intoxicated with worldly power and might to hear, beckon, and heed their cries." [p.171-172]

I do not want to be numbered among the Hateful Faithful. Neither does Jesus, judging from what he declared near the end of the Sermon on the Mount: Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

To claim that Jesus is at the center of one's faith and living, while simultaneously condoning bigotry against immigrants, denial of access to healthcare services to people who are needy, and the mistreatment of vulnerable persons amounts to moral and ethical nonsense.

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name." Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers." [Matthew 5:15-23] ■

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Sing, Jesmyn Ward, Sing

By Walter B. Shurden

I am one of those people who hate being late for meetings, church, dinner engagements, or appointments of any kind. And while I get massive heartburn from people who are cavalier about time and who seem to make an occupation out of being tardy, I find myself being repeatedly late at finding good books and good writers.

One of the most important gifts good friends have given me over my lifetime has been to introduce me to their friends. Grady Nutt (blessed be his name!), for example, should have been awarded an honorary Ph.D. in "Introductions." He constantly linked people up with each other. Grady loved for his friends to get to know others of his friends. He held his friends close, but he was not greedy with them. He shared them. He turned them loose to make new friends, to widen the circle.

So I want to introduce you to a friend, a writer at whose doorsteps I have only lately arrived. She has become a mentor. Some of the readers of this journal will surely know her and have read her, but some may not. And even if you have heard her name or seen her book titles, you may not know how relevant she can be for Christian ethics.

Her name is Jesmyn Ward. A native of the deepest part of the South, she grew up on the Gulf Coast in the little rural town of DeLisle, Mississippi. At present, she is a professor of creative writing at Tulane University in New Orleans.

Even though it may be a bit early to say so, literary critics have already crowned Jesmyn Ward as the successor to such bright lights as William Faulkner and Toni Morrison. Ward is one of only six writers to have twice won the National Book Award for Fiction. (You may want to read the previous sentence again.) The other illustrious five are John Cheever, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, William Faulkner and John Updike. Significantly, Ward is the only woman and the only African-American honored in this way.

Jesmyn Ward's name appears thus far on the cover of five books. She published her first book, a novel, *Where the Line Bleeds*, in 2008. The book was a finalist for a couple of prestigious literary awards. In 2011, Ward published *Salvage the Bones*, the first of her novels to win the National Book Award for Fiction. In 2013, she published her third book, *Men We Reaped*. One of two books of non-fiction by Ward, it was an awards nominee for autobiography. *The Fire This Time*, a volume edited by Jesmyn Ward and dedicated to Trayvon Martin, includes a collection of essays and poems by a new generation of writers about race in America. It contains a very important autobiographical chapter about Ward herself. Published in 2016, *Fire* was a New York Times best seller. In 2017, Ward published her fifth, most-celebrated, and enigmatic book: *Sing, Unburied Sing*. Her third novel, *Sing* is her second National Book Award for Fiction.

Someone asked Ward, "As a writer from the South, you are fated to be compared with Faulkner. How do you contend with this legacy?" She answered,

Readers of Christian Ethics Today will profit from her writings, especially her novels. She opened wide---very wide---the doors to the homes of black families in rural Gulf Coast Mississippi, and she graciously ushered me in.

"The first time I read *As I Lay Dying*, I was so awed I wanted to give up. I thought, 'He's done it, perfectly. Why the hell am I trying?' But the failures of some of his black characters---the lack of imaginative vision regarding them, the way they don't display the full range of human emotion, how they fail to live fully on the page---work against the awe and goad me to write."

Here's what Ward did for me and why I think the readers of *Christian Ethics Today* will profit from her writings, especially her novels. She opened wide---very wide---the doors to the homes of black families in rural Gulf Coast Mississippi, and she graciously ushered me in. She gave me a detailed and unvarnished tour of those homes. She introduced me not to stereotypes, but to real black families—families rife with human emotion whose characters are fully alive. These families, plagued by the weight of Southern history and racism, have survived even in the face of some of

life's most terrifying storms, including Katrina. Ward excels at the very place where she thinks Faulkner failed. Her black characters "live fully" on every page. I predict a long life for her characters, especially for Jojo, Leonie, Skeetah and Esch, full-time human beings in her two award-winning novels.

James Cone castigated Reinhold Niebuhr because Niebuhr had "eyes to see" but lacked the "heart to feel" black suffering. Jesmyn Ward gives you both "eyes to see" and a "heart to feel" black suffering. But she does not drown you with black suffering. She also helps you "see" and "feel" black everydayness, black persistence and black hopefulness.

Faulkner created Yoknapatawpha County. Wendell Berry memorialized Port William, KY. Ward localizes her riveting stories in Bois Sauvage, a fictional village for her small hometown of DeLisle, on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. Without Ward's tragic, colorful, rural Mississippi environment and her authentic portrayal of black families, her stories would surely fail to arrest. Before she became a celebrated writer, a hometown friend once asked her what she wanted to write about. "Books about home," she said. "About the hood." And she has done it lyrically, beautifully.

This is Southern stuff. As with much great literature a sense of place is crucial. But also with great literature, universality transcends locality. Universal themes ride piggyback on local ones. Regarding her first National Book Award winner, *Salvage the Bones*, Ward said, "The stories I write are particular to my community and my people, which means the details are particular to our circumstances, but the larger story of the survivor, the savage, is essentially a universal one." In *Salvage the Bones* Ward portrays a black, motherless family bonded by fierce loyalty that survives hurricane Katrina. An absorbing story of humongous loss, not all of it property, *Salvage* hides nothing and reveals much about black families in the South. Katrina literally leaves bones; yet even Katrina is not the last word in *Bois Sauvage*. New life is on the way.

In her most recent novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing,* Ward's themes again go far beyond Bois Sauvage, Mississippi, and the South. Critics claim that *Sing* is a journey novel, a family novel, and a novel about the oppression of Southern history. Surely it is all of these. A raucous journey from the Gulf Coast to Parchman Penitentiary and back dominates the heart of the novel. And as with all of her novels, it is all about the conflicts, struggles and love of a rural black family in the modern South. The Mississippi history in the novel is thick and heavy. It impinges on the present and the two, past and present, can hardly be separated. But *Sing, Unburied, Sing* also croons and chants world-wide aches and hopes.

For me, *Sing* asks and answers the big question: *What kind of world is this?* Ward answers with gripping dialogue, emotional language, and a worldview embracing unmitigated evil and some hope that is tamed but real. Another universal theme, indicated above, is the overwhelming weight of history on the present. We have no key to hit that will delete history. Ward, of course, demonstrates this with Southern history. But what is true in Bois Sauvage, Mississippi, is also true in the most isolated parts of India or the most bucolic areas of Brazil. We are all tangled up in our history.

"Home" is another universal that dominates *Sing.* We should not find this strange in a novel about a black family, but In *Sing* "home" seems accentuated to me. We are all a little bit lost, and we live in a world where we all are trying to find our way home, to a sanctuary of acceptance and security, to a place with a future, to a place where we can "sing," in spite of the ghosts of the past. In some ways, the saddest character in the book is an adolescent ghost named Richie with a gruesome past. At one point, Richie says, "Home ain't always about a place, the house I grew up in is gone. Ain't nothing but a field and some woods, but even if the house was still there, it ain't about that." Then he adds, "Home is about the earth. Whether the earth open up to you. Whether it pull you so close the space between you and it melt and y'all all one and it beats like your heart."

James Cone castigated Reinhold Niebuhr because Niebuhr had "eyes to see" but lacked the "heart to feel" black suffering. Jesmyn Ward gives you both "eyes to see" and a "heart to feel" black suffering. But she does not drown you with black suffering. She also helps you "see" and "feel" black everydayness, black persistence and black hopefulness.

Here is the best guidance I can give you for getting to know and hopefully appreciating and hearing Jesmyn Ward "sing." First, before reading any of her writings, go to YouTube and watch her adorable face and listen to her quiet, humble voice give the 2018

commencement speech at Tulane University, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRvdCAYh4uU.

Take note near the end of her speech of her plaintive, pleading, repetitive line to those Tulane graduates: "Take another step; take another step." As much as sermonic exhortation, these words are heartfelt autobiography. The call to the Tulane students regarding the critical importance of choice and persistence throughout life echoes also in all three of her novels of black families. And at the commencement speech don't miss the proud introduction of Jesmyn Ward by the president of Tulane University.

Second, read Ward's 2013 book of non-fiction, *Men We Reaped.* While I suggest that you read the entire book sequentially, you will find her personal memoir in chapters 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. "All theology is biography," is a legendary dictum. Ward's literature, too, is rooted in her biography; so I urge you to read her life before you read her novels.

After listening to her Tulane speech and reading her memoir, experience her three novels in the order in which they were published. *Where the Line Bleeds*, published in 2008, recounts the lives of fraternal twins who have recently graduated from high school. As she does later in both *Salvage* and *Sing,* Ward flings wide the door and again ushers you into the home of a rural, African-American family on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. You discover the importance of food, what they eat, how they celebrate, the vast reach of "family," the pervasiveness of drugs, the admirable responsibility of some, the enervating irresponsibility of others, absent parents, a blind grandmother, devoutly loved, who feels "her family spinning away from her," and what young black men without a college education face in adulthood. Cascading downward into a predictable violence, the story ends hopefully, somewhat like both *Salvage* and *Sing,* with an open but unknown future. But future there is.

After you read *Where the Line Bleeds*, go to the two novels that have catapulted her into national literary prominence—Salvage *the Bones* maybe my favorite, and her more cryptic *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Like some of the best books ever written, her books are not specifically about religion. But they are all profoundly religious, containing immense and profound ethical themes. Good friend Frank Tupper, and one of my favorite theologians, speaks of the evil in our world in this graphic way: "There are bodies strewn everywhere." This young -American writer from DeLisle, Mississippi, knows those bodies. She can name them, the dead ones as well as the living. But in the face of all the detritus, she urges, "Take another step." Persist. Hang on. Black families have been doing it for years. ■

Walter B. (Buddy) Shurden is Minister-at-Large at Mercer University

From Walter "Buddy" Shurden

"The way we are cutting taxes for the wealthy and social programs for the poor, you'd think that the greedy were needy and the needy were greedy."

Quoting William Sloane Coffin, Credo, 61.

The Black Hebrew Israelites, Identity Construction and the Jersey City Shooting

By Jimmy Butts

Introduction

Religious diversity and religious liberty are considered cultural values in the United States. However, the limitations of these values are tested when they intersect with public morality. Take for example a recent court case involving a baker who argued that his religious beliefs would not allow him to make a cake that he thought would express a message inconsistent with his religious beliefs.[1] This case and ones similar to it suggest a development in the way some U.S. citizens imagine religion; namely that citizens should have the freedom to believe what they choose, but the acts within society that a religious person engages in should be regulated when such beliefs interfere with the lives of others.

An additional layer is added when the person is an African-American. Developed in the midst of oppression, African-American religions often have a theology of action that seeks to inspire resistance to the evils of white supremacy. Reflecting on figures like Nat Turner, Elijah Muhammad, Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr, one should become aware of the way African-American religious thought has caused adherents to implement change in society.

For some, their religious views encouraged the use of violence to obtain the freedom of Black people. Various religious groups developed identities in response to the violence directed toward their African identities through discursive arguments about inferiority.[2] African-Americans have provided their own discourse about their identity and the identity of their oppressors. The fear of some whites about the identity construction these religious groups developed causes uneasiness among some whites as they consider the potential for violence being directed towards them.

The question one may ask, however, is whether the call for violence in some African-American religious thinking arose from the constructed identities within their theology or from some other location? More specifically: Do certain religious views about others necessarily lead to violence?

This is the question addressed in this essay, especially in light of a recent fatal shooting in Jersey City, New Jersey. At least one individual gunman is reported to have been an adherent to the Black Hebrew Israelites, an African-American religious tradition.

David Anderson and Francine Graham began their acts of violence in a local cemetery where they killed Detective Joseph Seals. They then parked a U-Haul van across the street from a kosher supermarket. The suspects entered the store and opened fire. After a shootout with the police who eventually arrived on the scene, both Anderson and Graham were killed. The suspects, however, had already killed Mindel Ferencz, Moshe Deutsch and Miguel Douglass. When the police searched the vehicle used by the suspects, they found a pipe bomb and numerous firearms. Ultimately, four innocent persons were killed, including one officer and three bystanders; another three people were wounded, including two police officers; and the two killers who were themselves killed.[3]

The question one may ask, however, is whether the call for violence in some African-American religious thinking arose from the constructed identities within their theology or from some other location? More specifically: Do certain religious views about others necessarily lead to violence?

This author argues that the Jersey City shooting is an aberration within the interplay between theologies of identity and the use of violence in the African-American religious tradition. Following a brief explication of the origin of the groups that fall under the broad category known as the Black Hebrew Israelites, I will attempt to address that issue, explaining the theological identity articulated about "White Jews" by some Black Hebrew Israelites, and describing how the theologies of other African-American religious traditions affected their treatment of others. This article will then conclude with some final observations about the subject.

Origin of the Black Hebrew Israelites

The title "Black Hebrew Israelites" refers to diverse groups of adherents who typically affirm the notion that the descendants of enslaved Africans who came to the Americas are the progeny of the biblical Israelites. Wisely highlighting the nuance needed to discuss this very complex topic, Judith Weisenfield, professor of religion at Princeton University, argues that "there's no such thing as 'the' Black Hebrew Israelites." She continues, "There are lots of different theological and political orientations within that broader umbrella."[4]

Scholars of these religious communities identify at least two strains of the Black Hebrew Israelite movement. Weisenfield and Jacob Dorman argue that the first period of Black Israelite religious formation occurred between the 1890s and the 1920s.[5] In response to a vision he claims to have received from God about African-Americans being the true descendants of the biblical Hebrews, Frank Cherry established the oldest Black Jewish organization in the United States called "The Church of the Living God, the Pillar Ground of Truth for All Nations;" founded in Chattanooga, Tennessee, around 1886.[6]

Another early proponent of this movement was a man named William Sanders Crowdy, who also claimed to have received visions. He taught that Black people in America were the descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Based on this central claim, Crowdy established "The Church of God and Saints of Christ" in 1896. It must be noted that these two men claimed to have received these revelations during the era of lynching and the rise of Jim Crow in the United States.[7] One also should be aware of Rabbi Wentworth Arthur Matthews who similarly taught that black people descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel. He founded "The Commandment Keepers Church of the Living God the Pillar and Ground of the Truth and the Faith of Jesus Christ" in 1919.[8]

The emergence of militant black nationalism led to the second strain of Black Hebrew Israelites in the 1960s and 1970s.[9] These modern expressions of Black Hebrew Israelism flow from groups that began in New York and Chicago. A multitude of diverse groups represent this movement, but the group that has the greatest relevance for our current discussion was developed in 1969 by Abba Bivens. He rejected Rabbi Matthews' Old Testament-only teachings and founded a school called "The Israelite School of Torah." The school was located at 1 West 125th Street in Harlem. Consequently, the Black Hebrew Israelite groups that descend from this school have been called "1 Westers."[10]

From the early days of Jim Crow to the present, Black Hebrew Israelism has been a part of the African-American religious tradition. One must distinguish these groups from black people who converted to Judaism.[11] While there may be some slight overlap in certain areas (acceptance of sacred scripture, participation in religious ceremonies), those who developed the Black Hebrew Israelite traditions were establishing a movement that was, in many ways, distinct from what some describe as orthodox Judaism. In fact, many of these groups developed an unflattering view of orthodox Jews.

The Imposters: "White Jews"

While the Black Hebrew Israelites have declared that they are the true biblical Hebrews, many of them also argue that "White Jews" are not true descendants of Israel. Some of the Black Hebrews in the early 20th century argued that they were the only true Israelites and that European Jews were really descendants of the Edomites.[12] Similarly, some of the modern strains of Hebrew Israelites emphasize the illegitimacy of White Jews.[13]

From the early days of Jim Crow to the present, Black Hebrew Israelism has been a part of the African-American religious tradition. One must distinguish these groups from black people who converted to Judaism.

One example is a Hebrew Israelite who goes by the name Prophet Travis Refuge. He contends that those professed Jews who are occupying the land of Israel today are imposters; they are fake Jews. He argues that any pure caucasian claiming to be a child of Israel is a lying counterfeit.[14] Refuge cites Revelation 12:9 and argues that the deception of Satan refers to the identity of the Jews.[15] He explains:

"There are demons working behind the scenes to promote deception amongst God's people and the world. It's all to promote the furtherance of the kingdom of Satan through the use of the fake Jews bringing more souls to hell while establishing a world where Satan is worshipped as God."[16]

Not only are the "fake Jews" allied with Satan, according to Refuge, they are the children of Satan.[17] Repeating some of the traditional stereotypes about Jews, Refuge argues that they own the major corpora-

tions of the world banks, they have large amounts of financial wealth, and they lied about the holocaust in order to gain money.[18] Moreover, they are taking control of the highest political offices and key legislative positions in the United States, according to Refuge.[19]

Refuge also maintains that when the true Israelites resettle in Israel, they will be involved in military campaigns of revenge toward the nations that mistreated them.[20] Refuge is apparently pointing to an eschatological event that will happen through divine intervention.

One may wonder how theological constructs like the one above may affect the way its adherents treat others. Can a theology that identifies a people as an evil race trigger acts of violence toward that people? Furthermore, can the promise of eschatological vengeance encourage attacks on people today by believers? To these issues we now turn.

Theological Anthropology and Violence

While diverse African-American religious groups have held unique, unflattering views of white people, they have usually allowed violence only in self-defense. For example, Elijah Muhammad taught members of the Nation of Islam that white people were grafted devils and inherently evil. Furthermore, he argued that whites would be destroyed in the last days. However, Muhammad did not permit his followers to attack whites unless they were first attacked by them.[21]

Similarly, James Cone, founder of Black Liberation Theology, argued that the White Church is unchristian and the contemporary manifestation of the antichrist.[22] He also maintains that God will fully liberate his people in the end of the world.[23] However, Cone suggests that oppressed black people should only use violence against whites when they feel that the violence of their condition is more deplorable than revolutionary violence would be. He goes further and argues black people and white people should attempt to reconcile with one another.[24]

Both Muhammad and Cone espouse a theology that is critical of white identity. However, neither theological tradition advocates for violence against white people. In fact, when asked about the Jersey City tragedy, one of the Black Israelite leaders named General Yahanna of "The Israelite School of Universal Practical Knowledge," said that the actions of the shooters did not represent the views of the Black Hebrew Israelites.[25] The actions of these two individual shooters in Jersey City, therefore, seem to diverge from the African-American religious tradition.

Conclusion

While the theology of the Black Hebrew Israelites seems to have played a role in the Jersey City tragedy, it is not clear that these actions are a necessary consequence of Black Hebrew "orthodoxy." It is true that "White Jews" are viewed by some Black Hebrew Israelites as imposters, evil and children of the devil. However, other religious traditions exist within the African-American community with similar views about white people. Those traditions and theologies notwithstanding, these groups do not support violence toward white people outside of self-defense.

While history demonstrates a link between unfavorable image projection and violence, the history of the Black Hebrew Israelites does not suggest the same for them. Unlike groups who have a long history of violence accompanying their rhetoric, African-American religious traditions seem to create identities for themselves and their oppressors for reasons outside of promoting violence, one being psychological. This does not mean that one should wait for a certain number of attacks to begin challenging certain ideologies. Anti-semitic rhetoric throughout Jewish history is a sad and deplorable reality. It is also apparent that terrorist attacks like the one in Jersey City are often rooted in ideologies that negatively project certain identities on groups of people. This situation opens the door for numerous ethical queries.

Both Muhammad and Cone espouse a theology that is critical of white identity. However, neither theological tradition advocates for violence against white people.

Christians are called to engage in discussions about religious freedom and the morality of identity construction as implemented against groups that are spurned and considered objectionable. Negative identity assigned to others, in some cases, appears to influence acts of terrorism against that same group.

When religious freedom is defined in ways that allows for the demonization of others, even to the point of eager anticipation for apocalyptic violence, where is the line drawn between religious liberty and irreligious bigotry? What then is true religious freedom?

The answers are nuanced. Legislation and court decisions are not satisfactory avenues to address such nuance. Fervent believers, however misguided, sometimes commit horrible crimes of violence. Those acts

can lead us to easily paint with a broad brush legitimate religious beliefs negatively, contributing to the "tribalism" which so infects our political-theological discourse nowadays. While these questions are vitally important, one must also ensure a carefully nuanced understanding of incidents such as the Jersey City shooting.

For example, Dorman argues that the Southern Poverty Law Center's labelling of some Black Hebrew Israelite organizations as hate groups is highly problematic from the perspective of a scholar.[26] While trying not to take away from the horror of the Jersey City shooting, we must recognize the way these two terrorists are anomalies within the African-American religious tradition. ■

Jimmy Butts is currently a student at the University of Louisville working on his PhD in Pan-African Studies. His particular research focus is on Malcolm X and Africana religions. He holds a A.B. in Bible, a B.A. in Christian Ministry, and a MDiv. in Islamic Studies. He has written broadly on subjects like Islam, the Black Hebrew Israelites, the Black Church, and other issues. He is married to his beautiful wife Brittany and is the father of Selah

All footnotes can be found on the web edition of CET at www.christinethicstoday.com

"One must be careful of books, and what is inside them, for words have the power to change us." —

Cassandra Clare, The Infernal Devices

Lessons about Pastoral Care from a Lame Duck ACPE Certified Educator

By Paul E. Robertson

1. Compassion makes up for a host of undeveloped pastoral skills.
2. If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it.
3. There are always at least three options, though they may not all be good.
4. Every response we make, in fact, leads the conversation.
5. Presence—it's powerful stuff; we mix with humanity in order to take divinity as far as it will go; you are a glimpse of God's face
6. Presence is not a skill set. Presence is what spills from one at home in his or her own skin. Or at the very least, one who has given up the need to impress or fix or please or jump hoops for laurels.
7. Healing is as important as curing, maybe even more so.
8. Joining with is better than fixing or advising.
9. Listening creates a sacred space. It is the oldest and perhaps the most powerful tool of healing.
10. Our greatest gift is our wholeness, not our expertise.
11. Better to empathize then just sympathize.
12. When you choose to visit someone twice, you are choosing not to visit someone else once.
13. It's not our task to provide easy answers, but to explore the mystery; questions are not always questions.
14. It's more about the journey than it is the destination.
15. In the beginning was relationship.
16. The art of pastoral conversation depends on the minister's ability to recognize and appropriately respond to the pastoral opportunities or doors to ministry that present themselves in dialoging during any given moment in time.
17. You can't go with patients where you can't go with yourself.
18. The capacity to listen to the non-sense of suffering is a hard-won skill.
19. Words don't have meaning, they have usage (context, intent and interpretation).
20. Titles are like tails on a pig: they are real cute, but don't add any meat to the table.
21. Hospitals are anxiety houses.
22. The foundational skill needed to establish relationship is active listening.
23. Feelings are not right or wrong; they just are (mostly so).
24. You can only help others to the extent that you take care of yourself (self-care).
25. Don't cut the leg off a three-legged chair, unless you have time to put a new one on.
26. Don't overestimate what you can accomplish in a single visit. But don't underestimate the potential impact of what can happen in a single visit. Don't go into a room expecting to change the world; be humble and grateful when someone's world is changed by your care.
27. It's okay to make mistakes; it's not okay to not learn from them.
28. The goal is not to be perfect, but to be on a journey.
29. It's okay to say, "This sucks."
30. Religious clichés are not helpful; as caregiver, we need to unpack churchy, theological, religious "code" language.
31. Theological language is analogical; we need to be careful lest we make idols out of theological words or propositions.
32. God's identification with our pain signals a fundamental change in human history. A God who suffers alongside us, who grieves with us, who is moved by our pain, who shows up is what people need.
33. A hard truth to accept is that we are mortal. None of us escapes death. We will all exit life through the cemetery. At some point, the question is not, "Will someone get better?" but "How quickly and how much worse will they get before the end?" Some diagnoses are final.
34. Learn how to hug your tombstone. Those who have grasped their mortality are better able to live it.
35. A challenge for pastoral caregivers is helping people to have a "good" death.
36. "And it is still true: No matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together." (Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Need to Know…")*

Good pastoral care can often be achieved
by demonstrating compassion,
providing a safe space for sharing,
listening deeply,
and connecting soul-to-soul--
with no agenda other than humanity.
Great pastoral cares involves careful spiritual assessment
and provides informed spiritual interventions. ■

Paul E. Robertson MDiv, PhD, ACPE Certified Educator

Prayers and Thoughts: American Politics and Jesus

By Patrick Anderson, editor

A good friend of mine, missions leader Jim Smith, sat with me and a group of praying Christians several months after the attacks of September 11, 2001. We were fervently praying that somehow the earthly powers that be would avert what appeared to be an imminent war. We prayed long and hard, asking God's protection for the many men, women and children who apparently were directly in the sights of missile-launchers, bombers, and invading ground forces of America and her allies.

As we concluded our time of prayer, Jim told me: "Last week I was visiting our brothers and sisters in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. They were praying just as fervently as we are that rather than avert war, that God would lead the earthly powers that be to invade with overwhelming military might and vanquish the nations responsible for the 9-11 attacks."

Two diametrically opposite entreaties from two groups of people claiming kinship with God Almighty through Jesus Christ, are sent heavenward. What must God think? The September 2001 attacks, and the seemingly endless wars that continue in the aftermath, still divide religious people. Wendell Griffen's essay in this issue of *Christian Ethics Today* explains how Cornel West ties the duality of Christian belief to the conflict between "Constantinian Christians" and "prophetic Christians." Perhaps that explains it. It is confusing.

After a season of family gatherings and much reading, I am struck by how differently self-identified Christians in America understand what it means to be a Christian and what priorities are shared by Jesus. For instance, consider how a few questions elicit opposite answers:

1. What puts America directly in the path of the wrath of God?
   Republican, Trump supporting white evangelicals: Gay marriage, abortion, socialism.
   Democratic, Trump opposing, Christians: racial injustice, family separation, income inequality.
2. Should Christians be concerned about global warming or any other ecological calamity?
   Most *Republican, Trump supporting white evangelicals*: Not really. The environment does not matter. Jesus will return to earth, probably before 2050. The earth is going to be burned up no matter what we do, and faithful Christians will not be here to experience it.
   Democratic, Trump opposing, Christians: Yes. We are instructed by God to care for the earth. Scientific facts inform us that the earth is warming due to human behavior, and that the warming will cause incalculable suffering. One's eschatological beliefs do not alter scientific facts.
3. What is the character of President Donald Trump and what does it matter?
   Trump's (white) evangelical Christian followers: Trump's personal character does not matter. God has used sinful men to lead God's fight for God's plan before, as with King Cyrus of Persia. Trump is, like Cyrus, anointed by God and thus has divine legitimacy, but he has no obligation to live out Christian principles in his personal life. Trump is a warrior, God's warrior. We just want him to win the fight. Christian support for him is mandatory and opposition to him is sinful. Trump is God's Chosen One, a savior who will deliver America from its transgressions.
   Trump-opposing Christians: Trump embodies the values Jesus disparaged. He divides rather than unites, his dishonesty is overwhelming, his arrogance and narcissism will lead to war, his disdain for science will lead to the destruction of God's creation, his love of money and power are antithetical to Christianity.

Many other serious questions are answered from opposite perspectives by Americans who claim Christianity as their religion. It is amazing how a man who has never demonstrated any affinity for Jesus has divided professing Christians into Pro-Trump and Anti-Trump camps, placing himself squarely in the divide of orthodoxy. ■

From Our Bookshelves…

Recommended Reading

Conversations with My Grandchildren about God, Religion, and Life

By William Powell Tuck, Energion Publications, 2019
Reviewed by Fisher Humphreys

William Tuck possesses broad pastoral experience and deep theological understanding, and his brief, readable book is a treasure. It is a record of conversations he had with three of his grandchildren when they were youths. In the charming final chapter of the book Tuck answers questions asked more recently by his two youngest grandchildren when they were four and eight years old.

Tuck's doctorate is in theology, and several of the topics of the conversations are theological: God, creation, evil, the Incarnation, atonement, the resurrection of Jesus and his future appearing on earth, and life after death. Others topics are moral: forgiveness, love, hope, global warming, racism, drugs and alcohol, casual sex, and homosexuality. Others are harder to categorize: the meaning of life, the will of God, prayer, atheism, the Jewishness of Jesus, how Christianity has changed, other world religions, depression and suicide, aging and retirement, and the loss of loved ones.

Altogether Tuck deals with 37 topics in 137 pages, which means that on average each topic receives fewer than four pages. This brevity contributes immensely to the readability of the book. It is readable also because it has been so carefully organized, Tuck's prose is crystal clear, and Tuck tells interesting stories, uses apt metaphors, and presents reasoned and sensible arguments for his ideas. He is an honest and truthful writer; he doesn't sidestep difficulties, and when questions come up that he cannot answer, he admits that he can't. The book is intensely biblical, and Tuck always takes account of the historical setting of the biblical text—there is no proof-texting here! All of this makes the book trustworthy as well as readable. Tuck treats every topic with the seriousness it deserves, so what he says about every topic deserves to be taken seriously.

Very young children sometimes ask questions that are profound, but they are not experienced enough to process a profound answer. That is not true of youth, and Tuck never talks down to his older grandchildren (or his readers). For example, responding to the question of whether God's existence can be proved, Tuck summarizes four classical proofs for the existence of God; the summaries are masterpieces of brevity and clarity. He then adds that even though the proofs work in a rational sense, "it is very doubtful that a person who is personally devoid of any religious desires or convictions could be convinced [by them] that God exists." We know God only through a personal commitment.

Tuck believes in the Mystery of God. He also believes that God is a personal Being who created the world and transcends it but providentially guides it and acts within it. God is wise, powerful, faithful, and above all, love. God's purpose in creation is to bring into being persons who are capable of having loving fellowship with God and with each other.

The book is intensely biblical, and Tuck always takes account of the historical setting of the biblical text—there is no proof-texting here! All of this makes the book trustworthy as well as readable. Tuck treats every topic with the seriousness it deserves, so what he says about every topic deserves to be taken seriously.

On the subject of creation and science, Tuck affirms both the standard scientific account of the universe and the Bible's theological account of the world as God's creation. Asked about an atheism that calls upon science for support, Tuck argues that "to say that the world came into being as an accident is to move from the realm of science to that of religion. Science has no more right to give answers in the field of religion than religion has to dictate scientific views." Later he adds,

"No young persons should be forced into an either/or decision: either God and the Bible or science."

Tuck's account of miracles is striking. He thinks that God created not only matter but natural laws that govern the behavior of matter. Miracles are not breaks or changes in those natural laws but rather applications of natural laws that are unknown to us. In support of this he points out that people who lived a century or two ago would certainly think that the air-conditioned houses, airplanes, television, and smart phones we have today are miracles. They would be right, but these things are not breaks in God's natural laws but applications of natural laws that were not understood two centuries ago but are understood today.

Tuck's book includes both traditional and progressive views. For example, he advises his grandchildren not to abuse drugs and alcohol and not to engage in casual sex. He is not in the least legalistic about this; it is the destructive power of these behaviors that concerns him. His view of homosexuality is less traditional. Because same-sex attraction is inherent rather than chosen, gays should be loved and accepted as they are, and reparative therapy to change their sexual orientation is a failure of love. Tuck gently points out the church's foot-dragging on this issue, and he reminds his readers of the wisdom of First John: you cannot love God if you do not love your brother and sister.

In a brief section on attending church, Tuck affirms the value of sacred spaces while also acknowledging that it is possible to worship in any place. He writes: "Worship is not something God does for us; it is something we do for God. Worship gives us the occasion to acknowledge our thanksgiving for all God's blessings, offer our adoration to God, confess our sins, sense God's forgiving love and grace, and seek to find direction for our daily living. To me, worship is as essential as air for breathing."

This book is very wise as well as very informative. It is the product of a lifetime of engagement with life and with books by a pastor-teacher who thinks Jesus brought the good news of God to all the world. I recommend it enthusiastically. It is available on Amazon. ■

The World In Black and White: A Memoir of the Civil Rights Wars

by Clyde E. Fant
(available at: Amazon.com Services LLC, 2019).

Reviewed by Floyd Craig

"This book belongs on the shelf with the work of Will Campbell and Alice Walker, powerful work from a writer who has, as Rilke wrote, lived the questions."

When I read a statement like that by novelist Mark Powell, author of *The Sheltering*, the book he is referring to is not one I can pass up. The book's other strong endorsements are also impressive: Bill Moyers, author and journalist; U.S. Senator Max Cleland (Ret.); novelists Sandra Novak, author of *Precious*, and *Everyone But You*; and Clyde Edgerton, author of

"Two men sat in the dark under the spreading branches of a mimosa tree. The only light came from the dying embers of a burned cross. One of the men had a rifle across his lap. The other man was his neighbor, a local pastor. They were watching the slow circling of sedan with its headlights off. The Ku Klux Klan was on the move again. But why had the Klan burned a cross on the lawn of the manager of a local shoe store?"

Walking Across Egypt.

So, in a single night I read all 357 pages of this exciting new book. Written by a longtime friend, Clyde E. Fant, *The World in Black and White: A Memoir of the Civil Rights Wars* proved to be as good as advertised, maybe better. I was able to obtain it from Amazon as both a paperback and an eBook.

Clyde Fant shares in graphic detail previously unreported, and never-to-be-forgotten, experiences during the heat of the Civil Rights conflict (1958-66). This is personal and close to the bone writing, the kind of writing Fred Buechner had in mind when he once wrote, "Every good story is written in blood." It will be difficult to ever think again about those years without remembering both the heroic, and the grievous, actions of the churches, pastors and laypersons which are retold in this memoir.

This story brought back many poignant memories of my own time with the Christian Life Commission, SBC, a casualty of the fundamentalist takeover. During those twelve years, I was privileged to prepare the Race Relations Sunday materials for SBC churches and agencies. Memories of the hostile responses to the CLC's efforts were again brought into sharp focus as I read *The World in Black and White*.

Clyde Fant was not yet thirty years old when he had to challenge the racist views of older pastors, denominational leaders, the head of the statewide White Citizens Council, and even the president of the local university, a member of his church. Written with conviction and wry humor, *The World in Black and White* is a memoir, as Sen. Max Clelland said, "that reads like a novel." Fant tells his story with frankness and honesty, as he reveals failures as well as successes—the fears, the compromises, the frequent doubts bordering on despair—along with the hard-nosed confrontations and political know-how learned from his distinguished father to navigate this racial storm.

A brief excerpt:

"Two men sat in the dark under the spreading branches of a mimosa tree. The only light came from the dying embers of a burned cross. One of the men had a rifle across his lap. The other man was his neighbor, a local pastor. They were watching the slow circling of sedan with its headlights off. The Ku Klux Klan was on the move again. But why had the Klan burned a cross on the lawn of the manager of a local shoe store?"

The book seems to divide itself into three sections: First, Fant's early life influences, his famous father, and his unlikely call to the ministry; next, his experiences in his first church, a rural parish where he spent five years; and finally as pastor of a university church, and his conflicts with the White Citizens Council and certain state denominational leaders. But if you are familiar with Fant's other writings, or his sermons and lectures, you already know that humor will find often its place in the story, even in the most trying days.

Why read this book? I believe the most important contribution of this memoir of the racial wars is that it can provide insight and guidance for the future. *The World in Black and White* is more than a searing examination of our past. It also lets us know what we're facing today in our own divided communities and what can help save us. That makes it worth reading. ■

Floyd A. Craig is former director of public relations for the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (no longer an agency of the SBC) and the North Carolina Governor's staff, now retired.

The Angela Project at Work: A Case Study in Transformative Pedagogy

By Lewis Brogdon

Last year, I served as a guest editor for a special edition of *Christian Ethics Today*. The issue focused on the work of **The Angela Project**, giving focused attention to the topics of privilege and reparations. I am thankful to God and Dr. Patrick Anderson for the opportunity to bring the issue to print. I am also thankful for Dr. Kevin Cosby's vision of the Angela Project, the leaders in *EmpowerWest*, and the denominational leaders in three major Baptist bodies for the prophetic witness they model during a time many Christian churches have been co-opted by the American civic and cultural empire and bowed their knees to Caesar.

Since then, I have sought to find the best way to follow up that series of essays and to identify the appropriate tone to strike so readers can move from understanding to action. I pose these questions because I want to strike a balance. It is important to give a sober and honest assessment of the impact of this history and its manifold manifestations today. Doing this honors the humanity and suffering many have experienced and reflects Christian values like neighbor love and compassion. In addition to these values, I draw on the Christian belief in hope that is ultimately rooted in God and not ourselves as an important resource in addressing systemic issues that are centuries old. Hope is important because we mortals are easily overwhelmed by the negativity of our shared history, and so balance is essential. Yes, readers needs their eyes and minds opened in a way that invites them to see the painful history and present injustice. Readers are also invited to join God's work of doing justice and showing compassion to the vulnerable. This is the work we are called to take up - some maybe for the first time in their life and others to continue.

To encourage next steps, I want to share other aspects of work being done by **The Angela Project** to make a difference. Much of this important work is taken up by *EmpowerWest*, in the city of Louisville. A group of black and white clergy, under the leadership of Dr. Kevin Cosby, meet on the campus of a Christian Historic Black College and University (HBCU) to address injustice and to empower the west end of Louisville. EmpowerWest brings two great resources together to do justice work – Christian faith and educational space. The synergy between church leaders and educational institutions is unique and has resulted in many impactful educational programs and advocacy opportunities that change thinking and challenge systems at work in a deeply segregated city. The EmpowerWest model has been celebrated and emulated in other cities and for that we give thanks to God. This model of bringing church leaders together in an educational institution to think intentionally about ways to correct the history of racism really spoke to me so I decided to emulate this model in my position as a dean and college professor at Bluefield College in Virginia last year.

This model of bringing church leaders together in an educational institution to think intentionally about ways to correct the history of racism really spoke to me so I decided to emulate this model in my position as a dean and college professor at Bluefield College in Virginia last year.

During the spring semester, I focused on the work and more importantly, the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. My focus resulted in two major initiatives: a special one-day program for the community to engage King's thought and a special topics class on the Life and Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. Both the community event and class were held at Bluefield College, a small Baptist liberal arts college in a small town less than four hours from Jamestown Virginia - where black's history in this country began. A community worship service and panel discussion was held in January to hear Dr. Johnny Hill lecture on King's idea of the beloved community. We also discussed King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. This event was covered by the local news media.

In addition to this, the college offered a special top-

ics class that I taught. Part of my rationale for focusing on King is my belief he is not only America's greatest theologian, he is arguably the greatest Baptist theologian. As I have worked to advance the aims and message of **The Angela Project** for the past three years, I thought that a class that gives students and the local community an opportunity to study the writings of King, a leader who knew that slavery and segregation impacted America nearly a century after the Civil War in the fifties and sixties, would provide one way to advance the educational aspects of this project and also provide space for God to bring transformation in a small way.

Focusing on King made sense because he often made explicit references to slavery and its impact on the African American community and America in his writings and speeches. Some key quotes here illustrate his deep belief that slavery and racism's effect was real:

The first Negroes landed on the shores of this nation in 1619, one year ahead of the Pilgrim Fathers. They were brought here from Africa and, unlike the Pilgrims, they were brought against their will, as slaves. Throughout the era of slavery the Negro was treated in inhuman fashion. He was considered a thing to be used, not a person to be respected. He was merely a depersonalized cog in a vast planation machine. The famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 well illustrates his status during slavery. In this decision the Supreme Court of the United States said, in substance, that the Negro is not a citizen of the United States; he is merely property subject to the dictates of the owner. After his emancipation in 1863, the Negro still confronted oppression and inequality. It is true that for a time, while the army of occupation remained in the South and Reconstruction ruled, he had a brief period of eminence and political power. But he was quickly overwhelmed by the white majority. Then in 1896, through Plessy v. Ferguson decision, a new kind of slavery came into being. In this decision the Supreme Court of the nation established the doctrine of "separate but equal," without the slightest intention to abide by the "equal." So the Plessy doctrine ended up plunging the Negro into the abyss of exploitation where he experienced the bleakness of nagging injustice (*Nonviolence and Racial Justice* 1957).

It is true that many white Americans struggle to attain security. It is also a hard fact that none had the experience of Negroes. No one else endured chattel slavery on American soil. No one else suffered discrimination so intensely or so long as the Negroes. In one or two generations the conditions of life for white Americans altered radically. For Negroes, after three centuries, wretchedness and misery still afflict the majority… Despite new laws, little has changed in his life in the ghettos. The Negro is still the poorest American – walled in by color and poverty. The law pronounces him equal, abstractly, but his conditions of life are still far from equal to those of other Americans…The tragedy of the present is that many newly prosperous Americans contemplate that the unemployable Negro shall live out his life in rural and urban slums, silently and apathetically (*Negroes Are Not Moving Too Fast* 1964).

Fivescore years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But one hundred years later, the Negro is not free; one hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination; one hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in a vast ocean of material prosperity; one hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. (*I Have a Dream* 1963).

There is an Old Testament prophecy of the "sins of the Fathers being visited upon the third and fourth generations." Nothing could be more applicable to our situation. America is reaping the harvest of hate and shame planted through generations of educational denial, political disenfranchisement and economic exploitation of its black population.

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exploitation of its black population. Now, almost a century removed from slavery, we find the heritage of oppression and racism erupting in our cities, with volcanic lava of bitterness and frustration pouring down our avenues…In spite of years of national progress, the plight of the poor is worsening…White America has allowed itself to be indifferent to race prejudice and economic denial. It has treated them as superficial blemishes, but now awakes to the horrifying reality of a potentially fatal disease. The urban outbreaks are "a fire bell in the night," clamorously warning that seams of our entire social order are weakening under strains of neglect. The American people are infected with racism – that is the peril…But they do not have a millennium to make changes. (*Showdown for Nonviolence* 1968, written earlier)[1]

King's emphasis on the material effects of slavery and racism and the Baptist connection between him and the three Baptist bodies committed to this work align with **The Angela Project** in a special way.

What we have done in Louisville and Bluefield can be replicated. In a sense, what I hope to inspire you to do is follow a simple yet profound principle Paul taught the Corinthians. One event plants; another one provides water.

More importantly, this special topics class, using the *EmpowerWest* model, provided educational space for a serious study and deep thinking about the impact of slavery on America during the 1950s and 1960s.

I want you to read the pieces of writing that came out of my work on Martin Luther King, Jr. at Bluefield College because they reinforce the important truth that God is already at work in this project and using it to make a difference in this country and the witness of Christianity. The writing from four student's final reflection papers on the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. provide powerful examples of the small difference **The Angela Project** is making in the world. The students are not seminary students or religious scholars but members of a local community who came to a college class to learn and be impacted by King's work and thought. Some of the student writings are found on the website version of this article, at www.christianethistoday.com The students' writings will educate but also inspire us all to see a hopeful way to look ahead.

Final Word on the Angela Project at Work

It is evident here that in small ways the work we all set out to do three years ago is taking root and growing in small yet powerful ways. Conferences are being organized and attended by hundreds of people. Educational forums and panels with top scholars and leaders are being convened to deconstruct this complex history and manifold ways it impacts and impairs our world. News agencies are covering these events. Insightful books and journal articles are being written and read. Classes on college campuses are being taught and students are both unlearning and learning this history in ways that challenge them to see things differently. I hope you are inspired to emulate this work where you live and serve. What we have done in Louisville and Bluefield can be replicated. In a sense, what I hope to inspire you to do is follow a simple yet profound principle Paul taught the Corinthians. One event plants; another one provides water. But God brings growth and change. That is how we take up work we hope will set a new trajectory for the next four hundred years.

There are signs of change around us. We have not done anything substantial to date but it is important to lift up change and impact. May we draw on it in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead to repair the damage done to African Americans and the Christian witness, amen. ■

1 All quotes taken from James M. Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), 5-6, 36, 71, 176-77.

Dr. Lewis Brogdon is a Visiting Professor of Preaching and Black Church Studies at the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky in Louisville Kentucky.

Comparing Political Direct Mail*

Liberals emphasize pity. Conservatives emphasize fear.

On the one hand…direct mail seeks to make the recipient feel sorry for the person starving to death, or in jail, or being the victim of big business or war or government or disease or famine or injustice. The Poster Child is someone you are supposed to feel sorry for.

On the other hand…The Poster Child for Conservatives is ME, MYSELF and I. The person who tears open the envelope already has a self-image of victimhood, so gin that up. Scare him.

Only, what does the white, male, American really have to fear? He has no real worries while enjoying the lowest taxes than any country anyone would want to live in, has most of the world's money, sits on every board, holds every office, runs courts, schools, churches, police, military.

Deep down he knows he did nothing to have all the good stuff except be born white, male, American. Why should he allow someone to take all this away that he got so easily?

So, make him afraid of the poor kids across the tracks, everyone who is not white, male and American. Tell him those kids are smarter, hungrier, meaner than he is. And they are on their way over right now to grab all his toys.

NRA, Religious Right….it is all about fear. The blacks, foreigners, liberals are going to take away your job, ruin your neighborhood, trash your schools, spend all your tax dollars on food stamps instead of bombs to keep ISIS away.

Fortunately, I can keep you safe by keeping the women barefoot and pregnant, closing off the border, and throwing the bastards in jail.

Pity and fear. Fear is a lot easier to work with. Stir up the natives. Scare them.

These are some of the words put in the mouth of Travis McGee's friend, Meyer, in John D. MacDonald's novel, The Lonely Silver Rain

Incoming.....From Our Mailbag:

Wonderful journal! Keep up the prophetic witness! Charlie Johnson, Texas

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Here is our gift of support, in honor of Caroline and Fisher Humphreys. Anne and N.S. Xavier, Alabama

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*Dear Pat: Your work editing Christian Ethics Today makes my ministry sharper, more thoughtful, and lifts my vision…*Wendell Griffen, Arkansas

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…I appreciate receiving each issue…keep up the good work…. Leroy Seat, Missouri

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Thanks for "good" reading. Caby and Betty Byrne, Mississippi

…Let me thank you from all my heart for the strengthening of CET's articles under your editorship, especially with the emphasis on the social justice of the Prophets and Jesus applied so cogently to the situations of our own times. In January, I mean to begin a study of Luke with women in a little patriarchal country church guided by those fine CET articles….God bless you and CET in the New Year. Pat Gillis, Georgia

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I have recently read a copy of Christian Ethics Today and would like to request these names be added to your mailing list…. Oyette Chambliss, Alabama

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…We appreciate every issue. We would also appreciate it if you would send the journal to… Tom and Judy Ginn, North Carolina

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Thank you for your mission and for sending me a copy of CET… Billy Hargrove, Georgia

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The enclosed check is in memory of my parents, Donna and Preston Whorton, longtime friends of Foy Valentine. Penny Whorton Wells, Ohio

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Thank you for all you do through CET as a thought provoking tool in this challenging world. Larry Lawhon, North Carolina

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I value and laud your publication. James C. Miller, Rhode Island

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I am enclosing a contribution with thanks for my receiving your wonderful Christian Ethics Today journal…Please put the two names below on your mailing list for the journal. PLUS…please include the recent Summer 2019 issue which I hope you can send immediately…Your issues were outstandingly covered in this recent journal. Thank you so much. Lilla Schmeltekoph, Texas

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Pat, …Both of us look forward to every issue. Thanks again for all you do… Huey and Charlotte Bridgman, Florida

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—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

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

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- Maintain an independent prophetic voice for Christian social ethics
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- Support Christian ecumenism by seeking contributors and readers from various denominations and churches
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- Address readers at the personal and emotional as well as the intellectual level by including in the Journal narratives, poetry, and cartoons as well as essays
- Strengthen and support the cause of Christian ethics

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Dr. Patrick R. Anderson is the current editor. He earned a BA from Furman University, MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and PhD from Florida State University. He is a professor, criminologist, pastor and writer. He and his wife, Carolyn, have been intimately involved in the development and operation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as well as several non-profit ministries among poor and disadvantaged people.

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