

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics Volume 28, Number 3 Aggregate Issue 113 Summer 2019

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Red Letter Ethics: Putting First Things First

By Patrick Anderson, Editor

Several years ago an acquaintance of mine abruptly quit his job and moved his family to a remote camp in the Rocky Mountains. He said that he had become convinced that the Russians were prepared to invade the United States through the southern border with Mexico, and that then they would confiscate and destroy all the Bibles. Therefore, he felt led to take his family to the mountains and spend his time memorizing the King James Bible in order to preserve the Scripture for future generations. It sounded like a crazy idea to me.

The task of memorizing the entire Bible seems a staggering ambition. I wondered if he planned to start at Genesis 1:1 and work his way through the Pentateuch, onward through the books on history, then the Wisdom Literature, the books of prophecy. Would he then start at Matthew 1:1 and work through the Gospels, Acts, the letters of the apostles? The Revelation of John? I mean, really? How and why would one tackle committing the entire Bible to memory?

Most of us who were raised in Christian, church-attending homes, have memorized certain portions of the Bible: John 3:16, Psalms 23, maybe the creation narrative, perhaps the Beatitudes, or the birth of Jesus narrative in Luke 2. Maybe. Some more ambitious of us perhaps added Psalms 1, Psalms 100, and I Corinthians 13 to the most popular list. Some of us. But, memorize the entire Bible? I am almost certain that my enthusiasm for the task would wane before I got very far.

The first Bible I remember holding in my hands was a “Red Letter Edition” of the King James Bible. The words of Jesus, highlighted in bright red print, stood out in my childhood reading of the Bible. Memorizing is a good thing, and choosing the red letters, the words of Jesus, has a notable rationale.

Toward the end of his life on earth, Jesus gave His disciples some very strong and specific instructions in what we call “The Great Commission” recorded in Matthew 28. He told his disciples that he had been given all authority in heaven and earth; he told them to

go everywhere and make everybody his disciples; he said to immerse people in all of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;...then, wait for it....he told his followers to teach believers to obey *everything I have commanded you*. He promised to be with us all the time.

Jesus told His disciples then and now that the process of making disciples must focus on the lessons He had taught the first disciples. He did not instruct us to teach the creation sequence or the Songs of Solomon or the genealogies, or the prophets, or anything else. He said to teach *everything I have told you*. That is where the nucleus of the Christian life and ethic is found—in the words and actions of Jesus.

We are tasked with doing more than committing words to memory. The real challenge for us is to translate the words into action. Disciples don’t merely memorize words. Disciples embody and practice the truths learned from their Teacher. The oldest flaw in faith is the belief that knowing the words will translate into living the truths. People know the words of the commandment against stealing, but wage theft, voter theft, water theft, land theft, labor theft, theft of medical care, theft of children and other forms of robbery continue to be practiced even by people claiming to believe in Jesus.

Jesus calls upon His followers not to produce “believers” or “knowers”, but rather to nurture and activate “disciples” who “do” what Jesus said: Love neighbors unconditionally. Welcome strangers. Protect vulnerable people. Condemn hypocrites. Expose liars and thieves. Practice nonviolence zealously. Jesus said and demonstrated that all of the Bible can be summarized as: *Love the Lord your God...and love your neighbor as yourself...in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you...*

It would have been much easier had Jesus told us to merely memorize stuff, to store it on our mental hard drive. But Jesus did not give us that rather simple instruction. Instead, Jesus told us to dive straight into the hard lessons that He set before us in His words and deeds. ■

Christians without Borders: Toward a Trespassing Church

By George A. Mason

The great Puerto Rican golfer, Chi Chi Rodriguez, was asked about how he learned the game. He said his first round of golf was an act of trespassing.

Now, I am a golfer myself. I have always loved the game and can relate to what Chi Chi says. I grew up across the street from a country club golf course in Staten Island, New York, and I would often sneak on there even though I was not a member. There were free public courses within driving distance, but I had no way to get there, so I trespassed. That's what Chi Chi did too. And while I have no defense for my sin of trespassing, I want to say that I'm glad Chi Chi did and I think we should be thinking less about the trespassing and more about whether young people like him have access and opportunity to learn the game.

There are all sorts of borders we erect in this country and across the world to keep people apart, and it's time Christians took a hard look at what we support. Here's my thesis today: Christians in America—and particularly white Christians in America—have become more concerned with defending the law-and-order crowd that builds walls and fences against trespassers than they are for the people who live on the other side who share the same hopes and dreams for opportunity. If we are going to bear witness to the world in a way that makes a compelling case for our faith, we may have to switch sides and become a trespassing church.

Let's take a look at where we are, to begin with. If I preach in my church about the southern border crisis, about the policy of separating children from their mothers at the border, about the idea of building “a big, beautiful wall,” as our president puts it, about the Muslim immigration ban, about the dehumanizing camps of people in Mexico awaiting a hearing just to be able to declare for asylum, about the fact that we will not appoint adequate immigration judges to hear cases because that will only lessen a crisis we would rather call an emergency so that we close the border altogether, about the explicit racism of claiming that the people who are seeking to come to this country to flee violence and seek safety, if not opportunity for their families are really rapists, murderers, drug dealers or terrorists in disguise, about the idea that we should have more Norwegians who look like me than people of Latinx descent coming in, and that we ought

to act as a nation according to the highest principles of humanitarianism—if I say those things, some people will think I've gotten too political. They just want me to preach the gospel. They want to leave public policy to the politicians.

But since Jesus, and the Hebrew prophets before him, and the apostles after him, were all political, I can't do that and honor my ordination papers. Since it's probably obvious to everyone in this room, I won't belabor the point for long—especially since Tony Campolo has been making the case for Evangelicals to speak and act for social justice for so long, Christianity is political by its nature. It isn't partisan, but it is political.

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Jesus came proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God. Kingdom. That was the language of his day for a political entity. And no fair rushing to the argument about him telling Pilate that his kingdom is not of the world: the *of* is genitive, meaning something more like “authorized from” another world rather than “pertaining to” another world (John 18:36). Likewise, when Jesus says the kingdom of God is within you, the “you” is plural, not singular (Luke 17:21). So it means the kingdom is among you, here. And Jesus didn't teach us to pray that God's kingdom go, but rather that “God's kingdom come, God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Politics is how we live together in the world. It's not a dirty word, no matter the grime and crime it often attracts. God wants us to bear witness *to* this world of God's desire *for* this world by the way we live together now *in* this world. We are not biding our time until we escape it for Beulah Land.

Interestingly, many fundamentalists, who used to eschew the politics of this world and thought the kingdom of God was only for our hearts now and for heaven when we die, have entered the fray with a fervor we haven't seen in ages. And they have taken center stage in this engagement. They have gained the ear of the

White House and Congress and the Supreme Court, and their version of engagement has changed the face of our faith in ways we have to confront with our faith.

Christians—again, primarily white evangelical Christians—have courted the corridors of power and have curried favor to gain power over their enemies. They have been changing the principle of religious liberty into a license to discriminate against people who offend them, on the basis of their sincere religious convictions. This is not something a Jew or a Muslim could successfully claim in this America.

We have forgotten that once we were no people, but now we have become the people of God (1 Peter 2:10). “Once we were slaves in Egypt,” Jews say during Passover. “My father was a wandering Aramean,” the Hebrew confession begins (Deuteronomy 26:5). Once, we were rejected by popes and bishops and left to worship in hovels and homes and clearings in the woods. Once, we had to pay taxes to the state so that somebody else’s minister could be paid, while we couldn’t even hold the office of dogcatcher in our town because we were Baptists or Quakers or some other unauthorized sect. Once, we boarded ships to flee persecution and find a place to worship and work where nobody told us that some human beings had more purchase on the right to call themselves children of God than we.

How did we get from there to where we are today, siding with the rich and powerful against the poor, defending walls and caging children. We say we belong to the tribe of Jesus, but we’ve been revising his words to fit our politics instead of revising our politics to fit his words.

Jesus declared his own mission in that Nazareth synagogue long ago, reading from the Isaiah scroll:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:16-21). He didn’t edit the prophet to our own liking. He didn’t say, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and has anointed me to preach good news to the rich, mass incarceration to targeted minorities, recovery of insurance payments to the optometrist, to let the oppressor get off Scot-free, and to declare the year of the Lord’s vengeance.

And yet, here we are. Eighty-two percent of evangelicals in America voted for a man for president whose policies are day-by-day an affront to the way of Jesus. We have a Fox News religion analyst who pastors a tall steeple church in downtown Dallas and who declares that heaven has a wall in it to keep out

lawbreakers, so there’s no reason not to support a wall on our southern border to keep out trespassers.¹ This is the same man who speaks for millions of American Christians when he says he wouldn’t vote for Jesus for president, because Jesus isn’t mean enough and wouldn’t punish evildoers. This same man prays at the ceremony in Israel when the Trump Administration announced the moving of the U. S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, because of his Christian Zionism that is based on a premillennial dispensationalism needs Israel to crush its enemies so that Christ can return to rapture true believers and establish a timeline for judgment that will reward people with his theology and leave the vast mass of humanity to get its just deserts in the eternal fires of hell.

For heaven’s sake! Literally.

Before offering a different biblical approach to addressing these matters, I think we need to think a little more about borders and nations and the concept of national sovereignty.

When people make the claim that nations are sov-

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ereign and have the right to secure borders, we tend to think this is unassailable logic. But part of the unwinding of all this is to challenge that idea at its core. Where is it written? The modern nation-state is a social construction, not a God-ordained natural political right.

No one knows for sure where the idea of the modern nation-state comes from. There are several theories, but they are just that. The most common is to trace it back to Europe and the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that that ended the Eighty Years’ War between Spain and the Dutch, and the Thirty Years’ War that included the Germans. Prior to this, empires came and went, marching across the landscape to gain ground for their glory until they were defeated by a stronger empire.

Westphalia laid the groundwork for a modern sense of internationalism that recognizes territorial sovereignty of a people. But still, there are questions of whether these nations can simply declare themselves or must be recognized by others in order to be legitimate. And then there’s the question of whether ethnicity and culture should be the determining factor in the constitution of a nation-state.

In its more benign form, the idea that the people who naturally inhabit a region and share a common language and culture should determine their identity as a nation-state seems appealing. There's a certain coherence to that theory, giving a clearer sense of identity to a people. But we have seen the malignant version of this in the "blood and soil" mantra of Nazi Germany that viewed the Jews as a scourge upon their land. So maybe that isn't a solid moral basis for establishing a nation.

We translate the New Testament Greek word *ethnos* as nation, and we're supposed to go into all nations to preach the gospel. Is every ethnic group on the planet supposed to have its own nation-state? What about the Kurds in Northern Iraq, then? What about the Rohingya people in Myanmar? The Jews lived in diaspora for centuries before returning to Palestine—some claiming it as a divine right. They declared themselves a nation-state in 1948, but 30 states, primarily Arab ones, still do not recognize Israel. Yet neither does the State of Israel recognize the right of the Palestinian people to their own national sovereignty in the land of their birth.

And what about many nations that have many ethnic groups within their borders? The word nation comes from the Latin root *natio* meaning birth or tribe, and thus means something like where or to whom you were born. So, most nations have this idea that if you are born within its borders, you have a claim to citizenship. But now our current administration in Washington is controversially trying to change that in order to discourage unauthorized border crossings and, in a more covert way, to protect a certain culture.

If you consider the American case, the natural inhabitant part quickly falls apart, since Native Americans are the only ones with original claim on the land. We decided that we would become a nation by declaration and that certain ideals about humanity would inform us—all men being created equal, for instance; each having the natural right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But when your nation has to construct a narrative to justify its claim to land, it tends to neglect certain factors in favor of other factors. So, we tell a story of people seeking freedom from persecution, the right to worship as we please, the opportunity to pursue prosperity, etc. But no sooner do we do so than we privilege certain aspects of that story. For instance, we initially privileged white, northern European Protestant immigrants. We didn't consider African slaves fully human, so they weren't a problem; they were just property. When the Irish and Italian Catholics starting coming over, we weren't sure they could be integrated

fully into this WASP-dominated nation, because of their higher loyalty to the Pope. In 1939, America turned away 900 Jews on the MS St. Louis who were fleeing Hitler's genocide. No room at the inn. So much for Emma Lazarus's poem at the Statue of Liberty that ends with these flourishing lines:

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

I tell you all this to remind you that when we hear people talking about borders and the rights of a nation-state to defend its borders, there's a more fundamental question about the definition of a nation-state that we aren't addressing. The nation-state is a social and political construct in search of a natural and universal grounding that falls apart with every attempt. It may be the best construct we have to work with today, but it isn't absolute or divinely ordained.

The more anxious we become about it all, the more likely we double-down on defending the indefensible. Nationalism is one such attempt. In the case of the United States, nationalism is always mixed up with white supremacy, no matter how much nationalists try to deflect that.

Representative Steve King of Iowa has been sanctioned by the House of Representatives by a vote of 421-1 for his comments to *The New York Times*, where he said, *White nationalism, white supremacist, Western civilization—how did that language become offensive?*² He has likened his censure to Jesus' trial and crucifixion. He has also said that we have to limit immigration because we are losing our culture, since the birthrate among immigrants (read Hispanic immigrants) is higher than whites. And from the highest office in the land, we get much the same sentiment, even as white nationalists are far more guilty of racially and religiously-motivated mass murder and terror than immigrants or Muslims. *Good people on both sides.* Right.

This all spills over into white Christian nationalism, too. Muslim bans, the right of Christians to discriminate against those who offend their beliefs, the denial by the Supreme Court to allow for a chaplain of one's own religion to serve a death row man: these are all trends that reveal the ungodly nexus of nationalism, white nationalism and Christian nationalism.

Now, what is the church to do in order to be faithful in our time and place? We should begin with Jesus and look backward and forward from Him—to the Hebrew Bible and to the early church.

When we look to Jesus, we find a consistent dis-

regard for borders in His mission. With the possible exception of his enigmatic claim to the Syrophenician woman that he came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Jesus consistently modeled religious and ethnic trespassing (Mark 7:24-30). And even with this woman, we should probably see his encounter with her as a kind of hip fake intended to get him on to his more universal mission or a moment in which he stated the expected and accepted in order to move beyond it. The Gospels portray Jesus crossing over into Gentile territory time and time again, healing and teaching in ways that frustrated if not infuriated those with more nationalistic ambitions for the messiah. Furthermore, He challenged the purity codes of His tradition that were another way of marking exclusion. The confession of the Roman centurion of His being the Son of God at the point of Jesus' death is another indicator of how the significance of His life transcended acknowledged borders.

This was also true of the Hebrew prophets. While post-exodus and post-exilic Israel continually focused on identity over against foreign influences, even in the Pentateuch there are clear commands to welcome the stranger, to treat the foreigner among them as if he were one of them (Leviticus 19:34). Likewise, it was in this same Holiness Code in Leviticus that Israel was instructed to love thy neighbor as thyself (Leviticus 19:18). And Jesus made clear in His Good Samaritan parable that "neighbor" didn't mean only those who live in your neighborhood. For all the rules against intermarriage, there are moments like that in the Book of Ruth where an alternate vision is put forward.

The Bible does not speak with one voice. It shows us how God is working out God's will and way against previous assumptions of how the world should be organized. There is a trajectory to Israel's understanding of how to account for insiders and outsiders that reaches a more universal moral grounding in Second Isaiah with the vision of Israel becoming a light to all nations, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.

So, Jesus doesn't just appear out of nowhere with these boundary-blurring ideas that burst the bubble of Jewish nationalism. He escaped Nazareth by a whisker when He interpreted Isaiah's words to mean that He would rely on the examples of the prophets Elijah and Elisha who in their day served and healed Gentiles as well as Jews (Luke 4:24-27).

And then the early church in the Book of Acts takes up this border-crossing, boundary-crashing work. The Spirit continually moves the apostles to accept God-fearing Gentiles, eunuchs and women without regard to traditional religious identity markers such as circumcision and purity laws. The early church had

to reckon with this as it continued to move beyond Palestine into Roman territory—whether in Asia Minor, Greece or North Africa. The gospel simply would not be defined by nationalism.

And so today, we find ourselves in need of reimagining our role in the world as the church of Jesus Christ. We have a history of Christian missions to draw upon that, while respecting national borders to some extent, saw the imperative of trespassing those borders at times in order to bring the gospel to unreached people groups. Likewise, we have transnational corporations that argue for a global economy that requires nations to compromise the extent of their sovereignty for the sake of the greater good.

And we have groups like Doctors Without Borders, which see human need as a higher value than national sovereignty. Their web site borrows the Christian language of "bearing witness." They declare that part of their mission is "to alleviate suffering, protect life and health, and to restore respect for human beings and their fundamental human rights."³ And they believe this involves at times risky disregard for borders that

When we look to Jesus, we find a consistent disregard for borders in His mission.

protect governments and dehumanizing actors from being held accountable for their crimes.

One of your alumni the other day saw my title for this lecture, *Christians without Borders*, and suggested that it might be better if we had *Borders without Christians*. I think we know what he means, since the people who most egregiously defend the cruel and inhumane policies of policing our borders against desperate people yearning to be free almost always claim Christian warrant for their behavior. But it would be better if we would instead take ourselves to task and renew our commitment to being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

We can start by remembering the distinction Martin Luther King, Jr., made in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail between a just and unjust law. *A just law is a man-made code, he said, that squares with the moral law or the law of God.* This is to be respected and honored. An unjust law, however, must be resisted and opposed.

One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who

*willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.*⁴

He was specifically dealing with segregation laws in his own day, but it didn't take him long before he trespassed into other areas of militarism and materialism. Today I believe he would also speak against an ungodly nationalism that divides us against one another within our borders and against one another across our borders.

Recently, my work with clergy colleagues in Dallas has taken us to the city council in defense of the church's right to house the homeless on nights when inclement weather forces them off the streets and when shelters are full. The old neighborhood canard, NIMBYism—Not In My Back Yard—rears its head time-and-time again when addressing the plight of the poor in our communities. And the council was receiving pressure to pass a code that would prohibit churches from taking in the homeless on such occasions. My Methodist colleague, Rev. Rachel Bachmann, rose to speak for many of us:

I worry that many of the proposals come from a Not in My Backyard mentality. I, too, rise to offer my own Not in My Backyard speech, but the proposals I would offer are rooted in morality and the faith that comes from Christian scriptures. This past winter, among the individuals we provided warmth included infants whose mothers were without shelter: Exposed to the elements these children may not have made it through the night. When we open the doors of our church, we proclaim, 'infants won't die on the street tonight—not in my back yard.'

When we open the doors of our church we proclaim, 'people without shelter will not be deprived their right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' Not in my back yard.

When we open the doors of our church we proclaim, 'human beings will not be stripped of their dignity just because they've been stripped of their financial well-being' Not in my back yard.

*Close the doors of our church to those in need, try to stop my church from following through on the mission appointed to us by God and you'll have one hell of a fight in your front yard because this city will not deny us the right to religious expression and freedom so that some citizens can shuffle unsheltered persons into faraway places and feel a little better about the comforts they enjoy.*⁵

This same feisty spirit should characterize our advocacy for human life and dignity at our southern border. Defending the right of our nation to make our border all but impenetrable to outsiders on the basis of Roman 13, as some do, is both horrible hermeneutics and terrible ethics. Paul claims there that we are to be subject to governing authorities, because authority comes from God and governing authorities are instituted by God. Some Christians today, especially those who are controlling the public understanding of our faith, see our current administration as wielding just such godly authority—although they didn't claim that for the previous administration. But this view conveniently passes over the historic struggle of the church to reckon with what to do with leaders who violate our sense of the universal moral law.

Martin Luther was challenged on just such a point in the early 16th century, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities calling upon him to be subject to their rule. The Swiss Reformed theologian, Philip Schaff, comments on this moment for Luther: *When tradition becomes a wall against freedom, when authority degenerates into tyranny, the very blessing is turned into a curse, and history is threatened with stagnation and death. At such rare junctures, Providence raises those pioneers of progress, who have the intellectual and moral courage to break through the restraints at the risk of their lives, and to open new paths for the onward march of history.... Conscience is the voice of God in man. It is his most sacred possession. No power can be allowed to stand between the gift and the giver. Even an erring conscience must be respected, and cannot be forced.*⁶

Civil disobedience is sometimes the mark of faithfulness to God. And the church that loses its conscience, loses its soul. At certain times, we have to declare to the world that there will be hell to pay for the foul treatment of human beings created in the image and likeness of God. The faithful church in these cases will be a trespassing church that respects God before human authority. We will never know for certain if we are right in doing so; but certainty is not a Christian virtue—faith is. And if we are wrong, we can always pray as our Lord taught us to pray: *... forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* ■

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Christ, You Spoke to Us of Children*

by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

Christ, you spoke to us of children:

“Let the children come to me.
Do not stop them, for the kingdom
Is for little ones like these.”
God, we grieve now as our nation
Fails its moral obligation
To receive the refugees.

Christ, you spoke of God’s intention:

“Do not cause my children harm!”
Yet we place them in detention,
Far from loved ones, scared and worn.
Children, huddled close together,
Grieve for families that are severed;
God of love, what have we done?

Christ, you taught us to give water
And to help the ones who thirst.
Yet in places near the border,
We confess we’ve done our worst.
Those who walk must now walk farther.
We have made their journey harder;
We dump water in the dirt.

God of immigrant and stranger,
God who welcomes those in need,
When your children are in danger,
Will we love them or concede?
May we not seek cheap forgiveness
Till we dare to work for justice—
Till your little ones are freed.

*Sung to the tune “Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”

Biblical References: Isaiah 58; Matthew 19:14 18:6; 25:31-46; James 2:14-26.

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The War in Yemen: Why it Matters

by Ken Sehested

The news was easy to miss. I saw it in several media, but never “above the fold” or in the opening lineup of topics for cable news shows. And there is reason to debate how significant the news is, depending on your level of political optimism or pessimism.

But the fact that Congress recently voted to exercise its never-before-used War Powers Act to cut off US funding for the Saudi-led war in Yemen is at least unusual. The fact that both the House and the Senate approved the measure is significant, though the margin in the Senate makes it unlikely they can override an anticipated veto by President Trump.¹

Created in 1973, after the disclosure of a mountain of governmental lies deployed to sustain the war in Vietnam, the Act was supposed to return to Congress the constitutional mandate for declaring war. The Act has gathered dust ever since, despite the fact that the US has undertaken military action in at least 14 countries since then, including the war in Afghanistan, which has now lasted nearly as long as all our other wars combined.

The devastation in Yemen is hard to conceive: It is too far away (for us in the West), geographically and emotionally; there are multiple actors involved and a longer history to be accounted; and the US role in the war is largely hidden under layers subcontractors (which is the way empires prefer to exert their power, to maintain plausible deniability when espoused human rights values collide with acts of naked aggression).

The most immediate cause of the war goes back to the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings that changed political landscapes in multiple Arab countries.

In this case, the minority Houthi people, devotees of the Zaydi branch of Shi’a Islam who live mostly in the country’s northern region (along its border with Saudi Arabia), began an uprising against the country’s repressive government. The rebellion was so successful—in part because of support from Iran’s Shi’a government—that in 2015, Saudi Arabia, Iran’s principal rival in the region, organized a coalition of other Arab governments to fight the Houthi-led anti-government forces.

One of the supreme ironies in this bloody mess is the fact that, indirectly, the US is funding al-Qaeda, against whom we started the War on Terror following

the 9/11 terrorist attacks. That organization’s branch on the Saudi Peninsula is also fighting the anti-government forces in Yemen.

“Elements of the US military are clearly aware that much of what the US is doing in Yemen is aiding al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and there is much angst about that,” said Michael Horton, a fellow at the Jamestown Foundation.²

All parties to the conflict have likely committed war crimes, though in proportion to the very unequal size of their forces.

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The war is directly responsible for the deaths of somewhere between 15,000-60,000 people since 2015. It’s hard to get reliable information in an active war zone, in one of the poorest nations on the earth.

An estimated 85,000 children have died from starvation and easily preventable diseases; another 1.8 million under the age of five are suffering acute malnutrition. A cholera outbreak has affected over a million people. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, if the population of Yemen were represented as 100 individuals, 80 need aid to survive, 60 have little to eat, 58 have no access to clean water, 52 have no health care provision, and 11 are severely malnourished. To get a sense of the scale of this disaster, project those percentages onto a country of 27 million.

The US role in the war has been substantial and includes accelerated sale of weapons, intelligence, logistical support, aerial refueling of Saudi (and their allies) aircraft, and assistance with targeting.

The most tangible link between US arms and civilian deaths in Yemen came when a CNN photographer

found a piece of debris with US markings following the 9 August 2018 bombing of a school bus which killed 40 children, 11 adults and injured scores more. It was a 500 pound MK 82 laser-guided bomb made by Lockheed Martin. *Note: It was laser-guided bomb, acclaimed for its precision, not an unfortunate act of “collateral damage.”*

“The US is completely complicit,” said Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence. “It’s like a drive-by. You know, if a drive-by shooter has obtained the car and the fuel and the bullets and the map and the surveillance and funding from another entity, then isn’t that other entity pretty complicit? And if the United States cut all that off, it would bring the war to an end within a day.”³

“And at a flight operations room in the capital, Riyadh, Saudi commanders sit near American military officials who provide intelligence and tactical advice.

“‘In the end, we concluded that [the Saudis] were just not willing to listen,’ said Tom Malinowski, a former assistant secretary of state and a new member of Congress from New Jersey. ‘They were given specific coordinates of targets that should not be struck and they continued to strike them. That struck me as a willful disregard of advice they were getting.’”⁴

The US did stop aerial refueling last November, due in large part to the public relations embarrassment in the aftermath of the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. President Trump, who publicly celebrated the jobs created in the US by Saudi Arabia’s arms purchases, has contradicted his own intelligence services who confirm that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman directly ordered Khashoggi’s murder and dismemberment in the Saudi embassy in Istanbul, Turkey.

It is painful to admit that the death of one well-known individual has a greater affect on public policy than the death and suffering of millions. This admission underscores the cruel observation of Joseph Stalin, former mass murdering premier of the Soviet Union, who quipped, “The death of one man is a tragedy. The death of millions is a statistic.”

To be sure, to fully explore the causation of the war in Yemen requires a longer historical lens. Support for the Saudi-led war was originally supported by President Obama, though Trump has knocked over a number of the guard rails previously in place to reduce the carnage. And remember, Obama’s authorization of 500-plus drone strikes, some in Yemen, far and away exceeded those authorized by his predecessor, George W. Bush.

Drone strikes stretch the distance between predator and prey, making it more palatable for the former to

act without regret. The increasingly sophisticated technology of war creates a new moral compass: The further from the actual blood, the easier to sustain being unburdened by ethical qualms.

An even longer view of the war in Yemen goes back more than a century, when in 1916 Britain and France literally drew the current boundaries in the Middle East, abruptly severing historical kinships based on tribal, religious and familial ties. It was a World War I military tactic, whereby Arab leaders were promised independence if they would revolt against their Ottoman Empire rulers.

Moreover, to understand much of the conflict in the Middle East, including Yemen, requires attention to the repressive rule of Arab monarchs themselves, who often made self-interested deals with colonial powers for the extraction of natural resources, oil in particular. It is this corruption that provides a key motivating factor to the rise of revolutionary groups like al-Qaeda (whose jihadist heirs were financed by the US in places like Soviet-occupied Afghanistan) and the Islamic

The increasingly sophisticated technology of war creates a new moral compass: The further from the actual blood, the easier to sustain being unburdened by ethical qualms.

State (which spawned out of the bloodletting and chaos caused by the US invasion of Iraq).

Though it likely wasn’t intended, a recent “Garfield” the cat cartoon by Jim Davis brilliantly summarizes the history of Western nations’ colonial foreign policy in three frames.

Garfield, thinking to himself, first says “I’ve decided to give back to the world.” Then, “But first . . . I’m going to take a bunch of stuff.”

“Since 1980,” writes Jeff Faux, “we have invaded, occupied and/or bombed at least 14 different Muslim countries. After the sacrifice of thousands of American lives and trillions of dollars, the region is now a cauldron of death and destruction. Yet, we persist, with no end in sight. As former Air Force General Charles F. Wald told the Washington Post, “We’re not going to see an end to this in our lifetime. . . .”

The rationale here is embarrassingly circular—we must remain in the Middle East to protect against ter-

rorists who hate America because we are in the Middle East.”⁵

When it comes to foreign affairs (in particular), most do not realize that, more often than not, our nation’s economic interests eclipse our humane political values. It’s not that there are no charitable impulses to be recognized and applauded. They are surely there. But typically these are preceded or displaced or overruled by errant, even vicious self-interest.

I am aware of how frustrating it is to call attention to such tragedies while offering little that can be done in response (e.g., charitable giving to relief organizations, contacting legislators, etc.). It is at least as bad for writers to pile on guilt as it is for readers to remain indifferent.

Guilt is not the issue; in fact, it is a dodge. At least in the common meaning of that word, guilt merely assuages responsibility; it does not unleash the freedom needed to make alternate choices and demand different public policies.

Odd as it may sound, the incitement to such freedom is the intention of Lenten observance in the Christian community. Lent’s invitation is to pay close attention, even when it’s discomfiting; to strip away the accretions of self-possessed living; to encourage penitential denouncement of miserly habits to make space for regenerate, neighborly response in the midst of history’s degenerate affairs.

Lent reminds us that sometimes a *no* must be said before *yes* can be uttered. A kind of dying must occur before the living—for which we were made—can be undertaken.

Before Easter’s resurrectionary profession can be made, a certain insurrectionary practice must be launched. To be enlisted in such a movement is not the achievement of valiant willfulness or moral heroism. Such virtues are noteworthy; but first we must fall in love, to be captivated by what Dr. King referred to as the “Beloved Community,” enraptured by a beatific vision, to the dream of Creation’s purpose and Re-creation’s promise.

These can be accessed only by paying close, risky attention to the underside of history; to the forgotten places, to the overlooked tragedies, to the frail, the frightened, the vulnerable, which call us to compassionate proximity.

That’s why Yemen matters. It is a mirror reflecting who we are; but also a reminder of Whom, and by Whom, we are invited to accompany. ■

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For more background on the war in Yemen, see: <http://www.prayerandpolitiks.org/signs-of-the-times/2019/04/11/news-views-notes-and-quotes>.

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We depend on the gifts of individuals.

“A Voice Crying in the Wilderness”: Joseph Martin Dawson’s Quest for Social Justice

By Bill Pitts

Part I: The Injustice of Poverty

Joseph Martin Dawson is remembered by members of First Baptist Church Waco as their longest-serving pastor, 1915-1946. By the larger Baptist community in the United States he is remembered as the founding executive of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington D.C., an organization devoted to religious liberty. In this position, Dawson exerted significant influence on U.S. policy from 1946-1953. His vision was to deny legislation funding Catholic parochial schools and to deny presidential appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican. Clarifying the meaning of separation of church and state and successfully advocating for it was his most notable achievement.

The present study focuses on another significant dimension of Dawson’s life—his deep commitment to social justice. Throughout his life ministry, Dawson spoke out on social issues confronting his community. In his autobiography, Dawson wrote: “I attribute continual involvement in lively encounters connected with espousal of social justice to a strong conviction that corporate sin was as culpable as individual sin. . . . Predisposed toward humane behavior, cruelty on individuals and groups . . . were particularly abhorrent to me.”¹

This study of Dawson appears in three parts. In this first article, following a sketch of Dawson’s life, I explore Dawson’s experience of poverty and his analysis of economic injustice in America. In a second essay, I note his early Waco experience of observing a lynching (1916), which prompted a lifelong campaign against racial injustice. In a third and final essay, I will trace how Dawson became a passionate critic of war and an active campaigner for peace, even contributing to the formation of the United Nations in 1945.²

A Baptist Minister

Joseph Martin Dawson was born June 21, 1879, in his grandfather’s farm house, 12 miles west of Waxahachie, in Ellis County, Texas. He was the oldest of 13 children born to Martin Judy Dawson, Jr. and Laura Underwood Dawson. Dawson’s father was a farmer who worked as a sharecropper in cotton fields. The Dawsons lived on the edge of poverty. Dawson struggled in choosing his vocation, recording that he expected to be a journalist.³ While still a teenager,

he submitted articles to the children’s section of The Dallas Morning News and, by the time he was 15, the paper engaged him to write regularly. He never lost his passion for journalism and continued to write throughout his life.

The other vocation attracting Dawson was the ministry. Dawson had been brought up in a Baptist church.⁴ He recalled his call to preach “in the ravine at the back of the cotton field.”⁵ Baylor President Samuel P. Brooks inspired Dawson to attend nearby Baylor University, which he entered in 1899 with meager resources.⁶ While he was a student at Baylor, he served as part-time minister to four small churches. He was

Dawson’s father was a farmer who worked as a sharecropper in cotton fields. The Dawsons lived on the edge of poverty.

also active in various literary organizations; he was also the founder and editor of The Lariat, the school newspaper, and editor of the school annual, The Round Up.⁷ He completed his degree and also read theological works under the direction of B.H. Carroll. Carroll introduced him to the practice of evangelism and denominational work; reading E.Y. Mullins was formative for his theology and reading Charles Reynolds Brown introduced him to social Christianity.⁸ Dawson did not have formal seminary training. But he read widely throughout the rest of his life.⁹ He served as full-time pastor of five Texas Baptist churches—briefly at Albany, Lampasas, Hillsboro and Temple, and then for a record 31-and-one-half years at the First Baptist Church of Waco (1915-1946).

Dawson was an effective evangelical preacher. He reported that early in his career he preached about six revivals per year.¹⁰ These meetings were successful, and he was persuasive in his own pulpit as well. His sermons are almost invariably constructed in three parts. They are well organized, easily understood, and focused on life situations.¹¹ The statistics for First

Baptist Church, Waco, show growth in conversions and membership throughout his 31 years of leadership.¹² By 1926, the average weekly attendance at First Baptist Church exceeded one thousand.¹³ Dawson said that soul-winning is the “primal matter” for Baptists.¹⁴ In this task Dawson was clearly successful.¹⁵ He had tremendous support from his wife, Willie Turner Dawson, an exceptionally gifted speaker who taught a huge class of female college students, as well as regularly addressing students at state conferences. When asked about Mrs. Dawson’s role in the church, a long-time FBC member declared, “O, she was the secret! Miss Willie loved everybody!”¹⁶

A second major pastoral interest of Dawson was foreign missions. As a student he formed a prayer group with six other students who called themselves “the Covenanters”.¹⁷ Their purpose was to pray daily for each other and for the success of the foreign mission enterprise. A measure of the strength of Dawson’s missionary commitment was the financial support his church offered to the enterprise. The report of the Association Year 1943-44 shows that FBC Waco received \$80,741.30, of which \$35,379.70 went to local projects and \$45,361.60 to all missions and benevolences.¹⁸ Through summer mission work, Dawson personally started Baptist work in Santa Fe and very soon the city had its own First Baptist Church.¹⁹ Dawson served on the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention for 10 years, 1919-1928.²⁰

A third mark of Dawson’s highly successful ministry was his deep devotion to his denomination. He served as assistant secretary for the Texas Baptist Education Commission, which supported Baptist colleges. He also served on the boards of the new Hillcrest Baptist Hospital in Waco, the Baptist Standard, and the executive board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He was asked to lead the Texas division of the Seventy-five Million Campaign to fund projects for the Southern Baptist Convention; FBC Waco pledged \$200,000.²¹ He served on the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1945-46, chaired the Convention’s Peace Committee in 1944 and was founding director of the Baptist Joint Committee (1946).²² Throughout his pastoral ministry, Dawson kept up a steady stream of writing—books (12 in all), chapters, articles in newspapers, religious journals and magazines, pamphlets and book reviews.

By any standard, Dawson succeeded as a Southern Baptist minister. But Dawson added to pastoral ministry a social activism uncharacteristic of his Southern Baptist culture. Acknowledging that few Southern Baptist ministers addressed issues of the social order,

he described himself as a voice crying in the wilderness.²³ Dawson readily conceded that his social activism drew criticism.²⁴ This commitment could have, in fact, jeopardized his ministry. Baptist fundamentalist leader, J Frank Norris, attacked him for his views, but failed to spoil Dawson’s ministry or undermine his commitment to social activism. Dawson was not only a successful minister in the traditional sense. According to historian John Storey, he was also Texas Baptists’ “foremost exponent of applied religion.”²⁵ Storey argues that Dawson was able to maintain engagement in social activism because he always combined his social message with a conservative rather than a liberal theology.²⁶

Poverty and the Social Gospel

Crusading for social justice became part of Dawson’s theology in 1912, while he was a pastor in Temple. The Baptist Standard’s new editor—E. C. Routh—asked him to write “a series of articles on the social application of the gospel.”²⁷ Dawson recalled that his research for these articles set him “on my subsequent

Acknowledging that few Southern Baptist ministers addressed issues of the social order, he described himself as a voice crying in the wilderness. Dawson readily conceded that his social activism drew criticism.

crusading for social justice.”²⁸ He became conversant with the work of many social gospelers, including his extensive reading of Walter Rauschenbusch in preparation for the series.²⁹ The social message articulated by Rauschenbusch challenged injustice and was widely adopted by ministers in the North; most Southern Baptist ministers accepted prevailing Southern culture, remaining silent on social issues. However, they too eventually began to confront social issues, forming the Christian Life Commission for this task in 1950.³⁰ But long before the appearance of the Christian Life Commission, Dawson, according to James Dunn, “fearlessly engaged in struggles in the South.”³¹ Throughout his writings, Dawson refers to the social gospel, observing that it “was Rauschenbusch from whom I received my concept of a full gospel.”³² He declared that Rauschenbusch’s contribution to American society was nothing less than “immense.”³³

Dawson's personal experience of poverty helps explain his commitment to the social gospel. He addresses the question extensively in his autobiography. Significantly, his father had many grievances with the sharecropper system:

Father mistrusted the tenant system, [and] resolved to achieve independence speedily. He heartily disliked landlordism, called it a curse, a dreadful tyranny. He recoiled at the exactions imposed upon renters—the requirement that they furnish teams and tools, frequently that they buy supplies from owner constabularies, mortgage their crops for living expenses, and add ten percent on deferred payment of high-priced items of ordinary food and clothing. . . . He pointed in bitter revolt to the fact that with all these impositions the poor sharecroppers seldom came out clear at the end of the year.³⁴

Sharecropping left his father distraught. Dawson suffered from threats of poverty during his childhood; he was exposed to the common trials of farm families—little time for schooling, too many children to feed, and fear of the future. He recalled that at age 14 he had . . . a sense of encircling doom . . . a terrible apprehension of imminent calamity hovering over my family. I seethed in anger that a wise God would permit so many children, fiercely rebelled at grinding poverty and the persistent irritation in the home. . . . Yet I did not try to “run away”—I admired my brave idealist father, and I would not think of the practical heroine, my mother, without tears.³⁵

Americans did not have to live in an industrialized northern city (where the social gospel was initiated) to suffer the sheer agony brought on by poverty.

Dawson's most important discussion of social Christianity appears in his book, *Christ and Social Change*, written during the Depression.³⁶ The first half of the book loosely approaches the question as Rauschenbusch did in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*.³⁷ In a memorable statement, Dawson declares the doctrine of the future life is firmly fixed in Jesus' teaching, but it is not as central as the doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven.³⁸ He reminds readers of Kagawa's current application of Christian faith to slums of Japan.³⁹ He cites the Biblical example of Acts 2, explaining that Christians today avoid giving it current applications, fearing it would be used as a warrant for communism. He of course rejects communism, noting to readers that the difference is that the Jerusalem experience was voluntary where Christians practiced service to others, expressing the love of Christ. Dawson cites the modern example of Denmark

to show the kind of society that can emerge if the fundamental concept of economy is based on cooperation rather than competition.⁴⁰ He is highly critical of the current American economic order because it is based on profit-making and consequently is selfish and thus anti-Christian. Moreover, the economic system also engages in exploitation, which sets one class against another, and finally, it creates poverty and crime, as well as a divided society.⁴¹

By contrast, Dawson believed that the ideal of a Christian economy is based on cooperation and sharing. He writes, “If it is God's will to give us our daily bread, then creation and distribution of wealth is one of the surest ways of cooperating with the purpose of God.” “Common,” he exclaims, “is a good New Testament word!”⁴² Dawson writes that in Jesus' teaching the Kingdom of God is the rule of God in the heart, the will of God done on earth as well as in heaven.⁴³ And again he declares, “The Kingdom is a society with God as father and men as brothers.”⁴⁴

Dawson was always very clear that we must have changed men, not just a changed system. But he

To him, it seemed “most unfortunate that we ever invented the terms personal and social salvation, for they are but complementary sides of the same thing.”

strongly insisted that one cannot be detached from his environment—his race, his family, and his associations. To him, it seemed “most unfortunate that we ever invented the terms personal and social salvation, for they are but complementary sides of the same thing.” Jesus' concept of the Kingdom of God means working to redeem the individual and redeem the nation. This is “the whole gospel.”⁴⁵

Dawson adopted a social gospel and a social ethic early in his ministry. The quest for economic justice was personal: it was a passion formed by his own experience of poverty's detrimental influence on his entire family. To counter poverty and rectify the economy was, in his view, a mandate of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. ■

References noted in this essay are to be found online: www.christianethicstoday.com

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A Personal Reflection on Mass Incarceration

By Abigail Pasiuk

A recent study released by bipartisan political organization FWD.us, in partnership with Cornell University, determined that half of adults within the United States have an immediate family member who has been incarcerated.¹ Incredibly, the affected population totals 113 million people. On July 25th of 2018, I became part of this statistic. That was the day my father began serving his 38-month sentence in a federal prison.

This has been an incredibly painful experience not only for him, but for my mother and my family. It is through this personal on-going experience that I have begun to understand the ethical issues that mass incarceration presents to our society. The issue is ethically and socially complex, but by drawing upon the biblical principles of justice, I believe we can illuminate alternatives to the current model of retribution and punishment. By applying the biblical principles, it may be possible to promote a transformation of criminal justice from retribution and punishment to a system rooted in restoration and healing.

Incarceration is at an historical high in the United States and, according to Human Rights Watch, 2.3 million people are currently incarcerated in state and federal prisons and jails. In addition, an estimated 5.1 million people are serving sentences on probation or parole,² making the United States the country with “the world’s largest reported incarcerated population.”³ While there are many contributing factors to the problem of the incarceration of masses of people, mandatory minimum sentencing, exorbitantly long sentences, and racial sentencing disparities are among the leading causes.⁴

Mandatory minimum sentencing laws, by which legislatures have removed the sentencing decision from judges and juries, have instead placed enormous power in the hands of prosecutors. Prosecutors can threaten a defendant with the prospect of a long mandatory term of incarceration upon conviction at trial, in order to entice the defendant to plead guilty to a lesser charge. It is not uncommon for a person to plead guilty to a crime he or she did not commit just to avoid the prospect of unjust conviction of a more serious crime and a lengthy prison term. Gregory Lee writes, “Ninety-six percent of felony cases are determined by guilty pleas and not trials. The system has thus transferred power from the independent juries to prosecutors, failed to distinguish those who have committed crimes from those who have not, and watered down the term ‘felony’ to encompass a host of

minor offenses.”⁵

This reality was manifested in my father’s experience from the moment the Department of Justice began to investigate his financial company. Over the course of nine years, the DOJ threatened to level multiple charges against him and indict the majority of employees at his small company if he did not plead guilty to a single count of “conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud.” Given that the company employed several relatives, the DOJ specifically threatened to indict his 80-year-old mother who was the receptionist, his son, his brother and even his wife if he did not accept their plea agreement. Although my father had hundreds of phone recordings, thousands of documents, and other evidence to prove his innocence of the claims against him, the

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prosecutors insisted he adopt their “narrative” and accept the charges. The other option was to spend tens of thousands of dollars he didn’t have fighting the federal government in court to defend himself and family members facing similar accusations.

Given that the sentencing guidelines for this offense dictate a sentence of up to 25 years in prison, their plea agreement that reduced the charges to a single count with a maximum of seven years’ imprisonment felt like the better path – albeit unnaturally. This sentence length was to be reduced through his substantial assistance in convicting the individual who knowingly committed fraud against my father and his clients. While the judge ultimately makes the decision on sentencing, he works within the guidelines provided by the prosecution, who recommended a 44-month sentence. The judge ultimately decided on a 38-month prison sentence paired with a multi-million dollar fine. As my father absorbed the shock of this reality right there in the courtroom, the judge also informed him that if he did not assist the prosecution in the other case, his sentence would have been much, much longer. He also proudly stated he has a reputation for handing down sentences that even

exceed the guidelines.

Extremely long prison terms were created primarily during the so-called “War on Drugs” first implemented by Richard Nixon, then reinforced by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and expanded throughout the late 20th century. Long sentences have been imposed on poor, black and Hispanic individuals at a much higher rate than for white persons. Racial sentencing disparities for drug offenses have led to an excessively high prison population for persons of color. Michelle Alexander writes, “there are more people in prisons and jails today just for drug offenses than were incarcerated for all reasons in 1980.”⁶ The War on Drugs not only led to mass incarceration but, as Lee observes, “has not reduced violent crime.”⁷

The combination of draconian incarceration terms for drug offenses, and the racial sentencing disparities that characterize the implementation of that sentencing option, has created a major, significant issue. Humans Rights Watch identifies that “black people make up 13 percent of the population and 13 percent of all adults who use drugs, but 27 percent of all drug arrests. Black men are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of white men.”⁸ This has become such an epidemic of confinement that author Michelle Alexander labels the phenomenon “mass incarceration.” Incarceration of such a large proportion of blacks, according to Alexander, is “like Jim Crow... [it] is a ‘race-making’ institution.”⁹

I witness this reality personally in the visitation room of Florence Prison Camp each time I visit my father and see the other family members visiting their loved ones. The majority of inmates are Latino and African American – almost none of whom have committed violent crimes.

The social framework that helped create mandatory sentencing guidelines stemmed from a misuse of the term, “justice,” and the desire of many politicians to be seen as being “tough on crime.” The result is a racially charged and flawed system that values punitive rather than restorative sanctions which ultimately cause more harm than good. The punitive criminal justice system results in significant damage to neighborhoods, families and individuals alike. Another aspect of the hardships the inmates and families face are the mandatory restitution payments if there is a financial penalty issued by the judge. Inmates make anywhere from four to 40 cents an hour, but are required to make restitution payments anywhere from 20 to 500 dollars a month. Failure to do so results in punitive measures within the prison including no access to phone or messaging, the imposition of labor-intensive work assignments and additional restrictions.

This other form of punishment shifts the burden onto

the family’s shoulders as the inmates are incapable of paying such amounts. This leaves the single parent homes even more helpless and in a state of poverty while further fraying family ties. The harm is not limited to the term of incarceration. As felons attempt to reintegrate into society, they face hurdles securing employment. When released to a halfway house or home confinement, felons are required to show a document which states that they are on parole, were recently incarcerated and that they are a potential liability. Supervisors must also be available at a moments notice to receive a check-in call or visit from a probation or community corrections officer. These conditions of employment leave the majority of potential employers with little or no desire to view a resume, conduct an interview or hire those transitioning out of incarceration. Further, felons are often denied housing due to lack of financial resources, credit history and employment which at times results in homelessness. The social impact of the flawed criminal justice system is significant as family separation created in the system ultimately shapes the next generation

The social impact of the flawed criminal justice system is significant as family separation created in the system ultimately shapes the next generation and causes irreparable damage to the family unit.

and causes irreparable damage to the family unit. Their punishment is not over once their sentence comes to an end, as those that have a fine also have to pay anywhere from 10 to 25 percent restitution the rest of their lives. My father will never leave this behind as this restitution will follow him the remainder of his life. At 60-years-old, he will be starting over again with bankruptcy; my parents would be homeless and without any vehicle if it were not for the generosity of the support of family and friends. One can only imagine the alternatives those of a lower economic status face. It is little wonder that damaged individuals experience alarmingly high recidivism rates when they are left with little to no employment and housing options.

There is another way. Secular “justice” is based on punishment which often harms both the individual and community. The Christian application of justice represents a paradigm focused on restoration and healing. Glen Stassen and David Gushee define biblical justice by drawing on the Hebrew words *tsedaqah* – delivering-

justice and community-restoring justice, and mishpat – judgment according to right or rights. It is “judgement that vindicates the right(s) especially of the poor or powerless.”¹⁰

The biblical understanding of justice is based on restoration of the individual(s) and is designed to facilitate the offender’s reintegration into the community. Justice as a form of deliverance is woven throughout the Scriptures as seen in Isaiah 5:1-7; 42:1-7; 51:1, 4-7; 53:7-9; Mark 12:1-9; Matthew 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19. Stassen and Gushee draw from passages in the Gospels which describe “a central theme for Jesus”¹¹ to include rather than exclude those who would often be excluded in society, namely those who are considered sinners, enemies and outcasts (Matt. 5:43-49; Luke 10:29-37; 15:11-32). The invitation for inclusion is to all people (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). While this message is one of inclusion and deliverance, it is also a call to repentance and healing – to turn from old ways and walk in righteousness with God (Luke 5:27-32; Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17).

The foundation of this concept of biblical justice incorporates mercy and love. Lee argues that theologians such as Augustine believed that “Jesus’ call to mercy” was vital to being a follower of Christ and thus “encourage[s] the restoration of enemies to righteousness.”¹² Given this biblical framework, Christians are to seek the “reformation of wrongdoers rather than their punishment” as this is what redemption is within a biblical view of justice. While this does not mean one should accept the sin or wrongdoing, it does mean there is hope for every individual. It places the dignity of human life at the forefront, and promotes hope and the possibility of healed individuals and communities. The biblical concept of justice also resonates deeply with inmates as my father has witnessed firsthand. Given the punitive nature of the criminal justice system, inmates are drawn to the biblical concept of justice and its restorative and redemptive teachings.

How can this understanding of biblical justice help inform a secular criminal justice system and begin to transform retribution into restoration? Amy Levad proposes a path toward biblical restoration through the implementation of programs that offer rehabilitation and support. She writes, “One model of restorative justice, Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), connects to the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model of rehabilitation.”¹³ These programs are currently found in select areas through the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. She explains how these forms of rehabilitation result in, “strong decreases in rates of reoffending, especially when compared with receiving no treatment. While incarceration alone can increase rates of recidi-

vis, RNR programs can decrease reoffending by about 25-30 percent.”¹⁴ Levad’s framework illuminates the fact that “justice” can be achieved through rehabilitative means rather than solely punitive ones.

This concept incorporates the biblical model of justice as it seeks to love prisoners and find a path toward healing while also inviting them back into the community. This outlines how the church can facilitate change in the broken system that is currently in place. Much of what is needed is communal support, acceptance and assistance in reintegrating back into society. Our experience with sharing my father’s story is often met with judgement and apprehension within the church as many people do not understand the nature of mass incarceration and the overall broken system. By understanding the nature of mass incarceration, the church can become a place of compassion, love and acceptance. Prison is a dehumanizing place and the church can serve as a community where dignity is restored. The biblical concept of justice is also an invitation for the church to welcome the outcasts, offer empathy and support, especially for the hurting families that are affected.

Christians are to seek the “reformation of wrongdoers rather than their punishment” as this is what redemption is within a biblical view of justice. While this does not mean one should accept the sin or wrongdoing, it does mean there is hope for every individual.

As the above analysis illustrates, the epidemic of mass incarceration presents challenging ethical issues that undoubtedly cause harm to affected individuals, the communities of which they are a part, and our society at-large. Change is undoubtedly needed and the biblical framework of transformation and restoration offers a sustainable and dignified pathway that will break the negative cycles that are currently in place. ■

Abigail Pasiuk is completing the Masters of Arts in Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. Her interests are in the areas of feminist theology and biblical dimensions of justice. She is part a grassroots ministry among incarcerated individuals.

References noted in this essay are to be found online: www.christianethicstoday.com

Authority: Is It Really the Biblical Counterpart to Marital Submission?

By Rachel Shubin

The other day my photographer husband, George, burst into the room with his camera in hand and shooed me out to the neighboring field of tall grass. He'd been wanting to take a "golden hour" shot using his umbrella flash modifier for fill light, and twilight shots are always a race against the setting sun.

After seeing the final image, my mom commented about my sneezing the rest of the night; but I'm not allergic to grass. And I've been taking meds faithfully this summer because pollen counts in our area are terrible and I am allergic to cottonwood. So, what if George had asked me to go stand in front of the cottonwood tree for a picture made in May when the tree is blowing its cotton? Would I have done it?

The Litmus Test

While this is an extremely mild example, this type of question comes up constantly when I talk to people about complementarian/egalitarian issues. When I say I think the Bible talks about husbands and wives each submitting to and loving one another as opposed to husbands leading and wives submitting, they often respond with a question like this: "If your husband asked you to do {insert some utterly ridiculous/offensive/painful/horrible/dangerous thing here}, would you do it?"

I'm not talking about everyday things on the scale of standing in front of a tree; the hypothetical question always involves some entirely unreasonable request that the inquirer assumes would get an automatic "no" under any other circumstances. The question is a ringer, a Catch-22, and the intent is to trap me into saying the expected "no" so they can then point out that I'm not for submitting after all, mutual or otherwise.

Love - the True Counterpart to Marital Submission

Here's the problem. That entire line of reasoning is predicated on the idea that the marital counterpart to submission is oppositional, interlocking authority. When I read my Bible, I don't see that at all. I believe Ephesians 5:22-24 talks about the wife submitting to her husband in the way that a body is joined to its head. The usage of "head" throughout the entire passage is as a body part, not an authority. There is a Greek word for authority, but Paul doesn't use it once in this passage and, when he talks to the wives, he

never refers to the husband as an authority but as a head. A head to a body.

In the verses immediately following, Ephesians 5:25-31, Paul switches from wives to husbands and talks about the husband loving his wife in the way that a head is joined to its body. Paul never once tells the husband to be the authority nor does he explain what that should look like. What he does tell the husband to do is to love his wife and talks about what that should look like.

When I read this passage and the others like it, what I see is not authority and submission as oppositional

When I read this passage and the others like it, what I see is not authority and submission as oppositional forces tied together, but love and submission as cooperative forces tied together.

forces tied together, but love and submission as cooperative forces tied together. Love, not authority, is the Biblical counterpart to marital submission. When I think about how that would play out in real life, the two start looking extraordinarily close to the same.

Metaphorical Usage

Since the same "submit" word is used elsewhere in the New Testament in relation to governing authorities, many people lump that meaning in with marital passages. (Rom. 13:1-6 uses the word for "authority," not "head," to describe the government). In Ephesians, three verses are spent on wifely submission while the following seven are spent on husbandly love. Three verses compare a husband to a body's head and seven connect a wife to that head's body.

Do you spend a lot of time thinking about how your physical body should submit better to your head or how your head should love your body better? The overriding image seems to be one of unity, not hierarchy.

This extended metaphor doesn't show up with passages on governmental structures; nor do those passages have counterpart exhortations in their sections for the government to love its subjects. (Although the parts of the Bible written to rulers definitely require that in the forms of justice and mercy.) However, Paul does use the same type of body metaphor in I Corinthians 12:15-27 to explain relationships within the church, and then it is always recognized as a metaphor for unity.

The teaching of love (not authority) and submission as the operating structure within the body of Christ is everywhere in the New Testament. With that backdrop in mind, the problem with that question, "If your husband asked you to do xxx?" becomes clearer.

Bad Presuppositions

"Would you do xxx?" is the wrong question. Not only is it the wrong question, but it is asked of the wrong person. If a wife comes into the pastor's office or if she elsewhere complains that her husband is asking her to do things that are not loving toward her, the response should not be to ask her why she isn't doing them. The question should be put to the husband, asking why he would request or require such a thing of her in the first place.

When you see the marriage dichotomy as authority/submission, the "If your husband..." question makes sense because any refusal is a challenge to his perceived authority. When you see the marriage dichotomy as love/submission, the question makes no sense since love would never ask someone to do such things in the first place and it would certainly never require compliance if the question were posed. The questioner is not the problem; the questioner misunderstands both his own duty to love and how beneficial authority works in general and in what situations it applies.

My Answer to the Question

So, if George asked me stand in front of the cottonwood so he could take my picture, would I do it? The first and arguably the most important point is that he wouldn't ask me to because George loves me. If he

did ask me, I would say, "Umm, George, my eyes will swell up and I'll be sneezing for days if I stand there." At that point he would say, "Oh! Sorry, I forgot. Let's do it in the field instead."

If later he still wanted a shot by the tree, he would just find someone else to use for the shot. There is no power struggle over who is not exercising their authority correctly or who isn't submitting properly because the issue is not one of authority. It is an issue of love.

Final note: If George suddenly became other than who he is and insisted upon my standing in front of the allergy tree after I reminded him that it would make me sick, I would tell him "no." For us, this would be a complete rarity; however, if your spouse (male or female) consistently asks you to do unreasonable things that put you in danger or show blatant disregard for your personhood in mind or body, please consider reading through a screening for abuse and getting help if necessary. ■

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Paul Simmons: The Witness to Life

By William Powell Tuck

Paul Simmons, the noted Baptist ethicist, died on March 17, 2019. How do you describe a life so well-spent as that of Paul Simmons in a few words? Reared in rural west Tennessee, where he was born on July 18, 1936, he first encountered his education in the Christian faith in a one-room Baptist church. As a young man, he felt a call to the ministry and attended Southwest Baptist Junior College and graduated from Union University and received his M.Div. and Th.M degrees from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

It was at Southeastern Seminary that I first met Paul in the late 1950's. We roomed next door to each other in the old Hunter Dorm. We were both single then. We have remained close friends since those early seminary days. He also met his future wife, Betty, at Southeastern Seminary. Later, Paul received his Ph.D. from Southern seminary with an emphasis in ethics under Henlee Barnette, who was his mentor and later colleague in teaching at Southern Seminary. Paul would do postdoctoral studies later at Princeton Theological Seminary and Cambridge University in England.

His ministerial career included serving as pastor of Edmonton Baptist Church in Edmonton, Kentucky, First Baptist Church, Liberty N. C., and New Hope Baptist Church, Dyer, Tennessee. While teaching at Southern, he was an interim pastor in several churches and preached in many others. He also was minister to youth at First Baptist Church in Raleigh, N. C. when he was a student at Southeastern Seminary. When I was the interim pastor at First Raleigh several years ago, I invited Paul back to deliver some lectures on ethics. One of the church members, whose children had been in the youth program when Paul was there, asked me, "Is Paul as handsome today as he was then?" I assured her he was.

For 23 years, Paul taught Christian Ethics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. It is difficult to measure the positive impact his teaching had on the thousands of students who sat in his classes and did graduate work under him. Students spoke about his willingness to tackle and discuss the most controversial and difficult ethical issues of the day. One former student wrote about the strong influence Paul had on him and that his passing had left a hole in his heart. Wayne Hagar, who had done Ph.D. work in New Testament and Ethics under Paul, said that Paul was "friend, profes-

sor, scholar and true Christian." He talked about Paul's compassion to him during the illness of his wife, Joy, and after her death. Bob Browning sent me an email that read: "Most days, I sat in Paul's class grinning and nodding my head in approval as he expressed a perspective on life that fed my spirit. He was thoughtful, logical, compassionate, inclusive, healing and refreshing. I am grateful for the many ways he built bridges of goodwill, understanding, hope and reconciliation. I cannot begin to imagine the full price he paid to remain faithful."

For years, fundamentalists trustees tried to fire Paul because of his stand on legalized abortion and other ethical views with which they disagreed. They tried to force him to take a severance package and be silent, but

They tried to force him to take a severance package and be silent, but he refused to accept options they presented which he believed were ways they wanted to silence him. He said, "My voice is not for sale no matter the pressures from trustees, convention leaders or administration."

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After showing a video on human sexuality in one of his classes, which had been used in other classes, some ultra-conservative students protested, and the trustees used this flimsy excuse to call for his dismissal. When the administration sided with the trustees, Paul felt betrayed and submitted his resignation effective December 31, 1992.

Following this, Paul went into what he described as an "exile" which lasted for several years. This exile, he said, became a time of reflection and transition for him. He found freedom in exile and kept his voice. During this time, he was invited to teach as an adjunct professor at the Louisville Presbyterian Seminary and, in 1994, was offered a position in a secular university, the University of

Louisville, where he found freedom to teach that was both challenging and productive. He soon rose to be a Clinical Professor of Medical Ethics and adjunct professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Louisville and taught there for the next 20 years. There, he not only taught medical students, but made hospital rounds with them to observe and instruct them in proper ethical behavior with patients. During these years, Paul produced some of his most significant contributions through lectures, writings, board memberships and as a witness for legal cases. His books included *Faith and Health: Religion, Science and Public Policy*, *The Southern Baptist Tradition: Religious Belief and Human Care Decisions*, and *Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue*. While at Southern, he had written three books, *Birth and Death: Bioethical Decision Making*, *Issues in Christian Ethics*, and *Growing Up with Sex*. Over the years, he contributed at least a hundred articles to books and scholarly journals. His curriculum vita, by the way, was 22 pages long.

Paul walked as a giant among ethical scholars; but to me, he was my closest friend for over 60 years. We began with rooms next door at seminary and with my office beside his in faculty row at Southern Seminary when I taught there. We often engaged in theological discussions long into the night, solving theological problems or catching up on the latest “whatever.” While we did not always agree, we were never disagreeable but always respectful of each other’s views. I invited him to hold a revival in my student church and to lead spiritual emphases and ethical discussions in the various churches where I served as pastor. When playing “pick-up” basketball games with him, he played against me like it was a March Madness contest. He was always a competitor in sports, as those who played tennis with him know. He loved to tell corny jokes and to tease. Our families became close through the years. Our children spoke about going to visit their “cousins,” when we went to see the Simmons. We shared many meals together, especially at Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays and Kentucky Derby days. Emily and I attended Actor’s Theater monthly with Paul and Betty for the 15 years we lived in Louisville. Paul would always have a small piece of chocolate to share. We attended football games together, walked the “Yellow Brick Road” at the Wizard of Oz Park in the North Carolina mountains, shared a small house as families on vacation at Wrightsville Beach and, in the mountains, cranked out home-made ice cream, and just loved to talk and talk.

Through the years, Paul and Betty cared for Brian, their son, with his special needs. During Paul’s health issues over the past several years, Betty, Brent, Connie,

Catherine and Miguel lovingly attended to him up to his final stay in the hospital. It’s hard to believe that the last chapter of his life is closed. But his legacy will live on not only through family and friends, but through his many students at Southern Seminary and at the Louisville Medical School. We will long remember his sharp mind, his challenges to shallow thinking and cliché religion, his confronting religious narrowness, bigotry, prejudice, his battle for religious and academic freedom, and the willingness to deal with the most controversial bioethical and social issues like abortion, euthanasia, genetic problems, women’s liberation, the artificial heart, the gay issue, the separation of church and state, and many others. He received many honors for his work. These included being listed in *Who’s Who in Religion* and being the first recipient of the Dr. David Gunn Award, presented by the Kentucky Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

Paul wrote a dedication memorial for Henlee Barnette in his book, *Faith and Health*. I believe that it is a perfect summary of Paul’s life as well. See if you do not agree. “Teacher and professor extraordinaire, mentor, friend and colleague, who thought it more important to be prophetic than to remain safely conservative; more important to seek truth than to settle for comfortable platitudes and more important to be inclusive toward the different and despised than to join the ranks of the powerful who exploit the vulnerable and make bigotry an article of faith.”¹ Paul had a love for faith, teaching, truth and people. In one of his sermons, “To Live is to Love,” he expressed his view of love. “The final affirmation is this: to live is to love; only as we love do we live. ‘God is love,’ wrote John, ‘and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him’ (v 16). Only as one participates in God’s life of love, does one live, according to John. The ethical imperative is driven home. As God is love, so we must be loving... Thus, if we are to live, if we are to have ‘everlasting life,’ we must love. To fail to love is to die; to love is to live.”² Paul lived his life seeking to follow that imperative of love for God and others. So, now, Paul has “fought the good fight, he has finished the race, he has kept the faith. and now a crown of righteousness is laid up for him.” He fought the good fight fearlessly for justice, freedom, equality, integrity, civility, compassion, inclusiveness, religious liberty, love, and many others. Depart in peace, dear brother, into everlasting life. ■

William Powell Tuck is author of more than 30 books. He has been a pastor in several states and a professor in both seminaries and universities. He lives with his wife, Emily, in Midlothian, Virginia.

Models for Reparation, Compensation, Financial Restoration, and Making Amends

By Marion D. Aldridge

During my retirement, I've been preaching short-term interims that last from three months to a year. Within a few weeks, I've taught the congregation to say these words at certain times during the sermon, "It's a Big Book."

"It's a Big Book" has become my mantra—because the Bible is physically and culturally huge, sometimes saying what we expect, and sometimes surprising us.

"The Bible says..." may have been a favorite saying of Billy Graham but, over the years, I've found that not to be a particularly helpful phrase. The Bible says "Be quiet" and "Speak up." The Bible says "Give" and "Receive." I want to be an honest preacher. Some of the Bible is either/or. A lot of it is both/and.

Love and justice... both.

Restitution and grace... both.

The Bible provides a variety of models for repaying damages or making amends when someone has been wronged. There is no one solution that fits all situations. Nuance and options are needed.

"Yes, I meant something like that, but not exactly..."

"No, that word doesn't quite capture the meaning..."

Repentance and confession are such familiar biblical terms that they've lost much of their comprehensiveness and depth. When certain people confess their misbehavior, they're doing no more than saying they are sorry they were caught. For others, it's no more than a formal apology such as they might give for a social *faux pas*, "Oh, I'm sorry for being under-dressed. I misunderstood the dress code."

The Bible and a good thesaurus will be helpful; but neither provides a guarantee of a satisfactory result for anyone with only one predetermined outcome, such as the death penalty for the perpetrator of a vicious crime or reparation for a theft or an act of injustice.

The Bible describes many models, a few of which are listed below. Indubitably, there are others.

1) Exodus 22 provides a couple of instances for making restitution after a theft of property. Jewish scholars have debated the distinctions between various types of larceny for centuries. Exodus 22 records two options:

"Whoever steals an ox or a sheep and slaugh-

ters it or sells it must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep" (Exodus 22: 1).

"Anyone who steals must certainly make restitution, but if they have nothing, they must be sold to pay for their theft. If the stolen animal is found alive in their possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—they must pay back double" (Exodus 22: 3-4).

2) Another instance of restitution in the Hebrew Scriptures is in the book of Numbers:

"Say to the Israelites: 'Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way and so is un-

When certain people confess their misbehavior, they're doing no more than saying they are sorry they were caught.

faithful to the Lord is guilty and must confess the sin they have committed. They must make full restitution for the wrong they have done, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the person they have wronged. But if that person has no close relative to whom restitution can be made for the wrong, the restitution belongs to the Lord and must be given to the priest, along with the ram with which atonement is made for the wrongdoer" (Numbers 5: 5-8).

3) The Year of Jubilee was to be an occasion (in theory) of massive social restructuring by returning of property to the original owners:

"Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan" (Leviticus 25: 10).

4) In the gospels, on several occasions, Jesus gave his disciples or potential disciples instructions to sell all they possessed and to give the income to the poor: *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor.*

Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys” (Luke 12: 33).

5) Zacchaeus responded to Jesus impressively, but not completely impoverishing himself:

“Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’” (Luke 19: 8).

6) Other disciples responded in varying degrees of obedience to this command of self-denial. The apostle Peter, apparently, retained ownership of his boat by which he produced his sustenance and income:

“The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore” (John 21: 10-11).

7) The early Christian church experimented with literal obedience to Jesus’s command to sell their personal assets and distribute the income to those in need, some form of communism. Whether the experiment succeeded or disappointed in the short term, the Jerusalem church ultimately failed financially, and collections were made by the Apostle Paul for the Jerusalem poor.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need” (Acts 4: 32-35).

8) One of the most fascinating, and often ignored, acts of repentance involving restitution is that of Judas. Regretful for his betrayal, by bribery, he presented himself to the chief priests and made restitution. They rejected his plea for forgiveness. I’m convinced that if Judas had gone to Jesus to ask for grace, he would have been forgiven:

“When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized

with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself” (Matthew 27: 3-5).

9) Unrelieved guilt is deadly, as the suicide of Judas demonstrates. As a pastor, I looked for evidence of repentance when a parishioner expressed contrition or grief over misbehavior. My reading of scripture indicates Judas attempted to make restitution.

The language of confession is a start. But words of regret may not be enough. My Baptist tradition has often excused the inexcusable after accepting a few glib remarks of acknowledging bad behavior. In *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle sings, “Words, words, words, I’m so sick of words ... Show me.”

However, David’s Psalm of Contrition is an example of apparently genuine repentance without, as far

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as we know, financial reparation or restitution. David remained married to Bathsheba, and Uriah remained dead:

*“Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me...
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken
spirit;
A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will
not despise” (Psalm 51: 1-3, 17).*

10) In the 21st century, I am impressed by the work of Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve Step

groups. When they have offended, they use the terminology of “making amends,” which I find helpful.

Alcoholics Anonymous speaks of three kinds of “amends,” none meaning a mere apology. The first is direct amends, which includes a reimbursement or repayment of funds stolen or taken during a season of alcohol abuse. The second is indirect amends, in which a person works toward redemption by repaying to society what cannot be repaid to the specific person who was hurt during an alcoholic episode. Volunteering for a non-profit organization is an example. The third option is living amends, involving a lifestyle change to cease the destructive behavior that created the problem.

These models, biblical and otherwise, may be deeply unsatisfying to those who desire a specific outcome to their complaint of injustice, e.g., the death penalty to someone who took the life of a family member. Ultimately, no amount of repair, restoration,

recovery, revenge, regeneration or even resurrection will necessarily make an aggrieved person serene after suffering loss. Financial laws and legal codes attempt to be precise, whereas life, by nature, is often imprecise. Other than the few examples from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Bible does not consistently give a dollar figure, a detailed remedy, or an explicit system of reparation that will satisfy all disputes.

11) I find it hard to improve on the more ambiguous but perennial wisdom that combines some mixture of justice, grace and humility:

*“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you? To act
justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with
your God” (Micah 6:8). ■*

Marion Aldridge is a writer, preacher, and blogger living in Columbia, S.C.

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Steeplejacking: How the Christian Right is Hijacking Mainstream Religion

By John C. Dorhauer

What you are about to read is going to sound like some wild conspiracy theory. That's because it is. It is a theory. It's about a conspiracy. And it's pretty wild.

I didn't believe it myself until all the research I and others uncovered led me to see that, beyond a doubt, some Christians are being trained to infiltrate other Christians' churches in order to foment dissent and silence voices that oppose their very restrictive views on the great moral issues of our day.

The research culminated in a book I co-authored with The Rev. Sheldon Culver: *Steeplejacking: How the Christian Right is Hijacking Mainstream Religion*.

One of the first times I got an insight into the power, reach and indignities of these conspirators was the night of my first book signing. I was in Brooklyn, standing on a street corner waiting for my publisher to come pick me up and take me to Manhattan for the signing. My son called my mobile phone and asked if I had any access to wifi. I had my laptop, but was standing on the street. I checked, and the bodega behind me had a signal I could use.

My son said, "Go to Steeplejacking.com." I told him I didn't have a website for the book. He said, "Dad, just go there." So I did.

Standing right there on the street corner, with traffic flying by outside that bodega, I logged onto a website I did not build: steeplejacking.com. What I found surprised the heck out of me. It was a blank page with black background. There was a continuous scroll that simply read in stark, white letters: "Steeplejacking: Don't believe in conspiracies."

The irony was that reading that scroll proved the conspiracy. They had bought the domain names for steeplejacking.com, [.org](http://steeplejacking.org), and [.net](http://steeplejacking.net).

At the center of this conspiracy is a group called the Institute on Religion and Democracy located in Washington, D.C. It is directed by a former CIA-trained psych-ops agent named Mark Tooley. The IRD is funded by heavy hitters from the neo-conservative side of the political right. Those benefactors don't care a whole lot about religion or faith. What they care about is that every social justice movement in this country has been fueled, funded and fostered by religious leaders with a conscience, a pulpit and a congregation.

The IRD was built and funded by these benefactors with deep pockets to create propaganda, rehearse talking points tested in focus groups, identify wedge issues (issues that would generate the most virulent anger and foment the greatest controversy), train and deploy operatives to foment dissent both in local congregations and at wider church gatherings, author and circulate documents that articulate their doctrine and orthodoxy, deploy their staff to attend church gatherings of progressive leaders and then write screeds to their minions that would describe these opponents as evil and heretical.

Political funders with unchecked ambitions and deep pockets bought into the design and mission of the IRD.

They were growing weary of religious leaders with a conscience and a voice who could and who did build movements to free slaves, give women the vote, create labor unions, end Jim Crow, and threaten to legalize same-gender marriage.

They were growing weary of religious leaders with a conscience and a voice who could and who did build movements to free slaves, give women the vote, create labor unions, end Jim Crow, and threaten to legalize same-gender marriage.

The creation of the IRD was a covert attempt on their part to minimize the impact that religious leaders and bodies have had to bend the arc of history slowly towards justice. And it worked. They were founded in the early 1980s and have been functioning ever since with very little interference or notice from the churches, leaders and people most impacted by them.

Their work goes unnoticed and therefore largely unimpeded, both because they are practiced in the art of deception while denying all the things I and other researchers into their machinations have written about them, and because most of the audiences to whom I speak about these matters either refuse to believe this

or lack the tenacity needed to combat their tactics.

One of the researchers with whom I worked was a gifted leader, the United Methodist preacher and clinical psychologist, Andrew Weaver. We traveled the country together, leading workshops on our discoveries and training church leaders to defend themselves against these attacks. He used to say this: “These guys are playing tackle football, and we are playing touch. We are going to lose this game every time.”

The first time I spoke with Andrew was at a gathering in St. Louis, well before the book was written and when we were still developing the research to back the theory. I was working with churches there that were being attacked from within by their own members. They couldn’t figure out why this was happening to them. We called our clergy together to speak about what we were learning.

The night before, I got a call from a TV journalist representing the show 20/20. They wanted to know if they could bring a camera in to cover our meeting with clergy the next day. I had no idea how they had found out about this. Nor could I yet understand why a national news crew in New York wanted to attend a meeting of local clergy in St. Louis. I was only beginning to get a sense of how big this thing is – and that call confirmed for me what was truly at stake.

Sure enough, that journalist was there the next day with her cameraman. As the workshop began, Andrew Weaver was talking about the IRD. Ten minutes in, he stopped short. A young man I did not know had walked into the room. Andrew, having stopped his presentation, said, “Meet John Lomperis. He works for the IRD. He’s here to slander us on the IRD website tomorrow.”

Sure enough, that’s who that was and that’s what he did. A 20/20 crew from New York and an IRD agent from Washington, D.C. came to track our gathering. Something was going on here.

For years after that, every time I went to speak about the book and tell the story of the conspiracy, someone from the IRD was there to track me and misrepresent on their website everything I said the next day.

Another key insight came during my visits to rural churches, suburban churches and urban churches whom I knew were not in any way related to each other denominationally or otherwise. They all were living through the same phenomenon: fights were erupting, arguments were proliferating, votes were being called for, and otherwise healthy and happy churches were being split apart. Here is what we found: No matter where we went, they all had the same handouts. When we asked them where they got them, they were circumspect. “Oh, we found them on

the internet.”

That was the key that set us on the right course. We suspected someone out there was producing and circulating these documents. As we researched further, our first suspicion that some entity was orchestrating this was verified. It took us the better part of two years to figure out the work and purposes of IRD.

We found documents that promised their funders that they, the IRD, would train operatives to: write and circulate documents that called for their own understanding of strict biblical orthodoxy; to infiltrate churches posing as new members, getting on boards, making motions at annual meetings, and forcing pastors to take positions consistent with IRD Bible teachings; to attend denominational gatherings and present resolutions forcing bodies to vote for positions on abortion or gay marriage or other wedge issues.

We warehoused and catalogued hundreds of documents that were circulated in our churches. These documents were used to discredit the denomination and foster hatred toward its leaders. We uncovered individual operatives functioning covertly in our churches. We wrote protocols and strategies for how clergy and key leaders should deal with these machinations.

We connected with investigative journalists like Fred Clarkson, author of *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle between Theocracy and Democracy* and ongoing editor of the website, *Talk2action*. We met with Michelle Goldberg, author of *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, whose own research both deepened and confirmed what we had discovered.

We proved the theory – and it was wild. The IRD are still operating. They have the desire to mitigate and minimize the impact that religion has on social justice movements that impede the ambitions of their benefactors. They do it because they feel empowered by God to silence voices that do not conform to their own narrow theologies.

Like inquisitors from the past, they believe the church must be purified of heretics. Functioning with an “the ends justify the means” ethic, they continue to infiltrate our churches with their trained operatives. They distort the teachings of mainstream religion. They continue to do this largely unnoticed by religious bodies who suffer because of their machinations, but who remain largely ignorant of their work and are functionally blind to their existence.

They continue to play tackle football while we play touch. And, yes, we are losing this game. We are losing it badly. ■

Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer is General Minister and President of the United Churches of Christ.

From Our Bookshelves...

Recommended Reading

Charles Marsh, Shea Tuttle and Daniel P. Rhodes, editors. *Can I Get a Witness? Thirteen Peacemakers, Community Builders, and Agitators for Faith and Justice*

(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019.) 385pp.

Reviewed by Walter B. Shurden

When rhetorically interrogating the congregation with, “Can I get a witness?” the black preacher is expecting an “Amen,” a resounding “Yes.” And so does this book. It answers the question, “Can I get a witness?” with 13 “unruly” witnesses, “dissidents, misfits and malcontents.” Most all of them did their theology close to the ground, right next to human hurt and suffering. With sparkling narratives of these 13 “peacemakers, community builders, and agitators,” the three editors have a purpose in mind. They want to nudge the rest of us to act with the same “heavenly discontent and disarming love” that fired these diverse 13 reformers.

Most of you who read this review will look at the table of contents and find at least three or four names that you do not know, maybe have never seen. So this is not the same repetitive list of American social prophets one often sees. Four, maybe five, names were foreign to me. I tease you with some of their words or words about them. Circle the names you do not recognize.

Cesar Chavez (1927-1993) prayed, “Help us to love those that hate us, so that we may change the world,” while he sought a better life for migrant farm workers. Howard Thurman (1900-1981), an advocate for “those with their backs against the wall,” was the intellectual and spiritual father of the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., carried a copy of Thurman’s *Jesus and the Disinherited* in his brief case.

Yuri Kochiyama (1921-2014) spent her life fighting against unjust imprisonment. She also taught a Sunday school class of young girls and believed it was “more important what you teach a child to love than what you teach a child to know.”

Howard Kester (1904-1977), working with miners and sharecroppers in the South, turned pessimistic after a horrible lynching in Marianna, FL. He wrote,

“We won’t love people into the Kingdom, we’ve got to bust this damn society to hell before love can find a place in it.”

Ella Baker (1903-1986), civil rights leader, caused people to sing, “We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.” She had a special concern for “the least of these” and “lifting up the lowly.”

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) begged, “Don’t call me a saint. I don’t want to be dismissed so easily.” After her conversion to Catholicism, she helped found the Catholic Worker Movement and insisted that the world is more than a series of ugly truths.

Father John Ryan (1869-1945), “The Right Reverend New Dealer” and alleged founder of “the living wage,” defended his social reforms against the charge of “socialism” saying, “The only liberty that they interfere with is the liberty of the economically strong to oppress the economically weak.”

William Stringfellow (1928-1985), a Harvard-educated lawyer who defended people drawing the short end of the stick of justice and a lay theologian who critiqued the church, said, in Pope Francis style, “The church must be free to be poor in order to minister among the poor.”

Mahalia Jackson (1911-1972), more interested in social change that some could ever imagine, brought her witness to the public through gospel music.

Lucy Randolph Mason (1882-1959) or “polite Miss Lucy,” a white woman with an aristocratic Virginia background, advocated for labor unions and racial reconciliation in the South when both were scorned and a woman was not supposed to lead.

Richard Twiss (1954-2013), born on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, cried out about the dehumanization of Native Americans and rebuked the story line that Native Americans were “the Canaanites, the Jebusites, the Hittites, the Perrezzites, who stood in the way of . . . the chosen people.”

Daniel Berrigan (1921-2016), a Jesuit poet-priest who once said jestingly, while making a point, that the Pentagon is “the largest insane asylum in the world.” Protesting the mythology that “violence alone can save,” Berrigan roiled both state and church, and he went to prison for his convictions.

Mary Stella Simpson (1910-2004), a preeminent nurse-midwife of 20th century America, encountered transcendence by ministering to the sick and needy and

found herself immersed in the wondrous spirituality of childbirth.

These 13 “witnesses,” calling us to the work of love and justice, shared commonalities. All of them did their work in the 20th century. Father John Ryan died first in 1945. Four of them, Kochiyama, Twiss, Berrigan and Simpson, lived into the 21st century. Also, several of them came from poverty, a schoolmaster for work against injustice. Moreover, women played large parts in shaping several of their lives. In most cases a religious faith of some kind guaranteed their tenacity, perseverance and calling. Solidarity with others and a non-violent approach to social ills dominated much of their activities. Finally, skilled communication, words spoken, written or sung, constituted a powerful tool in the work for human flourishing.

Differences, as well as commonalities, existed among the 13. Latinos, African Americans, Asians, whites, and, of course, male, female and probably gay are among these reformers. Their causes differed as well: peace, racial reconciliation, workers’ rights, physical health and healthy religion. Where religion played a major part in their lives, Christianity was that faith. Within the Christian tradition, however, you will find here Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Baptists, among others. Strategies and tactics for confronting social ills varied. While a few took an “in your face” approach, others were amazing in their love for those they prophesied against.

I must say what one almost always says in a review of an edited volume of essays from different hands, “Of course, the chapters are uneven.” They are. However, not a single chapter failed to arrest me. The subject matter triumphs over style in every case. And it is very difficult to choose favorites among these prophets. For years, I have been enamored with Howard Thurman and challenged to the point of embarrassment by Catholics Cesar Chavez, Dorothy Day and Daniel Berrigan. But in this particular volume, I found myself drawn to John A. Ryan, Lucy Randolph Mason and Mary Stella Simpson. Whatever you do, don’t overlook these chapters.

I came away from the book with another barrel-full of books to read, autobiographies, biographies, words of fiction and non-fiction, books by and about these 13 truth-tellers. The editors, who deserve extensive applause for their work, have a valuable section, “For Further Reading,” in the back of the book.

You, like I, probably do not have the time or inclination to read critical biographies or autobiographies of all 13 of these social reformers, and that is all the more reason to savor these brief sketches. Including the “Introduction,” a chapter a day will keep you inspired

for two full weeks. And each chapter will give you subject matter for your personal conversations.

The effort here to “retrieve and celebrate the tradition of Christian social progressives in the United States” succeeds overwhelmingly and beautifully. Sometimes in reading about people of unspeakable courage and rare nobility, I not only wish I could have known them, but that I could embody them. See if it is not the same for you. ■

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Embracing Weakness; The Unlikely Secret to Changing the World,

by Sharon K. Evans,

published by Our Sunday Visitor in Huntington, IN 2019

Reviewed by Janet Speer

She had me at the title: *Embracing Weakness; The Unlikely Secret to Changing the World*. Intrigued, but a little wary that weakness and meek shall inherit the earth were synonymous ---a theme I had heard from many various angles --- I pressed on into Shannon K. Evans’ work. I was pleased to find that in her first book, Evans explores new territory. It would seem the author seeks new understandings of who we are and how we should live as Christians. Her fresh ideas, previously read in publications like the Huffington Post, show a willingness to explore routes we generally trek by tiptoe.

Shannon Evans begins her story with a subject to which we are often drawn. Who doesn’t want to hear about missionaries in Indonesia who bring intelligent Western know-how to a struggling people? Certainly Ms. Evans had the same goal as she enthusiastically embarked on her journey to “fix” things. But the adventure leads her only to the darkest of disappointments. We are left unsatisfied when she finds herself looking “over” the people; not fully engaged and unwilling to hear their stories. After all, there was a very specific agenda: bring these poor people to Christ. When she discovers the adventure is not what was expected, the author imprisons herself in her house, choosing not to be in intimate proximity among the population she came to serve. The warm euphoric feeling expected only leads to her wishing she were somewhere else. Evans, after all, wanted what any of us would want: to be useful, effective and pleasing to God. After all, if we have these things, we have power.

Using this personal example of mission work, then moving on to marriage, adopting a child and wading through the struggles that accompany these, Shannon Evans leads us into the weightier portion of the book. Her personal journey satisfies our need for storytelling, and her new ideas on spirituality take us into reflection. An example is given when she adopts a child, firm in her belief that power is the crux of parenting. That premise rings true with most of us; after all, the parent knows best and should be an authoritative figure. This, like the mission story, proves to be a falsehood. Power and authority as parenting mantras become as false as the idea that power over impoverished people in Indonesia will bring them out of darkness. It is tempting for Christians to practice their munificence so they can garner God's approval, and thus the approval of peers and kin. Approval lands us in a powerful place. But it can also disappoint, make us empty, even lonely. A possible path to extract ourselves from this quagmire is to embrace our weakness.

Ms. Evans' description of weakness is unique, and the reader will experience a new facet of the word. We are weak when we arrogantly believe we have the tools to dig the Third World out of poverty while remaining objective and distant. Even when Evans traveled to the country and lived with its people, she distanced herself from their stories because she perceived herself as the one whose wisdom set her apart. If her job was to bring these people to Christ, she did not need to participate in intimacy. This weakness led to her great despair. It is, as she calls it, a personal poverty. The truth, she discovers, is that Christ loved these people long before she arrived, and her job was to allow a vulnerable spirit that is open enough to listen to stories seldom heard.

The search for power can come in many forms and through "numbing agents," including drugs, sex, consumerism, – even exercise, re warnings of an insatiable need for control. They are symbols of our poverty. Our obsessive need for them should tell us to slow down and "tend to the soul," allowing weakness to take its course. But these numbing agents steal a part of our reasoning and we lose the objectivity needed to take a step back. If we become weak and vulnerable, we lose power; so we fight it with all our might. But as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12, 9-10: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

In addition to Paul's statement, Shannon Evans believes the temptation of Christ helps us realize that Jesus chose weakness over power. Ultimately his death unravels his followers' hopes for power, as he dies in the weakest of circumstances. He dies in poverty. That "death" becomes a strong theme. To become an effective and loving parent and wife, Evans had to disassemble, become vulnerable, and allow old notions to die off. She had to practice "solidarity."

Many readers might move quickly to the solidarity of Polish leader Lechas Walesa, where like-minded people come together to overthrow oppression. But she takes the word in a new direction, using it in tasks as simple as caring for our children. Simply said, if we "belong to one another, we should act like it." If we are honest with ourselves, we are perfectly willing to be the benevolent giver and instructor, but distance ourselves from full engagement. After all, we know best. What Evans discovers is that old rules of parenting, marriage and missionary work were less than satisfactory because solidarity had not been present. No give and take. This personal revelation leads to depression, failures and ineffectiveness. But they also lead to a map to transformation.

Ah, at last, the happy ending. Transformation! But Ms. Evans, as usual, has a new definition. Transformation is not a neat package where all is perfectly fine. It is not a perfectly fine world. She describes her poverty, convinces us that we have it as well, but now has the gall to tell us transformation is difficult to attain? That the journey is ongoing and usually untidy? But it's worth the struggle, she says. Surprisingly, she ends her book with concrete steps that can set us on a "solidarity" path we have yet to explore. She invites us to be weak. We are invited to throw off the armor so we, who are impoverished, may authentically be with and respond to those around us. She shows us how to look into the eyes of Third World country dwellers, our child or our spouse, and shed the cloak of power and "rightness." We see ways to realign our views of others, and in doing so, find the rich possibilities that lie in a relationship that basks in "solidarity."

Embracing Weakness; The Unlikely Secret to Changing the World is short enough and meaty enough to be used in a Church School class seeking to expand spiritual awareness. It stretches our capacity to love in ways we have not yet explored. Questions in the appendix provide discussion platforms. Our need to expand the way we relate to one another is not new, but Shannon Evans brings fresh information to us that provides fuel for thoughtful reflection. Potentially these concepts just might change our reputations as Christians. Dare we tell the world that we are weak

and impoverished? Is it possible for Christians to seek out the “others” stories? If we choose this path, new possibilities yet unseen may emerge. And it is well worth the effort. ■

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Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America’s Heartland

by Jonathan M. Metz, New York: Basic Books, March 5, 2019, 331 pages.

Reviewed by *Stephen Fox*

In a TED Talk aired on NPR on April 2nd of this year, Howard Stevenson told a story about a presentation on lynching he had made to a class at Southern Baptist Seminary. As he showed the class a photograph which had been taken during a lynching of a black man, he pointed out two white child witnesses. At seeing that photograph, one of the white ministers in training broke down uncontrollably, sobbing and saying that as a child he had also witnessed a lynching.

Stevenson stopped the class to allow the seminarian to regain his composure and then allowed him to continue to explain to the class that he was currently serving as a pastor of a church in a transitional neighborhood and that people of color regularly worshiped in his congregation. He described how he had not been able to reconcile his childhood memory of the lynching with the ministerial tasks facing him.

Stevenson asked the seminarian to consider engaging in a conversation with his own congregation about how to heal his own soul while doing justice work among the people of color he had been called to pastor.

Such sentiment is at the guts of Vanderbilt Professor, Jonathan Metz and his book, *Dying of Whiteness*, that appeared on bookshelves in March of this year. Focusing on Tennessee, Missouri and Kansas, Metz explores the Trump Base and the peculiar reality of the advocacy of white working class males who also vote against their own best interests and that of their children. How could they come to support an ideology saturated with race and minority resentment? His research is depicted in charts and data summaries which make a compelling case that white

males in Trump’s MAGA are damaging their own quality of life and shortening their own life expectancies while resisting sensible reform on the issues of guns, healthcare reform, environmental protections and funding of schools.

Though he never writes the word “Baptist” in his book, *Dying of Whiteness* meshes well with the Baptist story of the last 40 years. For instance, Metz explores the legacy of Kris Kobach in his chapters on Kansas, suggesting he is like the former Governor Sam Brownback on steroids. Kobach is credited (blamed?) for enactment of state laws to make abortion virtually impossible to obtain and a strangling cut of tax revenue to fund state programs of health and education, further enriching the already rich at the expense of the people on the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum.

In her grand history of America published in the fall of 2018, Jill Lepore described in the chapter titled “Battle Lines” the legacy of Eagle Forum’s Phyllis Schlafly. Lepore discussed the network of followers of Schlafly, including a significant number who were

Focusing on Tennessee, Missouri and Kansas, Metz explores the Trump Base and the peculiar reality of the advocacy of white working class males who also vote against their own best interests and that of their children.

also involved in the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, some of whom had also been involved in the John Birch Society and White Citizens Council. Those followers advocated a kind of backlash conservatism emerging out of the discredited McCarthy-era Communism hysteria, and resistance to *Brown v Board* and the integration of public education.

This is significant for Baptist history as the Eagle Forum’s Alabama President, Eunie Smith, was intimately involved in the creation of the draconian immigration bill in Alabama in 2009, spearheaded by Kris Kobach. Smith’s husband, Albert Lee, was Paul Pressler’s confidante as a member of the board of the Baptist Joint Committee leading the unsuccessful efforts to fire the executive director, James Dunn. The underlying effort was to counter what Pressler and other fundamentalists saw as a liberal stance by the

BJC to champion racial integration and the separation of church and state, bedrock principles in Baptist history for much of the 20th century.

As an aside on Lepore, one knows he/she is reading new territory when, in a secular history of America, in the chapter on the Scopes Trial and Fundamentalism one finds this quote by Southern Baptist firebrand, J. Frank Norris himself: “I was born on the dark moon night, in the dog fennel season, when a black cat jumped on a black coffin”.

It was the head of the Alabama chapter of the Eagle Forum, Eunie Smith, who introduced Kansas native, Kris Kobach, to Scott Beason, Alabama state legislator and member of First Baptist Church in Gardendale, Alabama. Kobach and Beason collaborated to draft and promote the draconian Alabama immigration bill that brought yet another chapter of civil rights and justice shame to Alabama in 2009. (See “Willimon Repents” included in *ethicsdaily.com*.)

Metzl described how the same pattern was repeated when Kobach joined the staff of the newly-elected Governor Brownback in Kansas. Brownback was elected with the Koch Brothers’ heavy funding supporting the political strategies of Brownback and anti-immigration lawyer, Kobach. Readers will remember the tax cutting that Governor Brownback pushed in Kansas, which he promised would create prosperity for all. Rather, the severe tax cuts resulted in a broken public education system, unfixed roads and bridges, and near bankruptcy in the state.

Metzl repeatedly comes back to the themes of austerity and backlash politics that result in “upstream

wealth and downstream despair.” His concluding thoughts are worthy of quoting in full:

In our Midwest there were certain tensions about fitting in--as Jews we were in many ways, white outsiders. But our family also thrived in Missouri and Kansas because of strong regional traditions of neighborliness, kindness and goodwill. These are the traditions that seem ever more in peril in this Trump moment of divisiveness. A moment when one side of a debate amasses arms, guts social programs that benefit

Metzl repeatedly comes back to the themes of austerity and backlash politics that result in “upstream wealth and downstream despair.

the least among us and falls into a narrative in which the viability of certain groups exists only in relation to the despair of others.....[It was not always this way] and to be great again we must not fall prey to prefabricated and manipulated polarizations. Let us hope for all our sakes and for the future of our nation, that the white America of which I am a part can find a politics worthy of living for, rather than one whose enormity is marked by increasingly autoimmune forms of conflict, disempowerment and despair. ■

Stephen Fox, a blogger living in Collinsville, Alabama, can be found at Fox Blog, foxofbama.blogspot.com

“There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there always has been. The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through all political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.”

Issac Asimov

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