

Fall 2012

Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

Who Are We? American Values Revisited



There is an American sermon to deliver on the unholiness of pessimism.

– Earl Shorris

cover art

“mournings After (september 11th)”

by michael seri

interior photography

campaign buttons from past election
seasons and social issue crusades

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Who Are We? American Values Revisited

From the Dean's Desk



Gregory E. Sterling
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The only person to be elected president of the United States by a unanimous electoral vote was George Washington – and he achieved the distinction twice. In his first term of office, the new president appointed one of the most talented cabinets in the history of our country, including Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. The secretaries of the Treasury and State differed sharply in their assessments of the role of the national government and foreign relations, but Washington managed to hold them together for four years. The president attempted to promote and embody national unity while avoiding platforms that represented less than the whole.

Eventually even the military hero of the American Revolution could not hold his cabinet together. Their embroilments helped to create rival political parties and their resignations forced the president to appoint lesser talents to serve in his second-term cabinet.

It is important to remember that partisan politics are not new. However, for many of us it appears that the intensity of it today has reached a crescendo that has become a threat to the health of our democracy. We worry that partisanship has created a gridlock that places the national good behind the party good. I recently moved from a state where a senior U.S. senator resigned his seat largely because he had grown weary of the fighting on the Hill that had failed to advance the country.

One of the dimensions of the current partisanship that has not always been present is the use and misuse of values – often values that the partisans claim are grounded in religion – to reinforce ideological lines. It is, however, not always clear that those who appeal to these values have reflected thoughtfully on the tradition to which they appeal. We hear too many examples of simplistic conclusions that overlook the complexities of evidence,

or single-issue stances that elevate one moral issue to an absolute while disregarding a series of others that are historically and theologically just as important, or ideological loyalties that draw on values when they are convenient and discard other values found within the same religious system.

Such moves fail to do justice to the values of a religion – I have Christianity in mind but recognize that individuals from other traditions could easily substitute their religion – and can create a schizophrenic tendency to push people who make an effort to practice the values of a religion in multiple directions at the same time.

This issue of *Reflections* is offered with the hope that it will provoke you to think about the place of values, especially religiously grounded values, in American politics. The contributors do not argue for a single perspective or solution. I am grateful that they do not. Such a reduction would not only betray the ecumenical nature of YDS and fail to do justice to the broader readership of this journal, but would itself become an unwitting partner in the partisanship that it seeks to question.

The contributors do have something in common: they share a spirit of openness and optimism. Their willingness to express their views openly and to publish them in a collection that contains different positions makes a statement that it is possible to hold a set of values and allow others with different vantage points to do the same. I hope that the thoughtfulness and civility of these essays will challenge you to reflect on your own values – your religious values, your political values, and the ways in which the two coincide or diverge.

Gregory E. Sterling
Dean

Contents

Who Are We? American Values Revisited

<i>From the Dean's Desk</i> – Gregory E. Sterling	2
<i>Learning and Praying to Do Right</i> – Senator Chris Coons	4
<i>Redemption Awaits</i> – Diana Butler Bass	7
<i>Amid the Bickering, Shards of Hope</i> – John Kenneth White	10
<i>Interview: The Disunited States of America</i> – Scott Keeter	14
<i>Theology Meets the Moment</i> – Kathryn Tanner	16
<i>Values: Maldistributions and Market Corrections</i> – Ray Waddle	17
<i>The Character of a Good Ruler, Then and Now</i> – Nancy S. Taylor	21
<i>Revelation Road: A Professor Hits the Campaign Trail</i> – Susan Pace Hamill	25
<i>Interview: Civil Thoughts on Uncivil Times</i> – Stephen Carter	27
<i>The Moral Dilemma of Growth</i> – Bob Massie	30
<i>Interview: "I See Deeply Caring People"</i> – Sharon Kugler	35
<i>Spiritual Power, the Subterranean River</i> – Christopher Timm	36
<i>Dreams, Dreads, and the New Global Community</i> – George Rupp	38
<i>In God We (Still) Trust: Electoral Thoughts on Faith</i> – YDS Alumni	45
<i>Interview: "Values are as Real as Grain Prices"</i> – Carlos Eire	57
<i>Suffer the Children: American Lessons from Middle School</i> – Christina Baik	58
<i>Politics and the Impossible Pulpit</i> – Charles Lemert	62
<i>The Bible and Rugged Individualism</i> – Richard H. Hiers	67
<i>Igniting a Revolution of the Heart</i> – Matthew Vogel	68
<i>Editor's Column: Flag Day</i> – Ray Waddle	76

Poems

<i>The Last Election</i> – John Haines	9
<i>A Buddha in the Woodpile</i> – Lawrence Ferlinghetti	20
<i>Monopoly</i> – Connie Wanek	34
<i>Tea and Sleep</i> – Taha Muhammad Ali	41
<i>Notes on the Capitalist Persuasion</i> – John Haines	61
<i>Neighbors</i> – Clemens Starck	65

Learning and Praying to Do Right

by sen. chris coons

On a warm June day in the Capitol, the Chaplain of the United States Senate, Rear Admiral Barry Black, offered a prayer. "Open the eyes and hearts of our lawmakers so that they will know and do Your will," he prayed. "Help them to think of each other as fellow Americans seeking Your best for our Nation rather than enemy parties seeking to defeat each other. Replace distrust in each other with a deep commitment to creative compromise." I had the honor of opening the Senate session that particular morning, a tradition I have led more than two dozen times in my year and half as a member of this body.

It is a short time in the chamber's history, but long enough to notice a shift in the chaplain's daily prayers. His words have grown more urgent, more pointed, and more explicit in their pleas for unity. He sees, it seems, what many of us see – that as this fall's election grows closer, the seeds of partisanship and division are being sown ever deeper.

Scripture tells us that what we sow, we also reap, and it is clear that the soil of our scorched-earth partisanship cannot yield solutions to the truly grave challenges we face as a nation. So we ask ourselves where we can find common ground and foster unity. In my experience, one of the paths to better understanding can be our broad and diverse faith traditions.

Genuine Human Encounters

This path is one several members of the Senate take each week, as we gather for a nondenominational prayer breakfast. With no staff, no lobbyists, and no pretense, these meetings are rare opportunities for us to get to know each other as people: as parents, as children, as spouses, and as individuals shaped by life's great triumphs and tragedies. When we see each other this way – as more than two-dimensional cutouts mapped to preconceived expectations – we

can begin to focus on what brings us together, rather than what drives us apart.

In Senate prayer breakfasts, I have witnessed acts of extraordinary kindness and genuine compassion for each other as fellow human beings, rather than as walking distributors of party-line talking points. These weekly sessions are powerful reminders that from the most liberal to the most conservative, we

modern politics has pulled just a few threads from the cloth of faith tradition and made them points of division.

share a love of family and country that far exceeds any policy or political disagreement.

It is not surprising to me that faith can help build this kind of common ground. At transformative moments in my faith and life journey, I have witnessed prayer services that transcend any barriers of local language or culture. As a student studying abroad in Kenya, a place as foreign as could be imagined from my home state of Delaware, I attended a church service with African, Indian, and English members, with songs and service for all.

But what does that mean for our political discourse?

Modern politics has pulled just a few threads from the cloth of faith tradition and made them points of division. In recent years, more often than not, faith has contributed to the divisiveness of our politics.

That has not always been the case. The history of churches and political change in America is long and distinguished, and makes good on our obligation to “learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed” (Isaiah 1:17). From the American Revolution to the end of slavery, from women’s suffrage to the movements for civil and labor rights, positive, progressive paradigm shifts have been centrally informed or directly led by faith groups.

Our faith traditions – even the same faith tradition – can inform our politics in diametrically opposing ways. Yet the opportunities to find common cause are not as rare as some might think, and I have seen moments where interdenominational faith-based and secular leadership have come together to unite members of the Senate who might not otherwise see eye to eye.

Rallying Points

One issue that inspires this kind of unity is global health, on which I work regularly as the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs. American policy toward Africa, in particular, is an area that has long enjoyed broad, bipartisan agreement, and there has been real commitment from members of both parties to ensure that we

it is hard – and should be hard – to throw verbal punches at a person who stood arm in arm with you in prayer only hours or days earlier.

extend our hand to those most in need around the world. Battling HIV, malaria, and infant mortality is an act rooted in faith and morality – one where congregations, health advocates, and global leaders stand arm in arm pressing us to action.

We are capable of extending this circle of protection around the least among us here at home, too. It is my hope that as we continue to debate what is the right balance of spending cuts and revenue increases to restore balance to our nation’s books, we will stand together to protect the programs that serve the most vulnerable in our society: the disabled, low-income seniors, and children in the early stages of life. The requirement to care for the “the

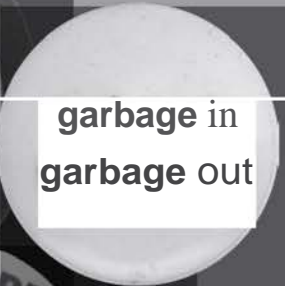
least of these” (Matthew 25:40) should guide our choices in the months ahead, as our nation’s budget is, in practice, a reflection of our values.

As we wade through the turmoil of this election season and the difficult decisions that await us after its conclusion, faith can be one path to shared understanding. When Admiral Black opens each session of the Senate with a prayer, he is contributing to a tradition that reminds us that we all share a calling to serve our country, our God, and each other. We can all look for opportunities to build bridges and seek out common humanity instead of rancor.

There is no salve to instantly heal our divisions. Some of our disagreements are real and deep, and they cannot be bridged with a weekly prayer breakfast. Still, it is hard – and should be hard – to throw verbal punches at a person who stood arm in arm with you in prayer only hours or days earlier. We remember that we ought to be less like the “enemy parties seeking to defeat each other” that Admiral Black warned of in his opening prayer on that warm June day, and more like the people of faith and conviction we know we can be.

We may disagree on policy and ideology, but share a view of humanity that is rooted in a calling and a commitment to those we serve – and that is a good place to start.

Christopher Coons ’92 M.A.R., ’92 J.D. is a United States Senator of Delaware. Elected in 2010, he serves on the Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Energy & Natural Resources, and Budget committees.



Redemption Awaits

by Diana butler bass

I confess: I spent much of Summer 2012 avoiding the news. This was odd for me as I have been passionate about current events for many years. At fifteen, I experienced an awakening of political and religious consciousness and have spent a quarter-century writing and teaching about faith in the world.

I do not entirely know what precipitated my sudden revolt against cable television, radio, the web, and newspapers. Unexpectedly, dreams of bucolic escape – fantasies of moving to a small farm or waterside cottage – occupied my mind. “There is a thing in me that dreamed of trees,” wrote poet Mary Oliver, “A quiet house, some green and modest acres/A little way from every troubling town/A little way from factories, schools, laments.”

I knew something deep was happening – I was feeling increasingly wearied by hopelessness.

A Fading Poster

As summer waned, I summoned enough energy to watch the political conventions. Of the many words and images, a particular moment disturbed me: vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan’s description of the “fading” poster from the 2008 election, now tormenting a generation of young adults with lost hope. As powerful as “HOPE” proved four years ago, it now seems little more than a slogan to some. To ridicule hope has become acceptable political sport. Fading hope, decaying dreams, gnawing doubt, and eroding confidence framed far too many speeches. These are emotions of escape, the inner space where sadness sows isolation and individualism. A party cannot put “DESPAIR” on a poster, but a disorientation bordering on despair reflects what too many people feel. And it was being plied to motivate – or deter – voters.

As autumn arrives and campaigns take up the media, I fear despair might displace hope. Somehow hope has become passé. This cynical public discourse, absent hope, forms the backdrop of what

happens in our congregations, informs the hearing of our sermons, and deforms the connections of our communities. Hopelessness is not only endemic to politics; it has worked its way into the spiritual DNA of many churches and denominations. It is hard to hope for the future when your congregation is declining, the Sunday school is empty, people are arguing about the issue du jour, and there is little money to pay the pastor – and when programs to increase numbers and vitality have failed. Hope is in short supply, even in churches, the single place where one would expect to find it.

The scriptures warn that without vision, the people perish. But vision begins in hope, and without hope, the future dies before it is born. Sans hope, we waste away.

Hope is not a political slogan. In Christian tradition, hope is one of the three theological virtues. According to Paul in First Corinthians 13, hope, along

Hope comes not through political campaigns. Rather, lasting hope will spring from a rebirth of courage in faith communities.

with faith and love, form the core of Christian life. In classical theology, hope is the opposite of despair, of which John Chrysostom said, “It is not so much sin that plunges us into disaster, as rather despair.”

Medieval Christianity understood the state of despair as *acedia*, the desire to flee from the good, toward apathy, isolation, even death. Thomas Aquinas

nas referred to this state of hopelessness as “uneasiness of mind.” Despair, generally called sloth, is considered one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

Is it possible to move past hopeless? Can we find our way to genuine hope?

Hope involves emotions, but it is not ultimately a feeling of happiness or optimism. Hope is a noun, meaning “expectation” or “sure confidence.” It is also a verb, “to expect” or “to desire.” The New Testament links hope with the salvation of all creation, God’s dream to heal the universe through divine love. In Romans, Paul says “the whole creation has been groaning” as with labor pains as it waits expectantly for this new world. Hope—the sure confidence that everything is moving toward this cosmic end—is the foundation of salvation. “Now hope that is seen,” wrote Paul, “is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom 8: 24-25).

A Universe of Health and Freedom

The hope that Paul describes takes not only patience but courage. Indeed, Christians must live with an eye toward this unseen end, the cosmic summing up of all things in God. We labor in service of birthing this new creation, a universe of health and freedom, formed by and in God’s love. In the New Testament, hope is always political—Christians hope for a new world, not personal salvation. This vision gives Paul courage as he faces criticism, challenge, and persecution. For him, hope goes far beyond sentimental feelings. Hope is the driving vision of a world restored by grace, and the ability to act upon what is only partly seen.

To those who trust that the future holds the promise of God’s salvation, hope-filled action is courage. Indeed, without the courage to act, hope is just a word or a slogan on a fading poster. However, when we act with deep assurance that things can and will be different, *acedia* loses its hold and we can move back into the world. Hope and courage are intimately connected in a mutual exchange of expectation and transformation. Hope without courage is a platitude; courage without hope is folly.

Hope and courage begin with honesty. We need to understand the wide gap between what is and what we cannot see. Thus, hope starts with a straightforward assessment of the world as it is. We must lament the state of things because we believe a different future is possible; we must acquaint ourselves with despair because we know the gulf between the two. But lament and understanding do not end in despair. Rather, despair points toward a spiritual reality: at the center of all doubt is, as the

Hebrew prophets write, a steadfast and compassionate God.

Much of today’s contemporary young adult literature is dystopian: *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, *Age of Miracles*. Each of these books begins with unblinking portraits of worlds of despair. These tales are modern versions of Lamentations, “How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!” (Lam 1:1). Yet, in each of these bleak stories, the main characters, even while suffering the full weight of despair of their circumstances, courageously act in expectation of a different world: They choose to love, leaping across the gap of what is and what can be. Ultimately, they are stories of hope.

Dare to Lament

My recent book, *Christianity After Religion*, begins with a sober assessment of the current state of North American religion. A woman sent me this email: “I like your new book, but I almost didn’t make it out of the first three chapters. They were depressing.” I replied that that was the point. *Christianity After Religion* is actually a lament, describing the turn away from conventional forms of religious life toward a different sort of spiritual connection. This turn has opened up a gap between church-as-it-is and the sort of community for which many yearn.

This disjuncture is frightening for many who love the church. Yet, in the gap between what exists and what could exist, new possibilities for vibrant faith are being birthed—and there can be found courage to embody a more meaningful, loving, and transformative faith. There is not much reason to expect that religious institutions will survive as they are; there is much reason to hope if we courageously reform and renew the church.

As summer turns to autumn, the questions bedevil me. I wonder if hope and courage will join hands to forge a new sense of the common good. But hope comes not through political campaigns. Rather, lasting hope will spring from a rebirth of courage in faith communities, when God’s people prophetically act on divine intention for a world transformed. I wonder if we can find the power of lament as a path toward a new future.

I have turned the news back on. Its hourly din reminds me how bad things are, how far there is to go. However, the groaning of creation strangely cheers me. After all, these are the labor pains. Redemption awaits.

Diana Butler Bass is an author, independent educator, and consultant. Her latest book is Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening (HarperOne, 2012)). She holds a Ph.D. in the history of Christianity from Duke University. See www.dianabutlerbass.com. She can be followed on Facebook and Twitter.

the last election
by John Haines

suppose there are no returns,
and the candidates, one
by one, drop off in the polls,
as the voters turn away,
each to his inner persuasion.

the front-runners, the dark horses,
begin to look elsewhere,
and even the President admits
he has nothing new to say;
it is best to be silent now.

no more conventions, no donors,
no more hats in the ring;
no ghost-written speeches,
no promises we always knew
were never meant to be kept.

And something like the truth,
or what we knew by that name –
that for which no corporate
sponsor was ever offered –
takes hold in the public mind.

each subdued and thoughtful
citizen closes his door, turns
off the news. He opens a book,
speaks quietly to his children,
begins to live once more.

Amid the Bickering, Shards of Hope

by John Kenneth White

This election season finds the nation mired in political bickering almost without purpose – save the mere acquisition of power. The intense partisan warfare now underway has been waged without end over the past decade – despite assurances from two presidents of different political parties to stop it.

George W. Bush promised to be a “uniter [sic], not a divider,” but his presidency plunged the country even deeper into the culture wars. At first, Bush looked to make good on his campaign promise. Following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the culture wars were set aside in favor of a real war against Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. But the unity that followed the 9/11 attacks did not last. Seeking reelection, Bush won largely by emphasizing cultural differences – especially his opposition to gay marriage.

Tired of the polemical back-and-forth, Barack Obama introduced himself to voters in 2004, saying: “There’s not a liberal America and a conservative America; there’s the United States of America. ... We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.”¹ Campaigning for the presidency four years later, Obama held forth the ideal that his lofty rhetoric could inspire a renewal of national unity. But after being besieged by Republicans unwilling to work with him as president, and by angry Democrats frustrated by his bipartisan overtures, Obama acknowledged his failure to end the squabbling. In a 2011 *60 Minutes* interview, Obama blamed Republican intransigence for his inability to call a truce, and he likened himself to a sea captain unable to “control the weather” – in this case the partisan squalls that dominate the news headlines and are further amplified on the internet.²

State of Catatonia

This small-minded politics has prompted two respected political analysts, Thomas Mann and Nor-

man Ornstein, to author a 2012 book with the dour title, *It’s Even Worse than It Looks*.³ According to them, the use of a potential filibuster for nearly every Senate vote (thereby creating a threshold of sixty ayes needed for passage) has plunged Congress

men, married couples, faithful church attendees, whites, seniors, land-line telephone users, Dunkin Donuts coffee drinkers, and gun owners are inclined to back Romney.

into a state of paralysis. This catatonic state was given additional life support after the 2010 elections, when Republican Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell made his intentions clear: “Our top political priority during the next two years should be to deny President Obama a second term.”⁴ This call to arms led to an unusual and debilitating standoff in Summer 2011 over the nation’s debt ceiling. In the past, raising the U.S. debt limit was a pro-forma vote routinely supported by both parties. But the heightened state of partisan warfare, combined with the near-running out of the debt clock, resulted in the downgrading of the U.S. credit rating for the first time in modern history. Voter approval of Congress plunged to a mere 12 percent, and Obama’s job performance also took a direct hit following the debt debacle.⁵

For Republicans, the goal of removing Obama from office has led them to double down on their rhetoric. Florida Congressman Alan West recently took a leaf from the late Sen. Joe McCarthy’s play-

book and charged that “seventy-eight to eighty-one members of the Democrat Party ... are members of the Communist Party.” (The numbers West cited happen to coincide with the total membership in the House Democratic Progressive Caucus.) Democrats, too, have engaged in political excess. A former member of the Florida congressional delegation, Alan Grayson, charged that Republican opposition to the Affordable Care Act (read: Obamacare) amounted to “Don’t get sick, and if you do get sick, die quickly.” From the House floor, Grayson read the names of people who have died without health insurance and blamed Republicans for their demise.

The 2012 presidential campaign is almost as mean-spirited. Barack Obama and his Chicago operatives spent the summer trying to disqualify Mitt Romney by painting him as a shadowy character who has pursued unsavory business practices. Romney and his Boston team accuse Obama of abandoning his uplifting 2008 campaign promises and operating as a typical Chicago pol and big government spender. Both acknowledge the economy is a top concern, but neither seems to have a plan for tackling it.

Amidst this, polls show that a values divide continues to shape the outcome – just as it did in the presidential contests of 2000, 2004, and 2008. Women, singles, seculars, minorities, young people, cell phone users, Starbucks coffee drinkers, and non-gun owners are predisposed to support Obama. Men, married couples, faithful church attendees, whites, seniors, land-line telephone users, Dunkin’ Donuts coffee drinkers, and gun owners are inclined to back Romney.

Evidence of New Consensus

Absent efficacious leadership, Americans have taken matters into their own hands on two issues that once defined the culture wars – abortion and gay rights – and they are coming to a consensus that gives each side reason to hope. According to the Gallup Organization, more Americans described themselves in 2009 as being “pro-life” rather than “pro-choice” – the first time that had happened in the long history of the Gallup poll.⁸ Today, Gallup finds the pro-life position holding firm: 50 percent describe themselves that way; 42 percent are pro-choice, the latter being the lowest number ever recorded. The same poll also found 51 percent agree that abortion is “morally wrong;” only 38 percent believe it is “morally acceptable.”⁹ Moreover, 59 percent think abortion either should be “legal in a few circumstances” or “illegal in all circumstances.”¹⁰

Finally, 64 percent favor laws that would “make it illegal to perform a specific abortion procedure conducted in the last six months of pregnancy known as a ‘partial birth abortion,’ except in cases necessary to save the life of the mother.”¹¹

Without question, the pro-life movement has reached new heights as Americans rethink abortion and have concluded that it should remain, in the words of Bill Clinton, “safe, legal, and rare” – with emphasis on rare.¹² Though this does not mean that the public favors overturning the 1973 *Roe v. Wade*

Women, singles, seculars, minorities, young people, cell phone users, Starbucks coffee drinkers, and non-gun owners are predisposed to support Obama.

Supreme Court decision (64 percent agree with it), the data strongly suggest that the pro-life supporters have made significant progress in wooing voters to the notion that abortion is something that should be exercised with great caution and only in extremely rare cases.¹³ Conservatives are encouraged by the general agreement on this once-touchstone issue of the culture wars.

But liberals and progressives can also claim progress in an emerging consensus concerning gay rights. When the Massachusetts Supreme Court issued its 2003 ruling making gay marriage legal in that state, the controversy gave George W. Bush a weapon he employed with relish during his 2004 campaign. Using the platform of the State of the Union Address, Bush proposed a federal constitutional amendment that would overturn the Bay State’s judicial ruling, declaring that he and his fellow Republicans “must defend the sanctity of marriage.”¹⁴ Eleven states followed suit in 2004 by amending their own state constitutions to ban gay marriage.

Today, less than a decade later, the number of Americans supporting gay marriage – or some variant of it – is at an all-time high. Seventy percent favor some means to legally recognize gay partnerships: 37 percent believe gay marriage should be recognized outright; 33 percent want a legally recognized partnership that is called something other than marriage; and just 25 percent express outright opposition.¹⁵ Moreover, 64 percent say that twenty years from now most states will permit gay couples to marry.¹⁶

This is an extraordinary change. Gay Democratic congressman Barney Frank believes one reason for

this transformation is that many Americans either know a gay person or have a gay person as a family member. According to Frank, making gays part of the culture wars means that “you’re not just beating up on gays and lesbian kids, you’re beating up on all their relatives.”¹⁷

One such person is Mary Cheney, the daughter of former Republican vice president Dick Cheney. Her homosexuality had long been a taboo subject within her family. In an infamous 2007 interview, her father, the then-Vice President, bristled when asked about the birth of a grandchild to Mary Cheney and her lesbian partner. But in one more sign of the times, Mary Cheney married her long-time partner, Heather Poe, in a civil ceremony in Washington, D.C. (where gay marriage is legal) on June 22, 2012, without fanfare. A few weeks later, on July 7, Barney Frank married his long-time partner, Jim Ready, saying he wanted his congressional colleagues to see a married gay member before he left office. And in 2012, for the first time ever, a major party presidential candidate, Barack Obama, expressed support for gay marriage. The Democratic Party followed suit by endorsing gay marriage in its 2012 platform. Candidates from both parties have publicly acknowledged their homosexuality. In virtually every case, their sexual orientation is not a political liability—and can be a political asset since it opens up new avenues of fund-raising. Simply put, the anti-gay campaign run by George W. Bush in 2004 would backfire in 2012.

Gun-Shy About Gun Control

Something important is happening. As the shifting data on abortion and gay rights demonstrate, Americans are seizing the initiative. The result is a muting of the culture wars on these two fronts. Such progress provides some reason to believe that with the passage of time (and as both sides take time to learn from each other), the culture wars need not be an enduring feature of our politics. Amidst the hyper-partisanship, there are shards of hope.

How much light these shards of hope will reflect is uncertain. When Americans are willing to rethink a cultural issue—or have been exposed to new variants of it—there are strong suggestions that these issues will fade. However, on one topic—guns—the public seems unwilling to reassess its hardened positions. Despite the tragedy of the Aurora, CO, movie theater killings, Americans have shown no inclination to support new restrictions on gun sales. A Pew Research survey finds that 67 percent believe the shooting is an act of a troubled individual; only 24 percent say it reflects broader problems in American society.¹⁸

The American love affair with guns, and the near-sanctification of them in the Second Amendment, have precluded any rethinking of the issue. Gun rights advocates say that the problem is not one of new statutes, but enforcing those already on the books. Both Barack Obama and Mitt Romney were gun-shy following the Colorado murders, with neither proposing a public dialogue on the issue. Instead, both focused their sympathies on the victims, with President Obama promising not to mention the name of the perpetrator—as if not mentioning his name would somehow make the subject go away.

By contrast, another touchstone issue—race—gives reason to hope. The dramatic rearranging of the U.S. demographic landscape is altering how we think about race in the twenty-first century. By 2050,

When Americans are willing to rethink a cultural issue, there are suggestions that these culture-war issues will fade. However, on one topic—guns—the public seems unwilling to reassess its hardened positions.

it is estimated that whites will be a minority. But the shifting racial composition of the U.S. is even more complicated than at first glance. While non-whites are assuming a larger place in both society and politics, the number of Americans who identify with more than one race is on the rise. In 1970, the number of interracial couples totaled 300,000. Today, that figure has jumped to 5.4 million.¹⁹

How we think about race used to be as simple as black and white (even though it was always more complicated). Today, defining one’s race is much more of a slippery slope. The U.S. government has acknowledged this fact. Since the 2000 Census, respondents have been allowed to check more than one race on the form. In 2010, more than nine million people did so.²⁰

Living in a racially heterogeneous nation means that race is likely to diminish as a political issue as more people marry someone of a different race, go to school and have friends from different racial backgrounds, and/or live in a mixed-race neighborhood. In short, our expanding experiences mean that de facto segregation is less likely, and the ways in which we think about race are sure to change in the years ahead.

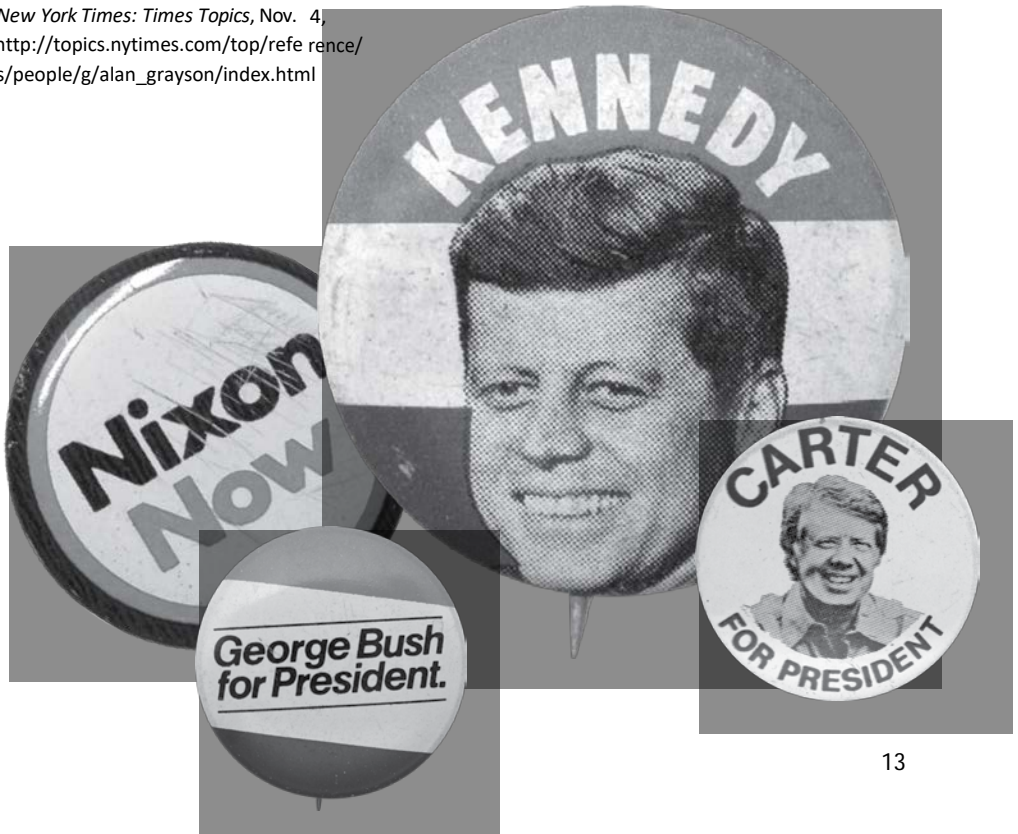
Addressing the Congress in 1862, Abraham Lincoln famously said: “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion

is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”²¹ Today, Americans are engaged in thinking anew some formerly held cultural positions. Amidst the bickering that will dominate the months remaining in Campaign 2012, there are indeed shards of hope.

John Kenneth White is a professor of politics at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and is the author of several books on U.S. politics. His latest is Barack Obama's America: How New Conceptions of Race, Family, and Religion Ended the Reagan Era (University of Michigan Press, 2009).

notes

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- 2 Quoted in David Nakamura, “Obama Criticizes GOP Intransigence in 60 Minutes Interview,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 11, 2011.
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- 10 Gallup poll, May 3-6, 2012.
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- 15 Fox News, poll, May 13-15, 2012.
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- 18 Pew Research Center, poll, July 26-29, 2012.
- 19 See John Kenneth White, *Barack Obama's America: How New Conceptions of Race, Family, and Religion Ended the Reagan Era* (University of Michigan Press, 2009), p. 61, and U.S. Census Bureau, “2010 Census Shows Interracial and Intermarried Married Couples Grew by 28 Percent over Decade,” press release, April 25, 2012.
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The Disunited States of America:

Scott Keeter



Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research at Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., was part of the team that conducted one of the year's most newsworthy surveys. More than gender, race, age, or class, Americans are divided by political values, and those divisions are intensifying, according to the Pew Research Center American Values survey.

A political scientist by training, Keeter has been associated with Pew and its surveys of American values since the mid-1990s.

This latest American Values survey finds deepening differences in the values of Republicans and Democrats.

"Republicans are most distinguished by their increasingly minimalist views about the role of government and lack of support for environmentalism," the survey summary says. "Democrats have become more socially liberal and secular."

The two groups are furthest apart in their attitudes about the social safety net—their opinions "about the government's responsibility to care for the poor, whether the government should help more needy people if it means adding to the debt, and whether the government should guarantee all citizens enough to eat and a place to sleep."

The gap has widened also in measures of religious belief and social conservatism. Democrats have become more secular, more positive in their views of immigrants and more supportive of policies aimed at achieving equal opportunity, according to Pew.

Swing voters, comprising about a quarter of all registered voters, feel "cross-pressured," the poll says. They feel more akin to Romney supporters regarding the social safety net and immigration, but they tilt closer to Obama supporters in opinions about labor unions and some social issues.

The poll finds Americans united around other values. There is little support for the idea of American "declinism." According to the poll: "A large majority agrees that 'as Americans we can always find a way to solve our problems and get what we want.' The public's confidence in the nation has not been dulled, even as

Americans have become more skeptical about prospects for economic growth."

The survey was conducted in April among 3,008 adults nationwide, tracking the underlying values that shape policy and political opinions. It is the latest in a series of Pew polls started in 1987. Keeter talked to Reflections last month.

REFLECTIONS: HOW did we get to such divisiveness?

KEETER: It's probably a fool's errand to attempt a grand theory. But Democrats will likely say George W. Bush started it by taking a no-compromise approach to government. And Republicans will probably point to the positions taken by Barack Obama or Nancy Pelosi or Harry Reid.

It's worth noting that lots of countries have trouble reaching consensus when they are under economic stress. Over the last two decades, most of America has experienced low or little economic growth, and that makes for a hard environment for finding common ground.

REFLECTIONS: Is this cause for alarm?

KEETER: The size of the partisanship gap had been stable for years—a difference of 10 percentage points, and that's enough to get a good political dog fight—but now the gap is 18 points.

In a sense, this is what many political scientists had been hoping for years ago: They argued that our political system needs responsible political parties that give voters a clear choice. That wish is coming true. The two parties are becoming more and more ideologically homogeneous.

But, so far, the result has been a dysfunctional political system that appears unable to govern or solve problems.

REFLECTIONS: Why is partisanship outstripping other divides such as race and gender?

KEETER: I believe it's a result of several factors. One is the consolidation of the New Deal realignment with southern conservatives finally settling in the Republican Party, thus making for more ideologically homogeneous parties on both sides. Related to this is gerrymandering, which has increased in effectiveness and – perhaps along with partisan media that enforce ideological discipline on members of each party – made for a more ideological corps of party leaders in Congress and the states. Leaders matter, and if leaders aren't willing to compromise, and don't hold any heterodox views, followers are likely to mirror them over time.

REFLECTIONS: Is this the worst it's ever been?

KEETER: I wouldn't say that, certainly not when we look back to the Civil War. And the Founding Fathers, revered as they are, said nasty things about each other. Today we hear of "Romneyhood" or "Obamalongy" – that's nothing compared to other periods in our history.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We've had lots of politicians who knew how to work across the aisle to accomplish goals despite partisanship. I think of Bob Dole and Teddy Kennedy. And people say they want to see this. There was national bipartisan feeling after the financial crisis in 2008. Americans wanted Washington to work together to solve it. It was bipartisan, briefly, after the Obama election. Even people who didn't vote for him were excited about the national accomplishment of electing the first African American as president.

The current situation could change. Keep in mind that both parties are shrinking. As they become more ideologically pure, they get smaller. But at some point, a party can become so pure that it no longer wins elections.

Demographically the country is changing quite quickly. It may be that, if the GOP doesn't self-correct, it could face dwindling appeal to people who aren't white. On the Democratic side, the party could become so diverse in its interest groups that it can't provide an effective message.

REFLECTIONS: Yet partisanship isn't the whole story. The survey identifies values that keep us together.

KEETER: America is more than its government and politics. The striking thing is the sense of continuity

in its values, not the changes. Yes, we're seeing a growing liberalism on some social issues, and some growth in secular attitudes, but other values remain consistent – the belief in hard work in order to get ahead, a can-do spirit, the importance of religious faith, an acceptance of diversity as a dimension of the nation's greatness, the rejection of notions of national decline.

REFLECTIONS: How are young people faring?

KEETER: There's a lot of noise about the failure of schools to teach civics and citizenship, but I don't know how much of that is true. We know young people particularly are disengaged from the political process, but they always have been. Even so, we are seeing some evidence that young people are somewhat more engaged than previous generations in volunteer service and other civic activities – soup kitchens, tutoring, environmental clean-up. In fact there was an uptick in voter turnout among young people – a reversal of a downward voting trend – in 2004 and 2008.

There's much bemoaning about the values of young people, but I think that's unfair. Teenage pregnancy is down. Drug use is not increasing. Young people are more accepting of social diversity – gay rights, racial integration. Yes, their attitudes toward marriage have changed, and they are more likely to say one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together. But they put a high priority on being a good parent and on trying to make good relationships.

REFLECTIONS: Is ideology taking the place of church and civic clubs as a shaper of individual identity?

KEETER: I don't get the sense that people are using politics that way. Church membership and Rotary Club and other organizations have a potentially moderating influence, because they bring people together to work side by side on common goals. They get to see each other as human beings and not as caricatures.

REFLECTIONS: That's not what happens when people watch cable TV news.

KEETER: The polarized talk on cable – Fox News, MSNBC, and others – is reaching a very small public. That public's reach is greater than its numbers, but most people still get their news from mainstream news organizations. Americans tell us that they don't want polarization to get in the way of possible solutions. The problem is politicians have trouble hearing that if they listen only to the most ideological voices in their party.

Leading into this election season, our political culture could use a dose of religious values that provide some alternative to the small-minded ethic of purely personal responsibility and self-reliance so often touted in our current public discourse.

Yale political scientist Jacob Hacker captures well the crabbed and myopic intent of what he calls the Personal Responsibility Crusade:

“Critics of public and private insurance know what they are against, and they know what they are for: greater personal responsibility and individual self-reliance, propelled by aggressive government policies that erode the bonds of shared fate and undermine the forms of social insurance that once linked Americans across lines of class and economic vulnerability.”¹

Where, one might ask, has social concern gone in this time of “government-off-my back” and “it’s-my-money-and-I-want-to-keep-it” sentiment, and can religion help bring it back?

No one of course can deny that over the long haul of history religious values have often merely held up a mirror to the trends of the day, in that way shoring them up and rendering them sacrosanct, immune to serious criticism. The givens of political, economic, and social life might find their reflection, for example, in a divine realm, kings on earth extending the reign of a monarch in heaven, hierarchies on earth matched by the ranked angelic retainers surrounding a divine sovereign. If that were all religion ever did – provide a “sacred canopy,” as Peter Berger terms it, for the political and economic practices to which society already inclines – then engagement in the theological task, to my mind, would hardly be worth the effort.

Even where chaos threatens, there are nobler theological tasks than blanket legitimization of existing opinion, and more intellectually challenging ones than simply reiterating in some higher register the common sense of the day, so as to bolster otherwise tottering current pretensions to knowledge. Far better to look to theological claims for unexpected insight in particulars, for salutary reminders about what has been left out and occluded in taken-for-granted views of how we are to live now. Because it references what lies outside our ordinary frame of vision – God – theology has the potential to break open cramped worldviews, to take us out of the often narrow confines of our own time and move us toward a field of expanded possibilities in which the repressed resurfaces.

What are we forgetting at this moment of American discontent and how might theology bring it back to the forefront of our national consciousness (and conscience)? For one, theology, by extending the range of our self-concern, might remind us how overly narrow definitions of self-interest can

be ultimately self-defeating. It is really not in our best interest to benefit alone, while our unfortunate neighbors fall without a safety net – not simply because we might be next but because their misfortune undermines our own well-being in the community we form with them. The “self” of our self-concern always extends beyond the limits of our own personal boundaries, at the very least to include loved ones: What harms them harms us. At its best theology does its best to encourage such an expansive self-definition: Identifying with Christ we must also identify ourselves with all those with whom he is bound, with his whole body, a body that at least in intent is universal in its range since Christ came in love for the whole world.

Second, theology speaks against the vain hope of insulating oneself through hard work or responsible behavior from the risks facing everyone in today’s America – the risk, for example, of financial ruin through job loss or debilitating illness. Theology reminds one instead of the way one remains ineradicably part of the pool of an ever-fragile humanity, both in need of and worthy of help. For all one’s differences from others as the unique individual one is, one remains a creature like them, a sinner like them, an object of God’s redemptive love and concern like them.

Finally, rather than take credit for one’s good fortune or make others assume responsibility for what has befallen them, theology counsels attention to the way one’s life is in the grip of larger forces outside one’s control, for all one’s obligatory efforts to steer one’s way toward the good – to the way we are all tainted by original sin, at the mercy of our limits as hapless finite creatures, and feeling the effects of a God whose good intentions for us will ultimately trump all our efforts to decide our own lives. In this most basic challenge to the ideology of just deserts, theology would concur in its advice for the contemporary moment with one of Yale’s most famous economists, Robert Shiller, who writes:

“Overcoming the false sense that each individual’s fate is fully deserved is vital, not only because it inures us to our own risks but also because it prevents us from appreciating the kinds of policies that society needs to adopt to deal with these risks and blinds us to the arbitrariness and absurdity of the misfortunes that others face. Only then can we really confront those risks and take timely action against them.”²

Kathryn Tanner is Professor of Systematic Theology at YDS.

Notes

- 1 Jacob S. Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift*, revised and expanded edition (Oxford, 2008), p. 166.
- 2 Robert J. Shiller, *The New Financial Order* (Princeton, 2003), p. 45.

Values: Maldistributions and Market Corrections

by Ray Waddle

Anguished debate about the future of American values has been flaring since the mud of Woodstock (1969), the heroism of the Montgomery bus boycott (1955-56), the grinding worry of the Great Depression (1929-1941) – and long before.

The soul-searching scrimmage over American identity and moral destiny was at full-tilt during the Scopes Trial (1925), the Social Gospel movement (ca. 1898-1917), the carnage of the Civil War (1861-1865), the First Great Awakening (ca. 1730-60). It was there at the landing of the Mayflower (1620) and the founding of Jamestown (1607). Are we a secular republic or a divinely aided city on a hill? A community melting pot or a gaggle of rugged individualists? Who are we? There's never been a moment's respite from the question or from the urgency of making answer.

Character Flaw?

Lately, the values debate has stubbornly taken up space on unexpected ground – the economic crisis. What besets our economic health and throttles our outlook for the future? Is the culprit a weakened dollar, an unjust tax policy, perhaps a flaw in the American character? The stakes are high. A stack of new books and studies declares something has gone deeply wrong in America in the last thirty years, something more troubling than the failure of econometric models of GDP growth and rational self-interest. Income inequality has intensified. Hostility toward government solutions has deepened. The sheer scale of money itself – the personal debt incurred, the federal debt accumulated, the trillions lost in the 2008 crisis, the corporate power gripping Congress, the super-PAC funds now unleashed in election season – seems to have broken free from the available vocabulary to understand it, manage it, or predict its next moves.

Recent arguments warn about the nation's widening economic division, and how it happened after the 1970s, and why it's dangerous if it contin-

ues. Books that come to mind include *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* by Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future* by Robert Reich, and *The Great Divergence: America's Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do about It* by Timothy Noah.

The authors look to the bad behavior of banks, markets, and government policy to find explanations for our financial meltdowns, our anxiety about the future, and the alarming levels of distrust that course through the body politic. But economic analysis only goes so far. As the reader discovers, such authors at least briefly glance at an elusive theme that's larger than economics – moral values. Today's market maldistributions are a betrayal of American ideals, they argue. We're deep in a values crisis, a struggle to keep American life under the sway of humane virtues that can defy the stark Darwinian impulses of the new world order.

"There is a tradition in our not-so-distant past of fellowship and decency and shared commitment to fair play, a feeling that when the country prospers, everyone should prosper," Noah writes.¹

"That tradition has been slipping away, and hardness and mutual suspicion and belief in markets as the infallible measure of all things have taken its place."

In the economy's recent free fall, a renewed scrutiny of the condition of American values has the ring of a national referendum. But with no national emcee to referee the discussion, the referendum is disorderly, unregulated, inconclusive, lurching in fits and starts. Still it manages to illuminate the country's dreams, nostalgias, and potential.

What explains the growing gap between the haves and have-nots? Is it bad that the middle class is shrinking? Are we losing sight of who we are as a nation? Did we ever really know?

Various threads and responses come into view. One theme is: Let us lament the loss of the Protestant work ethic, which instilled self-restraint and thrift in American capitalist behavior but is now fading in the new multicultural, globalized milieu. Another theme: Today's feverish inequality is a sign of the triumph of a ruthless, post-theistic ethic that will lead to social breakdown and dystopia. A counterargument is made: Let us cheer the reemergence of unfettered individualism, which is at last challenging the paternalism of nanny-state big government and returning liberty to America's entrepreneurs. Still another: Inequality is efficient, fair, and inevitable in the economic game of life, and globalization's untamed free markets are the unstoppable reality of our century; reform is futile, so stop trying.

The 60s, Again

Amid the sifting and sorting, scrutiny focuses on the state of values before and after the 1960s. We are getting clarity on its legacy. Before the 60s, a New Deal coalition that began in the 1930s forged a national narrative of community solidarity. The nation was roughly united by an expectation of shared prosperity, by the democratization of incomes, by a new safety net for the most vulnerable citizens – also by belief in God and, after World War II, opposition to Soviet expansion. The American experiment was a shared one no matter how perilous the times.

By the 60s, that unspoken social contract was beginning to fray. Many Americans refused to extend the contract to African Americans and other minorities. Libertarian opposition to taxes was gathering steam. An anti-war movement was corroding trust in government authority. Income inequality was starting to creep up again.

And the decade churned up a demanding new ideal that upended traditional patterns: personal autonomy. Witnesses of those times still marvel at what was fast happening everywhere – a suspension of old repressions. It was intoxicating.

"Some unjust severity had been overcome or bypassed," poet Robert Bly writes of the Woodstock moment. "Fundamentalist harshness, Marxist rigidity, the stiff ethic of high school superintendents, had passed away."²

But it uncorked other forces too. Woodstock optimism, Bly admits, gave way to darker impulses in every decade after: a declining regard for the common good, a trend of adolescent posturing among

adults, a wised-up connoisseurship of conspiracy. Tones of snark and sarcasm became a national style.

"Cultures with depth have firm codes," Bly writes.

"One can feel the codes in old movies; promises must be kept, pleasure comes after relationship, you talk in a polite way to grandparents, there is something more important than money ..."

Exalting the Self

A revised America was rising on the giddy discoveries of emancipation. This freedom was personal and sexual. It was also political and financial. Americans found it easy to harmonize them all as the decades unfolded. According to author Mark Lilla, the "liberal" 1960s revolution of personal autonomy and the "conservative" 1980s revolution of economic autonomy share a decisive trait: both exalt the self.

Woodstock Generation, for its part, gave us private freedoms but also more out-of-wedlock children, a soft-porn pop culture, and poor neighborhoods destroyed by drugs.

"Others wanted to be free from taxes and regulations so they could get rich fast, and they have," Lilla wrote in 2010, "and it's left the more vulnerable among us in financial ruin, holding precarious jobs, and scrambling to find health care for their children."³

The new dispensation's celebration of individualism accounted for the curious revival of novelist Ayn Rand as its totem and evangelist. Defenders saw her version of selfishness as a principled rebuke against hippie communitarianism and government hand-outs too. She believed self-sacrifice is morally

the wealthy feared revolution, and the poor feared hunger. the new Deal was the answer to both fears.

inferior to self-interest; altruism leads to socialism. A remarkable number of American Christians, ignoring her contempt for their religion, embraced her ideas of individual power and anti-liberalism.

"A man who places others first, above his own creative work, is an emotional parasite," she declared. She dreamed of a world of market purity: "Not only the post office, but streets, roads, and above all, schools, should all be privately owned and privately run. I advocate the separation of state and economics."⁴

The noisy jostle of arguments about American spiritual politics and well-being – the dispute of routine facts, the split between religious and secular voters – signaled a disappearance of old

touchstones. Value debates appeared increasingly unmoored from familiar referents such as biblical monotheism, mainline Christianity, neighborly trust, personal modesty, or skepticism of too-big-too-fail solutions. A *Time* poll last year reported Americans turning decisively pessimistic about their future.

Despite a famous national flair for positive thinking, a certain strain of pessimism has been hiding in plain sight for decades, reconfiguring the horizon of America's values. This intrigued writer/educator Earl Shorris, who by the mid-2000s noticed a trend: "In half a century America has gone from love of God and one's fellow man to fear of God and one's fellow man."⁵

The Unholiness of Pessimism

In his book *The Politics of Heaven: America in Fearful Times* (2007), he describes a vast new political movement now afoot that has virtually replaced New Deal optimism. He does not give the new movement a political label, but it is built around an impossible search for existential security in a nuclear age and the yearning for certainty about a heavenly afterlife. It has redefined our politics.

A plausible birthdate of this movement was the morning of Aug. 6, 1945, when the first atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima. At that moment we learned that we now lived in a world where nuclear death could come with a flash at anytime. A new sort of dread descended, a fear of untimely death and sudden catastrophe. (A subconscious question stirred even more anxiety: "If we are good and we did this to our enemies, why should our enemies, who are not good, hesitate to use nuclear weapons against us?" Shorris asks.)⁶

Fifty years of Cold War hardened the worry, and nightmares of nuclear terrorism in the new century only elevate the fear. This represents a break with the past. In the 1930s, America had two fears, Shorris says. The wealthy feared revolution, and the poor feared hunger. The New Deal was the answer to both fears, delivering a measure of security and political unity. Now, though, the goal of security in a nuclear world is more sweeping, demanding, harsh: It means security only for the fittest, the mightiest, the militarily superior. The inconsolable dread of atomic annihilation makes for a gnawing loneliness and isolation, a forerunner to a politics of despair unredeemed by other values.

Yet this doesn't get the last word. No movement is permanent. It is well to remember, Shorris says, that the New Deal's hopeful ethical vision was supplied by the Social Gospel, the Christian-infused social movement of the late nineteenth century. That

buoyant spirit of religion, which declared a ministry to body as well as soul, lived on until the 1960s. The death of Martin Luther King represented the end of Social Gospel hopefulness. But the American bloodstream carries memories, a recoverable resolve that flows into the open-ended future. There a treasure of values, including courage embodied by King's words and actions, remains in play in the name of defiance and healing.

"An undercurrent of optimism still exists in America," Shorris declares. "To avoid despair, Americans will have to abandon the practice of capitulation to the movement. Millions of citizens will have to be as brave as old men or smooth-cheeked children. There is an American sermon to deliver on the unholiness of pessimism."⁷

Ray Waddle is *Reflections'* editor-in-chief.

notes

- 1 Timothy Noah, *The Great Divergence: America's Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do About It* (Bloomsbury 2012), pp. 8-9.
- 2 Robert Bly, *The Sibling Society* (Addison-Wesley, 1996), p. 3.
- 3 Mark Lilla, "The Tea Party Jacobins," *New York Review of Books*, May 27, 2010. Writing in the *New York Times* in July, writer Kurt Andersen made a similar point this way: " 'Do your own thing' is not so different than 'every man for himself.' If it feels good, do it, whether that means smoking weed and watching porn and never wearing a necktie, retiring at fifty with a six-figure public pension and refusing modest gun regulation, or moving your factories overseas and letting commercial banks become financial speculators. The self-absorbed 'Me' Decade, having expanded during the '80s and '90s from personal life to encompass the political economy, will soon be the 'Me' Half-Century." Op-ed column, "The Downside of Liberty," *New York Times*, July 3, 2012.
- 4 Ayn Rand, interview, *Playboy* magazine, March 1964.
- 5 Earl Shorris, *The Politics of Heaven: America in Fearful Times* (W.W Norton, 2007), p. 3.
- 6 In *The Pregnant Widow*, novelist Martin Amis ponders the psychological fallout of the nuclear presence: "Everything could vanish, at any moment. This disseminated an unconscious but pervasive mortal fear. And mortal fear might make you want to have sexual intercourse, but it wouldn't make you want to love. Why love anyone, when everyone could vanish?" *The Pregnant Widow* (Knopf, 2010), p. 132.
- 7 Shorris, p. 343.

A buDDHA in tHe WoodPile

by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

if there had been only
one buddhist in the woodpile
in Waco texas
to teach us how to sit still
one saffron buddhist in the back rooms
just one tibetan lama
just one taoist
just one Zen
just one thomas merton trappist
just one saint in the wilderness
of Waco usA
if there had been only one
calm little Gandhi
in a white sheet or suit
one not-so-silent partner
who at the last moment shouted *Wait*
if there had been just one
majority of one
in the lotus position
in the inner sanctum
who bowed his shaved head to the
chief of All Police
and raised his hands in a mudra
and chanted the Great Paramita sutra
the Diamond sutra
the Lotus sutra
if there had somehow been
just one Gandhian spinner
with brian Willson at the gates of the White House
at the Gates of eden
then it wouldn't have been
Vietnam once again
and its "one two three four
What're we waitin' for?"
if one single ray of the light
of the Dalai Lama
when he visited this land
had penetrated somehow
the Land of the brave
where the lion never
lies down with the lamb –

but not a glimmer got through
the security screened it out
screened out the buddha
and his not-so-crazy wisdom
if only in the land of sam Houston
if only in the land of the Alamo
if only in Wacoland usA
if only in Reno
if only on cnn cbs nbc
one had comprehended
one single syllable
of the Gautama buddha
of the young siddhartha
one single whisper of
Gandhi's spinning wheel
one lost syllable
of martin Luther King
or of the early christians
or of mother teresa
or thoreau or Whitman or Allen Ginsberg
or of the millions in America tuned to them
if the inner ears of the inner sanctums
had only been half open
to any vibrations except
those of the national security state
and had only been attuned
to the sound of one hand clapping
and not one hand punching
then that sick cult and its children
might still be breathing
the free American air
of the First Amendment

The Character of a Good Ruler, Then and Now

by nancy s. taylor

It is May 30, 1694 – Election Day – and the Rev. Samuel Willard mounts his Boston church pulpit to address the region’s recently elected rulers: “His Excellency the Governor, and the Honorable Counselors, and Assembly of the Representatives of the Province of Massachusetts Bay in New England,” all of whom are sitting in the pews that day.¹

Mr. Willard’s sermon, called “The Character of a Good Ruler,” is equal parts warning and lecture, aspiration and inspiration, exegesis and instruction. We can imagine these politicians awaited his words with a measure of fear and trembling.

The annual election sermon was a Puritan phenomenon that lasted for well over two hundred years, from 1634 through 1884. It was one of the means by which church and state, the sacred and

today’s politicians routinely give tremendous attention to liberty, but when was the last time you heard a politician wax passionate on virtue or piety?

the profane were twined so tightly together in colonial New England. The election sermon served as a centering and ritualized observance of the purpose of the entire Puritan enterprise.² Election preachers were as “watchmen upon Jerusalem’s wall, whose proper business is to descry dangers, and give seasonable notice thereof; to observe the sins of the times, and the awful symptoms of God’s departure.”³

Mr. Willard’s election sermon of 1694 is particularly fraught with significance. It is preached one year after the debacle of the so-called Witch Trials, a calamity worsened at every turn by political leadership that assisted in and enabled collective madness.

Although situated eighteen miles from Salem, Mr. Willard’s Third Church (today known as Old South Church in Boston) becomes infected by the hysteria as soon as it begins in 1692. Some of the members are accused. (Capt. John Alden, son of the Mayflower’s Priscilla and John Alden, is one. Mrs. Thacher, widow of our first minister, himself beloved and venerated, is another.) Some of the members are accusers while four others serve as justices on the special court of Oyer and Terminer, which the governor has established to hear so-called “spectral evidence.” Mr. Willard is pastor to them all.

Great Risk

Employing a probing intellect and a pastor’s heart, he investigates the matter and finds the evidence wanting. At great risk both to his life and his reputation he positions himself between accused and accuser and publically demands a return to reason. He places himself between powerful justices and helpless women, between an imposing governor and hapless girls, between those brandishing stones and the targets of their “righteous” indignation. (Is it any wonder that in Old South’s portrait of Samuel Willard he appears to have suffered a black eye?) In meeting after meeting, letter after letter, and sermon after sermon, he defends the victims of the hysteria. He emerges as this country’s original public defender.

Mr. Willard’s persistence is eventually rewarded. He is among those few clergy who finally succeed in persuading the governor to dismantle the notorious tribunal of Oyer and Terminer.



Now, a year later, Mr. Willard preaches the election sermon to the region's freshly elected magistrates, reminding them that "the Weal or Woe of a People mainly depends on the qualifications of those Rulers, by whom we are Governed ..." Surely the Witch Trials are a raw wound to these would-be rulers and Mr. Willard's words salt. As a pastor it is the weal or woe of the people that matters to him. Will the colonists' wants and needs be heard? Can they entrust their safety to these leaders? Or will they again be subjected to the foolishness and agony of such tyrannical injustice as blighted the years 1692-93, leaving thirty-two dead from state execution and almost no New England town or family unscathed?

A Haunted Memory

With this devastating recent memory on everyone's mind, Mr. Willard insists that civil rulers should be just men. It is not *adequate* that they *understand* the law. Surely the justices who presided over the executions in 1692-93 understood the law. That is not nearly enough. They must themselves *be* just.

"Ignorance," Mr. Willard declares, "is a Foundation for Error, and will likely produce it." Injustice

will beget injustice and ignorance will beget yet more ignorance. Those invested with the privilege and responsibility of ruling their fellow human beings "must be above Flattery and Bribery, must hate Ambition and Covetousness," for "if these Rule him, he will never be a just Ruler."

Finally, looking each newly elected ruler in the eye and punctuating each word, each phrase, as if life and death depend on them (because they do), Mr. Willard says of the ruler, "he must be one who prefers the public Benefit above all private and separate Interests ... [I imagine a very long pause here] whatsoever." Whatsoever!

In truth, there is nothing astounding about Mr. Willard's words except this – the day's audience. Here is a preacher directly addressing such admonitions to duly elected public officials. We can only suppose they are listening – perhaps with trepidation. But others are listening as well – the electors, the populace whose work it will be to keep their new rulers' feet to the holy fires of moral fortitude. (Election sermons were published and made widely available).

Mr. Willard's sermon is no perfunctory pep talk. It is lengthy and substantive. His words remind the colonists they are embarked upon a moral marathon. He describes civil rulers as "God's Vice-regents here upon the earth." In vigorous prose he avers: "A People are not made for Rulers, But Rulers for a People, and just as there is a great Trust devolved on them, so is there an answerable Reckoning which they must be called unto..."

Mr. Willard winds toward his dénouement: "And although God doth not always peculiarly put a Brand in this World upon Impious and Unjust Rulers, yet there is a Tribunal before which they must stand e're long as other men; only their Account will be so much the more Fearful, and Condemnation more Tremendous, by how much they have neglected to take their greater advantages to Glorify GOD, and abused their Power to His Dishonour, by which they had fairer opportunity than other men."

Imagine exchanging such a sermon for the jaunty music, celebratory confetti, and bright balloons with which we greet and fête today's newly elected politicians.

Surely we cannot or even wish to return to such a time and setting. What then? Although we cannot duplicate Mr. Willard's fearsome warnings on behalf

God's name is invoked today with reckless ease and confidence, often serving as a code word, a momentary means to rally and unify an otherwise unwieldy voter bloc.

of God and the common good, clergy and persons religious are not without recourse.

Today Mr. Willard's church is in the planning stages to sponsor a Candidate Forum in Fall 2012. Ecumenical and inter-religious leaders hope to query candidates for state office on matters that we discern are close to the heart of God. By plumbing our sacred scriptures and drawing upon our acquaintance with the terrors and trials of Boston's least and lost, we will engage our candidates and more. We will provide them with face-to-face testimonials of harassed immigrants, families whose houses and lives are under siege because of catastrophic medical bills, taxpayers for whom Boston's public transit is deficient, and citizens for whom our public schools are more playground and drug-ground than classroom.

Local religious leaders are regular visitors to the Commonwealth's House and Senate, to hearing chambers, to the offices of the Governor and Senate

President. Through Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, we do call the Commonwealth's elected officials to account, reminding them that the weal or woe of the people in their care depend not only on their political skills, but also on their character.⁴

The upshot: Not only do Boston's elected officials know the local clergy, in many cases they welcome the moral and spiritual pressures we apply. They need us. The clergy of Mr. Willard's day understood themselves to be in symbiotic relationship with their elected rulers. Should we not also understand and position ourselves in symbiotic relationship with the elected officials of our day? After all, a great many of them entered upon public service with a heart for the common good, only to find themselves frustrated by the machinations of a large and complex political establishment.

An Ever-Demanding Enterprise

But we, too, must be self-searching. As the Puritan divines understood very well, religious leaders have no business holding our political leaders to moral account or challenging their characters if we have not attended to our own characters and our own moral fortitude. We, too, must be just.

American democracy is an exceedingly demanding enterprise. As the Founders knew, democracy is far more labor-intensive than a monarchy. It requires genuine commitment to conversation and deliberation among thoughtful, informed, and virtuous people.

For Founder Samuel Adams (1722-1803), who was a member of Old South Church nearly a century after Willard, a functioning democracy depends on a common commitment to key principles. He conceived of these principles as an interconnected triad of virtue, piety, and love of liberty (not only one's own liberty, but everyone's liberty as a God-given, "unalienable right"). By contrast, when democracy is reduced to liberty alone – liberty unhinged from the rigorous disciplines and high principles of virtue and piety – everything gets off-kilter. Today's politicians routinely give tremendous attention to liberties and liberty, but when was the last time you heard a politician wax passionate on virtue or piety? Perhaps that is where we come in – ensuring a healthy balance to that symbiotic relationship between political and spiritual leadership, each challenging and inspiring the other, each embracing responsibility for the greater good, each serving different functions in a greater whole.

Of course, the risk of abusing public religion runs very high. In the campaign season, God's name is invoked with reckless ease and absurd confidence. It

often serves as a code word for particular audiences, a momentary means to rally and unify an otherwise unwieldy voter bloc.

By definition, however, God is unknown and unknowable, incorporeal and ineffable. The attempt to bend and wrest God to political purposes (to a party, policy, or politician) is bound to be folly, a betrayal, revealing a lack of connection between rhetoric and morality, campaign promises and com-

exalted references to God on the campaign trail so often appear disconnected from any moral urgency to solve our problems.

mon purpose, genuine spirituality and the veneer of civic religion. Exalted references to God on the campaign trail so often appear disconnected from accountability – that is, from any moral urgency to solve our problems, ease the wretched persistence of poverty, or challenge the highly financed business of violence.

From beginning to end, American-style democracy is a strenuous undertaking. There are no shortcuts. It demands the best we have to offer as a nation. Not least, it demands the best that you and I have to offer as people of faith and as religious leaders – as persons trained not only in love of liberty, but also in virtue, piety, and justice. The character of good rulers, in other words, may very well depend on the character of the local religious leaders. As people of faith we are intrinsically vital to the democratic enterprise. The lives and legacies of Samuel Willard and Samuel Adams attest to that.

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notes

- 1 The Rev. Samuel Willard (1640-1707) was the second pastor of Third Church, Boston, from 1678 until his death. A graduate of Harvard College, Willard also served as acting president of Harvard for six years, from 1701 until his death.
- 2 A.W. Plumstead, in his essay "The Election Sermons," published in *Religion In American History: Interpretive Essays* (Prentice-Hall, 1977), edited by John Mulder and John Wilson.
- 3 Ebenezer Thayer in his 1725 sermon "Jerusalem Instructed & Warned."
- 4 The Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) is a broad-based organization that works to coalesce, train, and organize the communities of Greater Boston across all religious, racial, ethnic, class, and neighborhood lines for the public good. Our primary goal is to develop local leadership to fight for social justice. We strive to hold both public and private power-holders accountable for their public responsibilities, as well as initiate actions of our own to solve community and economic problems. See www.gbio.org.

Revelation Road: A Professor Hits the Campaign Trail

by susan Pace Hamill

The intense hatred and fear fueled by the manipulation machines permeating the 2012 presidential election cycle raise disturbing questions. Can the common democratic values we supposedly share survive the turbulent tensions driving us apart?

Hostility toward government and taxes, the wedge over gay marriage, and legalized abortion and the treatment of illegal immigrants – these are just a few of them. We are faced with a perplexing paradox. In a nation where more than 70 percent of us claim to practice Christianity in some form, we endure an increasing lack of civility punctuating the discussion and the demotion of the most important concerns Jesus expressed – “Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (Matthew 25:45). This paradox indicates that

We must grasp this paradox – why many devoutly religious people cling to ideas, policies, and candidates that hurt “the least of these” as well as themselves.

authentic faith is in deep trouble. If they truly want to straighten out our path, ministers, well-meaning reformers, and academics must grasp this paradox – why many devoutly religious people cling to ideas, policies, and candidates that hurt “the least of these” as well as themselves personally – and respond to it by crafting a reform message in a way that speaks to *their* universe, *not ours*.

As a tenured professor of law, I decided a decade ago to complete a master’s degree in theological studies at Beeson Divinity School, a conservative evangelical interdenominational seminary, part of a private Baptist-affiliated university in Birmingham, AL. Beeson’s mission – to prepare God-called men and women to do the work of Jesus Christ on earth using their “head, hands, and heart” – fit my needs perfectly. I quickly found my calling – using my

expertise in tax law in a manner that reflects the teachings in the Bible. My master’s thesis, which declared that the horrible injustice inflicted by Alabama’s regressive state and local taxes is unbiblical according to conservative evangelical exegetical and hermeneutical analysis, caused a firestorm in Alabama and quickly spread to other states.

Energized, I conducted follow-up research. One article establishes that biblical principles support moderate progressivity and reasonable opportunity as general moral guidelines for tax policy discussions. I also argue that the tax cuts during President George W. Bush’s first term were driven by objectivist ethics, a form of atheism where each individual functions as his or her own god. Another exhaustively researched article examines the state and local tax structures of all fifty states, concluding that none of them meet these general moral guidelines and thirty-one of them display the extreme level of injustice found in Alabama.

Simplify, Simplify

Bursting with pride over the positive responses that generated hundreds of speaking engagements in thirty different states and extensive press coverage, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and *London Times*, I believed I had found the answer: All I had to do was simplify the message and secure help from trustworthy community leaders to help me deliver it. If I did that, like the sun shining rays of hope far and wide, my work would reach the masses and grow grass by convincing them to support leaders who foster tax policy that helps “the least of these” and would also for many of them reduce their own personal taxes. I was undeterred even by the 2003 defeat of a tax reform proposal in Alabama.

Then something happened that taught me how wrong I was. During the 2010 election season I ran for the Alabama legislature as a Democrat. The experience took me decidedly out of my comfort zone. I emptied myself of being an autonomous professor and became a servant who begged people for support. I submitted to the authority of a street-wise political manager who, despite staunchly believing in my work, informed me darkly: “Darling, your books and poetry are of little use to you now.” Under the tutelage of a new hairdresser, handpicked by the self-appointed chair of a committee of ladies that swooped in and assumed responsibility for my makeover, my hair went from a short and professional cut to a lengthier, blonder style.

Meeting People Where They Are

The campaign came to a head when, over my manager’s objection, I insisted on conducting an organized field campaign: Over a three-month period I spoke to 2,431 regular voters at home. Resigned that he could not stop me, my manager prepared me in a two-hour training session to meet the people at the door. “Never use the word *professor* at the door and only admit you teach at the university if the voter asks where you teach,” he ordered fiercely.

He proceeded to interrogate me throughout the session to keep me focused on the goal of this arduous field campaign: “Dear, why are you at the door?” Each time I said, “To get the voter to like me,” and he’d smiled and at the end of the session concluded: “That’s right darling, you want them to say after you’ve just left, She’s a nice lady – I *like* her.”

Only in the campaign did I fully discover the third of Beeson’s three educational prongs—“head, hands, and *heart*.” As one of my Beeson professors informed me years after I graduated, “Most of our students come to us with their hearts on fire and their heads not functioning and we have to straighten that out. You had the opposite problem.”

Although in the end I got killed because hordes of irregular voters came out in droves and voted straight Republican to make a statement against President Obama, I was still wildly successful at the door because my style of communication morphed. I learned to meet people in *their* way on *their* terms at an emotional level where they felt that *I cared about them as people*. As I discovered, nuanced policy arguments were of little interest to voters at the door. One local sage whispered brutal advice in my ear: “Use emotionally charged words, provide easy entertainment in sound bites of fun, fear, and us-against-them.” On my fiftieth birthday, the first day of the field campaign, I came up with my own

snappy quote to mark the occasion: “Stop relying on well-reasoned ideas and trust your hairdresser.”

Too many devoutly religious people are hurting both “the least of these” and themselves because they personally *feel* more comfortable with those ideas, policies, and candidates even when they are contrary to biblical teachings and their own self-interest. But here’s the rub: As long as ministers, well-meaning reformers, and academics put well-reasoned ideas at center stage without engaging the hearts and emotions of voters, our current political path will go unchallenged, even though the Bible promises such a path will eventually destroy us.

I learned this painful lesson during my campaign, one that is difficult for any academic who has dedicated years to laborious research to accept. My work is not like the sun after all but rather like a visible but distant planet – Saturn, say, rings and all. A planet has weight and atmosphere and density and importance, but it moves to the gravitational forces of others. It is absolutely helpless in getting us there on its own.

“I’m the Ball, Boss”

Another metaphor illustrating this invokes an Alabama favorite – a football team. My manager posed this hypothetical in our training session, asking me what position I played as the candidate. He was astounded when I answered correctly – “I’m the ball, boss” – and I understood that he is the quarterback, his staff plays other offensive positions, and my hairdresser plays center. Ministers, well-meaning reformers, and academics bring them water.

The greatest impediment to encouraging voters to help “the least of these” and themselves – an impediment even greater than the fear-mongering political manipulators – is us. When we ministers, well-meaning reformers, and academics refuse to accept the demotion of our importance in this pecking order, we allow the manipulators to prevail. In order to respond effectively to the paradox of immoral tax policy in a religious nation, we must resist the sin of pride and take our position as water bearers for the metaphorical quarterbacks who definitely sympathize with us about what the Bible requires but who have the decisive ability to communicate with voters in *their* universe using *their* language.

Jesus understood how difficult this is for us to swallow, and he offers those struggling some comforting words – “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

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Civil Thoughts on Uncivil Times: Stephen Carter



photo credit: elena selbert

Stephen L. Carter '79 J.D. has taught law at Yale since 1982. His course subjects include law and religion, the ethics of war, contracts, evidence, and professional responsibility. He also writes widely on the interplay of culture, ethics, and religion, with books such as The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion (1994) and Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy (1999). His best-selling novel The Emperor of Ocean Park was released in 2002. His latest novel, The Impeachment of Abraham Lincoln, was published by Knopf in July.

REFLECTIONS: Has the moral mood of the nation changed in recent decades?

STEPHEN CARTER: The late religious philosopher Henry Nelson Wieman coined the phrase “traffic society” to refer to a culture so steeped in generalized impersonal regulation that people are treated in effect like automobiles rather than human beings. That seems to me the direction in which we’re headed. It isn’t that any particular law or rule is particularly bad (although there are some clunkers out there), but that the sheer weight of rules displaces other goods.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Fifteen or twenty years ago, a college student in California decided to attend classes naked. When criticized, he insisted that he had the right to do it. Maybe he did, maybe he didn’t. The point his critics made was that whether or not he had the right, what he was doing was wrong.

Nowadays, this sort of argument is quite difficult to make. Once a claim of right has been asserted, the asserter (often aided by the media) expects all critics to shut up. It is as though the establishment of legality ends questions of morality. A public conversation premised on that vacuous notion isn’t worthy of the name.

Edmund Burke, in an early essay, bemoaned the way that lawyers and theologians had divided up the world, so that nobody dared act without consulting both. Few people are very frightened any longer of the theologians. The lawyers of his day have morphed into the bureaucrats of ours; and the bureaucrats scare everybody.

One predictable result of a heavy reliance on rules is a decreased reliance on moral suasion – and as the need for moral suasion declines, so does our ability to engage in moral argument. That is why, for example, critics of the Bush Administration’s adventure in Iraq, or the Obama Administration’s drone war, have found themselves forced to rely on shaky arguments about legality. In both cases, they should have been making arguments about morality. Alas, we no longer do public moral argument particularly well. If we don’t recover the skill, we will cease to be in any recognizable sense a moral people.

REFLECTIONS: How do you assess the national conversation about American values during this election season? Do you hear resilience, self-doubt, confidence, confusion?

CARTER: I was unaware that any such conversation was taking place. I have noticed a great deal of silly

shouting and sloganeering, applause lines, useful mythologies, and lists of people to hate – in short, all the usual accouterments of a reactionary politics. A reactionary politics is one designed to bypass the rational faculties of its targets, and that is the corrosive work in which both sides are engaged during this election season.

Emerson and Thoreau had a famous disagreement on which was superior, the spoken word or the written. Emerson believed that one had to listen to an argument to truly understand. Thoreau considered reading better, dismissing speech as a “brutal” alternative to writing. Whoever was right then, both forms of communication have become equally brutal in the current campaign. This is not so much the fault of the candidates as the fault of the voters – they are only giving us what they think we want, and they don’t think we want a serious, reflective conversation among competing visions.

But if I am mistaken – if there is, on the national stage, an actual conversation going on, on any subject – I would most certainly like to learn of it.

REFLECTIONS: In *Civility*, you said it was your prayerful hope for America that “we build a society in which we act with, rather than talk about genuine respect for others.” Has civility lost ground since 1999? What conditions are needed for it to flourish?

CARTER: In the book you mention, I define “civility” as the sum of the many sacrifices that we make for the sake of living our common life. Thus civility isn’t only good manners (although it is that) and it isn’t only how we think about and talk about others (although it is that, too). Civility resides, for example, in acts of charity, particularly when they are truly costly to us.

Are we being more sacrificial? It is difficult to say. Acting through government isn’t sacrifice – it’s the use of coercion to require sacrifices from others. Coercion isn’t always bad, and there are things government must coerce – but we should be careful to separate acts of state from acts of charity.

The distinction matters. Consider for example the substantial literature suggesting that when individual income tax rates rise, so do charitable donations, because the benefit to the giver (the charitable deduction) is worth more at a higher marginal rate. If this is so, however, we must recognize the implicit failure of civility: People are giving money to charity because they are being paid to do it! (The older view, that only the giving of the rich and not the giving of the middle class is influenced by tax rates, seems not to have stood empirical testing.)

REFLECTIONS: Is religion today a healthy part of the public conversation about values and behavior?

CARTER: One would of course want those who take God’s word seriously to be serious in applying that word to the problems of society. I cannot speak for other religions, but I am skeptical that many Christians are any longer well-positioned to bring the teaching of their traditions to bear on the problems of the world.

When Paul prays (Ephesians 3:17-19) “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God,” his purpose isn’t the creation of any community. He is trying to create

Democracy cannot flourish when electoral politics is exalted above all things. the entire point of the concern for civil society is that a successful nation needs its people to be focused on matters more important than transitory partisan advantage.

Christian community as something distinct from the culture it inhabits. Here it seems to me that Stanley Hauerwas has matters right. We might dispute in places Stanley’s vision of what Christian community is, but a Christian is most certainly called to create it – not for the purpose of fixing the world but for the purpose of nurturing and disciplining believers.

Short of this, as Hauerwas points out, it is difficult to know how Christians can possibly witness to the world. If Christians don’t have any idea what we ourselves believe, or why, we can hardly expect the world to listen to our disordered musings.

Of course, as we know, people by and large don’t want to listen anyway. They are skeptical that the religions have much to teach them about how to meet the challenges of today. No doubt some of the blame for this rests with the cultural assault on religion. But much of the blame also rests with religion itself, not only because of the “legalistic” face the public often perceives, but also because of the way the faiths have become distracted by internal battles that are simply irrelevant to the lives and needs of most believers.

REFLECTIONS: What sort of wisdom can faith traditions inject into turbulent times?

CARTER: Our modern word wisdom comes from an Old High German word meaning, roughly, judicial precedent. The idea was that wisdom was the guidance that the experience of the past could offer to the present – and that the guidance of wisdom, absent exceptional circumstance, should be binding. I

have never thought that we should somehow be ruled by the wisdom of the ancients. That doesn't mean, however, that we shouldn't consult it and, at times, defer to it. The ancients can be wrong, but so can we. Here it is useful to follow the example

of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, and be as acutely sensitive to what we don't know as to what we do.

A lot of traditional teachings are, by our present lights, morally reprehensible, and have quite properly been rejected. But we shouldn't turn this around and suppose that they must be morally reprehensible because they're ancient. When a moral teaching has been held for generations, that at least suggests that a lot of people over the centuries have thought it might actually be true. That fact does not make a traditional answer true, but it does suggest that we should embrace a certain humility when deciding whether to reject what tradition teaches. On the other hand, many religionists are nowadays in retreat from their own traditions – or else cowering in bunkers, trying to protect what tatters of tradition they can from the strengthening cultural and legal assault.

REFLECTIONS: If American history can be characterized as a long debate between individualism and community, who's winning?

CARTER: If the question is about sex, individualism is winning. If the question is about just about anything else, community is winning. If you doubt this proposition, just consider where we feel comfortable regulating, and where we don't.

As more and more corners of life are regulated for the sake of the common good, the tricky question is who's in charge. Come to think of it, the same question applies to sex. Odd how our culture seems most individualistic in the one sphere where the intellect is least involved in the taking of decisions.

REFLECTIONS: There's talk of a "narrative of decline" taking hold in this country. Is that overstated?

CARTER: Oh, we're in a decline. No question. Not because the economy is retrenching – that'll work itself out eventually, and people will fight viciously over credit the way they now fight about blame – and not because American influence abroad is receding, either – although that, too, presents problems. No,

the reason we're in a decline is that we no longer are capable of being serious about public argument.

Election campaigns have become opportunities for entertainment, each side declaring a jeremiad against the other, but mainly pointing to silly gaffes, and lying happily about what the opponent is up to. Supporters of this or that candidate, when pressed about why the campaigns are so vicious, will routinely answer that their side is just matching the other, doing what's necessary to win. As a

When a moral teaching has been held for generations, that at least suggests that a lot of people over the centuries have thought it might actually be true.

Christian, I find this response terrifying. Christianity seeks to build a morality of means that is every bit as important as the morality of ends, and often more so. And not just Christianity. The late Gore Vidal used to argue that the American idea rests on the proposition that the end doesn't justify the means, and I think he was right. Our goals obviously matter, but so do our chosen strategies for attaining them. There is nothing admirable in doing whatever is necessary to win, because victory is not a virtue. (John Courtney Murray's clever mot – "If the end doesn't justify the means, what does?" – is often quoted in response, but usually out of context.)

It's not that politics wasn't nasty before. In America, politics has always been nasty. But we used to spend a good deal less time on it than we do now. People paid attention for a few weeks and then went on with their actual lives.

Democracy cannot flourish when electoral politics is exalted above all things. The entire point of the concern for civil society is that a successful nation needs its people to be focused on matters more important than transitory partisan advantage. A nation where friends can no longer hold political discussions, for no other reason than that they disagree, is a nation not only in decline but, in the Weberian sense of nationhood-as-common-interest, on the verge of collapse.

And our decline matters. I am naive enough, in the innocence of late middle age, to believe that America should still be a beacon to the world, a nation worth imitating. Plenty of countries around the globe have learned to imitate our self-seeking, our obsessions with wealth and celebrity, and our growing incivility. Before selecting our public behaviors, we should perhaps think a bit harder about what it is that we want to export.

The Moral Dilemma of Growth

by bob massie

My mother is Swiss, and a few years ago we paid a visit to an elegant old farmer in a village where our extended family now gathers in the summertime. He had a deep love of history and his chalet was filled with ancient Swiss woodworking tools and historical items. During our tour, he pointed to the distant mountain pastures where his cattle were grazing for the summer.

"How long has your family lived here?" I asked him.

"My grandfather was born in this house," he replied.

"And how long has your family been sending your herds to those pastures?" I continued.

"About 700 years."

The thought startled me. The stability and continuity of his experience contrasted sharply with my experiences as an American. Seven hundred years ago there were no Europeans in North America. None of the homes or towns that have shaped my life existed. My experience has largely been one of change, as communities and landscapes have been transformed by economic life.

Collision Course

This contrast between stability and change, or to put it another way, between sustainability and growth is one of the most important challenges in modern America. It represents a balance between values that people of faith must explore and understand – and on which they must lead – if they are to make a contribution to one of the great struggles facing humanity.

The impulse to grow is built into our fundamental identity as humans. We are born as powerless and unwitting infants. Our goal as children must be to grow and to master our surroundings, physically, mentally, and emotionally. In our youth we spend considerable time imagining what lives we want to build and how we want to shape our futures. I have

two sons in their early twenties who are stepping forward into their lives as adults. They have few possessions but many aspirations. They are eager to move forward to define their own careers, create their own homes, and expand their horizons and domains.

Such restless yearning for growth and change has long defined American history and culture. Many came and still come to the United States because they were denied chances in their countries of origin. The apparent combination of unlimited op-

the idea of materialism is so deeply ingrained in our self-definition that we have allowed indicators of economic performance to override all others as measures for national success.

portunity and resources fed a particularly American enthusiasm for invention, expression, and expansion. These attributes, enshrined as the concept of "progress," frame our politics, economics, and culture. America became famous and powerful for creating entrepreneurial businesses, perfecting new means of production, and expanding markets. Even now technology seems to promise limitless gains.

Only recently has the distinctly American dream of boundless freedom and uninterrupted growth begun to bump into social, physical, and economic limits. Similarly, Americans have correctly begun to question whether individual happiness is solely

tied to increased material consumption. We have watched as our national values have pivoted away from equality, leaving some with far too little and others with grotesque excess. Still, the idea of materialism is so deeply ingrained in our self-definition that we have allowed indicators of economic performance – such as Gross Domestic Product *per capita*, which is an unrealistic average – to override all others as measures for national success.

Such enduring confidence in materialism has blinded us to new dangers that are emerging from compound growth. For decades, the population seemed small relative to our limitless country. When my grandmother was born in 1904 there were eighty million Americans. By the 1950s, that number had nearly doubled, to 150 million. By this decade it has doubled again, to nearly 310 million. This rate of population growth has been exceeded at the international level, with world population *tripling* from 2.5 billion fifty years ago to nearly 7.5 billion today.

Such growth – compounded by increased manufacturing capacity, improved productivity, rapid globalization, and skyrocketing consumer demand – has put humanity on a collision course with the planet. The world economy is now operating at a level of nearly \$60 trillion a year, with a global growth rate of more than 3 percent. Almost all forms of resources – both renewable ones such as forests and fisheries, as well as extractive ones such as minerals and fuels – are being exploited at an unsustainable rate. As scientists have evaluated the ecological footprint of our accelerating industrial and consumer economy, they have come to conclusions that remain hard for both Americans and other citizens to accept. For example, if every person in the world were to consume the same number of resources required for an American lifestyle, we would need five planet earths to draw from.

Real-Life Travails

This message has largely been ignored, not because of the facts, but because our values have not evolved and our personal problems have increased. As inequality in the United States has grown, more and more Americans find the inherited dream of abundance receding. Many families are struggling so much with the complications of a recession – lost jobs, lower housing values, diminished opportunities, and other crippling damage caused by Wall Street speculation – that they have neither the capacity nor the inclination to ponder these difficult long-term trends. Struggling with these personal experiences, they long for more wealth, not less, and they measure wealth primarily in terms of ownership

rather than stability. Fourteen million children live in poverty in the U.S., and one in fifty is homeless.

We are also experiencing a depressing failure of political leadership. Politicians continue to vie for votes by promising to restore the unlimited upward trend toward expansion. We must advocate for greater equality and prosperity in America, but our adolescent belief that our future has no physical boundaries must give way to something far deeper and more mature.

Fortunately, there are thousands of communities in America and around the world that are proposing new solutions at the local and regional levels,

We must guide our natural and God-given desires into new ventures, so that we are growing not just objects but spirit.

solutions that would create far more balance in our agricultural, educational, cultural, and communal lives. New and more sustainable patterns of distributed energy and regional food are rising up. Communities are experimenting with creating new capital for local business in the form of local currencies. Researchers are devising new economic measurements of prosperity that include health, independence, and well-being – a modern take on “the life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” that the Declaration of Independence lists as among our inalienable rights.

Denying the Evidence

We must accept and then share the hard reality that a pursuit of unlimited growth – particularly by populations with very high standards of living – would mean to press down on the accelerator toward greater global misery and climate disruption. Our planet is a gift, and its bounty must be understood and protected. Few of us have really absorbed just how small the planet really is. If you were to bore through the core of the earth, you would come out on the other side after less than eight thousand miles. The atmosphere of the planet, into which we are pouring tens of millions of tons of damaging greenhouse gases a day, is proportionally thinner than a coat of shellac on a classroom globe. And we know from history that any system, even a planetary one, can reach its capacity abruptly. As scientist Jared Diamond noted in his 2005 book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* – which studied the extinction of various island societies that maintained old practices despite accumulating dangerous new evidence – the end stages of a profligate culture can be convulsive, painful, and swift.

The industrial world's continued obsession with unlimited growth also raises profound questions of social justice. For nearly seventy years economic and development policy has focused on helping countries to establish productive industries, higher levels of employment and wages, and thus become more expansive consumer societies. For the developed world to turn around and announce that the poorer countries, for the sake of the planet, must no longer seek to advance would be seen as kicking the ladder out of the hands of the poor. It pits two of our most deeply held values – justice and sustainability – into false conflict with each other. This has been one of the major political and cultural tensions looming over the negotiations around climate change.

In sum, if the United States is to lead, it must lead by example, and to do so it must learn to define

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our national future – and indeed the entire concept of growth – in terms of different *values*. In one sense, this is and should be a natural step in the evolution of capitalism. Right now there already is a massive global effort known as the International Integrated Reporting Council, on which I serve, which is re-thinking the fundamental way in which business models transform capital stocks of kinds – natural, human, social, and financial – into value. For too long we have simply assumed that more is better. We have reached the point where many American households are drowning in clutter and overwork while they are worrying about basic elements of economic security such as jobs, retirement, and health care. We need more peace, more calm, and more time.

A Word to the Economic World

To create such a transition in our personal and communal identities will require the active engagement and wisdom of communities of faith who must ask, deeply and pointedly, whether our economy really serves humanity. For decades many churches have been driven to address highly personal questions of sexuality, identity, and inclusion. It is now time for religious leaders from across denominations and faiths to step boldly and unapologetically into the world of economics.

Religious leaders must state that it is an illusion that happiness is primarily tied to the size of one's

bank account. They must advocate for economic fairness rather than unlimited expansion. They must point out that in the era of inequality, extinction, and climate change it is a deadly mistake for nations to define their futures around their GDPs. They are uniquely responsible for pointing out that market values often undermine spiritual values.

As Robert F. Kennedy said presciently in a 1968 speech in Kansas just three weeks before he was killed, our conventional economic measurements conceal and disrupt our deepest values:

The gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans.

Change is possible. In the years after Kennedy's words, Americans realized that the natural environment was being sacrificed and laid down new guidelines protecting our health and heritage. But these are not enough. Despite increasing attention by companies, communities, and countries to the doctrine of sustainability, despite global meetings of the United Nations and thousands of other parties, we are not moving fast enough to avoid the collision ahead.

To solve this problem, we need not only candid leaders promoting wise policies; we also need to go straight to the emotional and moral conundrum of growth. And this duty naturally rests on those in America's faith communities and seminaries, who have committed their lives to expressing and living through shared values.

On the one hand, we, as biological and spiritual beings, are designed to grow, to expand our capacities and our horizons. On the other hand, the industrial forms in which these energies have taken us are now leading us toward destruction. The solution must be to redirect our positive attributes away from the simplistic accumulation of more consumer goods and toward what we truly value and love. We must guide our natural and God-given desires into new ventures, so that we are growing not just objects but spirit. We need to apply our talents to the creation of more beauty, knowledge, wisdom, and compassion.

In this there is a word of hope and of responsibility for all citizens, especially those who call themselves people of faith. After years of seeing ourselves marginalized in what seemed like a rapidly growing global economy indifferent to the deeper matters of the spirit, people must lead the evolution of our values toward the genuine substance of life. We must learn to embrace sustainability – like the Swiss community tending cows in the same pastures for seven centuries – *and* innovation. We must affirm *and* control our desire to grow. We must apply our intellects *and* our values to designing a just, safe, and livable planet.

Few seminaries and religious communities have caught up with this reality, and few religious leaders have embraced it, but every young person – especially in America – who longs to build a life of meaning and purpose in the twenty-first century knows that it must happen. Our prayer and our work now must be to make it so.

Bob Massie '82 M.Div. is an Episcopal priest and a member of the YDS Board of Advisors. Over a long career of fusing environmental and economic ideas and action, he conceived or led three major global sustainability organizations: Ceres, the Global Reporting Initiative, and the Investor Network on Climate Risk. He is now president of the New Economics Institute, which supports the evolution of more just and sustainable economic practices, particularly at the regional level. His new book, A Song in the Night: A Memoir of Resilience, was published in May by Nan Talese/Doubleday.

What is the relationship between christian ideals and economic systems? is it a moral problem that wealth inequality is increasing? is capitalism compatible with christianity? A national poll last year reveals tensions between some of America's values and its economic practices.

Here are some of the findings of the survey by Public Religion Research institute in partnership with Religion news service:

- **more Americans believe that christian values are at odds with capitalism than believe they are compatible. Among American christians, 46 percent believe capitalism and christian values are at odds, while 38 percent believe they are consistent. Fifty percent of women believe that capitalism and christian values are incompatible, compared to 37 percent of men. Among Democrats, 53 percent believe that capitalism and christian values are at odds, compared to 37 percent of Republicans.**
- **62 percent (including three-quarters of Democrats and a plurality of 47 percent of Republicans) say one of the biggest problems in the country is that more and more of the wealth is held by just a few people; 24 percent say this is not a big problem. Young people are more likely than older Americans to think this issue is one of the nation's biggest problems.**
- **58 percent of Americans believe the federal budget is a moral document that reflects national priorities; 41 percent disagree.**
- **61 percent of Americans disagree that most businesses would act ethically on their own without regulation from the government.**
- **Asked who is most responsible for our current economic troubles, 52 percent say government neglected its duty and allowed unethical business practices.**

source: Public Religion Research institute news release

We used to play, long before we bought real houses.
A roll of the dice could send a girl to jail.
the money was pink, blue, gold as well as green,
and we could own a whole railroad
or speculate in hotels where others dreaded staying:
the cost was extortionary.

At last one person would own everything,
every teaspoon in the dining car, every spike
driven into the planks by immigrants,
every crooked mayor.
but then, with only the clothes on our backs,
we ran outside, laughing.

As university chaplain at Yale, Sharon Kugler oversees a teeming organization – associate chaplains, administrative staffers, and members of Yale Religious Ministries – dedicated to enhancing dialogue, personal growth, interfaith collaboration, and pastoral leadership in a pluralistic

campus milieu. Kugler was named university chaplain in 2007 and was recently reappointed. A Roman Catholic and native Californian, she has more than two decades experience in ministry. She came to Yale from Johns Hopkins University, where she had been university chaplain since 1993. Her master’s degree at Georgetown University culminated with her thesis, “The Limits and Possibilities of Building a Religiously Plural Community,” used by the U.S. Department of Defense Office of the Chief of Chaplains as a training tool for new chaplains in the military. She talked with Reflections earlier this month.

REFLECTIONS: Are students today carrying a different set of values than previous generations did?

SHARON KUGLER: Some things don’t change. Students are pondering life’s big questions about meaning and purpose while adjusting to life outside the parental purview and exploring what it means to be an adult. Our young people are carrying a burdensome weight. They worked very hard to get here and now they think they must have everything figured out in this very moment. The chaplain’s office tries to help by offering them opportunities to experience a more contemplative mindset: Answers to life’s big questions aren’t found quickly. We encourage them to live with the questions for a time; this is counterintuitive to our solution-oriented students. We often remind them that we are all still flesh-and-blood human beings who crave rest, which is something our smart phones don’t seem to need! Maintaining balanced lives allows room for blessed clarity in thought and deed. Our faith traditions can offer them a kind of “retraining” – prayer, meditation, service to others. These things can feed them in new ways, providing some distance from the frantic pace they feel.

REFLECTIONS: Do you find young people to be optimistic about the world?

KUGLER: They want to make changes in the world, but they think more strategically, with a patient view of change. They’re a lot more astute than I was back in the 70s! Before even arriving at Yale, most students have had significant experience in service to others – since middle school it has been built into their curriculum as part of the fabric of the way they encounter the world. For some it’s a religious call. Others fit it comfortably into a secular humanist viewpoint.

REFLECTIONS: How were you drawn to this work?

KUGLER: I was lucky to have some gutsy Jesuits in my life as an undergraduate. They believed in empowering women and gave me the opportunity to explore and ultimately embrace my faith through social action.

REFLECTIONS: Has college chaplaincy work changed during your ministerial career?

KUGLER: Up until the 1970s, the focal point was on a singular chaplain, who was often a Protestant and likely male. It has evolved to more aptly reflect the religious diversity and changing needs of our students. Chaplaincy work is no longer pulpit-centered. We now have a team approach to nurturing the community. I oversee an office that works with nearly thirty richly diverse religious and spiritual traditions. We forge partnerships across the campus so that these groups come to know each other better in authentically healthy ways.

REFLECTIONS: What sorts of campus or service projects work best?

KUGLER: There are literally hundreds available at Yale. Ours intentionally offer ways to link faith and action. We organize “alternative spring break” experiences. Spring Break New Haven is one where students spend time in the city looking at it with fresh eyes, repairing low-income housing, holding conversations with officials at city hall or taking children to the Peabody. We have taken groups to New Orleans to do post-Katrina relief work and visit sacred sites – mosques, temples, churches, and synagogues – while hearing stories about life after the hurricane and lessons learned. This is what is so rewarding to me: to be with the students as they put hammer to nail, then later encounter sacred places that might initially feel quite strange, then watch them experience profound hospitality. I feel quite blessed to witness how transformative that can be.

REFLECTIONS: Many Americans worry that the nation is moving away from its traditional foundations. What’s your impression on the Yale campus?

KUGLER: This global campus welcomes Buddhists, Baha’is, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and those who claim no formal faith tradition. Yes, there’s more uncertainty now, and that’s always unsettling. However, with these students I find a sense of genuine hopefulness. Yes, it’s messy and complicated because so many people are bringing their own perspectives to an issue. But from where I sit, I see deeply caring people. They feel the burden of being tomorrow’s leaders, and I want to help them be the best-balanced human beings they can be so that they are not eaten up inside or overwhelmed. The gift we can give them is a way to look at things so they can be in the moment – and exhale.

Spiritual Power, the Subterranean River

by christopher timm

The family I grew up in was ashamed of the pride many Americans have for their country. The kind of pride that embarrassed my parents was the kind that identified America's greatness only with its military prowess and celebrated the right to own a gun as a great leap forward in freedom. Actually the shame was not about the pride, per se. The real issue was the idea that was so often attached to that brand of pride: that it is a violation of the country's greatness to engage in a substantive critique of its problems. This misconception, this willful act of denial, is at the heart of every dysfunctional relationship: If I love and respect a person I should be blind to his or her faults.

Denial is like a phantom. Its movements are hard to perceive. The idea itself appears schizophrenic and illogical. A duality exists where it should not. How can I deceive myself? But denial is real. In fact, to greater or lesser degrees, we all walk through life with this ghost just ahead of us, sifting out data, discerning what we will be conscious of. To confront this shadow-like creature requires, I believe, superhuman courage. It requires a connection to God. To strip the illusions we have about ourselves requires a deep confidence that there is something else of value.

Shadowlands

The fact is that America has always had a shadow. Our glorious strides for freedom have rarely, if ever, been devoid of the impulse for exploitation and oppression. Those who have borne the brunt have always felt the irony: women, blacks, indigenous people, those with minority sexual orientations. Sadly, the list goes on. Although time has shown progress in many ways, the darkness remains, and within it is a frightening potential for destruction.

The aim of nonviolent protests has always been to force society to confront its shadow. For me, that was the result of the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle. I was transfixed by images

of storm trooper-like police attacking a crowd of protesters, turning Seattle into an apocalyptic scene. How was it that so many Americans were willing to risk being beaten to protest an organization I had never heard of before? I felt so much spiritual charge in this act of people coming together to stem the

in our society, the topic of spirituality in political discourse about social change is much like a subterranean river. it is invisible to the mainstream. but the river flows nonetheless.

tide of exploitation and greed. I wondered if the people there saw their efforts in such a way. And so

I began the exploration that eventually took shape as the documentary film *Today We Have the Power*.

Recently I was interviewed on radio in Seattle by a newswoman who witnessed the protest firsthand. She was amazed that I looked at the event from such a perspective. At one point she expressed her wonder by saying, "If you can see spirituality in those protests then you must see spirituality everywhere!" I wish. Well ... and I do work at it also. But

the fact is that a spiritual dimension was not the forced imposition that she, and many people, might imagine. The topic of God might not be discussed very often in daily news reports on current affairs, but a great number of the people I spoke with who were instrumental in making the Seattle protests happen saw their work in a spiritual light.

Empowerment of God

Hidden things are not always negative. In India the sacred river Sarasvati, which is mentioned in ancient Sanskrit texts, is said to have gone underground. It's not that it died. It's just no longer visible. In our society, the topic of spirituality in political discourse about social change is much like such a subterranean river. It is invisible to the mainstream. But the river flows nonetheless. I believe we must undertake the work to make this explicit before we see the transformation in society that so many of us yearn and work for. We must bring that conversation out into the open in a way that is relevant and sensitive to the pluralistic age we live in, *and yet retains its force*. This is the single most important step I see in bringing light into America's shadow.

My point is not new or novel. An appeal to God was a core element of the greatest social change agents of the past century. Gandhi wrote in one issue

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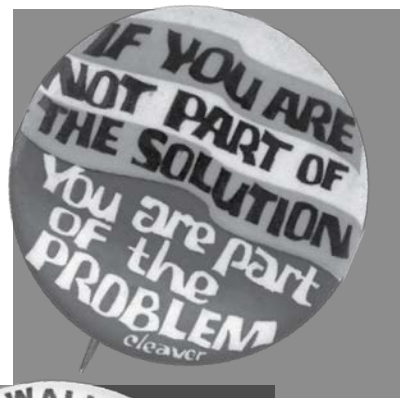
of his magazine *Harijan*, "I have no other resource ... than the assistance of God in every conceivable difficulty." Martin Luther King Jr. abided by the same principle. Since the time of King, however, the spiritual current has largely gone underground. Today you can watch hundreds of documentaries about the problems of society without the topic of God or spirituality coming up – unless it is a film about the negative effects of a fundamentalist group.

As soon as I began to look for the empowerment of God in the Seattle protests, I found it. I found it in people organizing for the labor movements who saw their work as an extension of their devotion to God. I found it in environmentalists who had become activists because they saw nature as sacred. I found it in animal rights activists who felt a spiritual connection with animals. I even found it in the black bloc anarchists who smashed windows as a tactic to get people to confront the question of alienation in our present society – although I must

confess it took me a long time to think of asking them about spirituality.

I knew I was tapping into a powerful current that may have gone underground but is still very much alive when I finally spoke with Norm Stamper. Stamper was the chief of police in Seattle during the protests and shouldered a bulk of the blame for the police brutality that went on that week. He resigned a few weeks after the protests. It literally took me years to gather the courage to reach out to him to see what he had to say about the event. Maybe he needed the time also, because when I finally did reach him by phone he had come to a change of heart about the choices he had made that week. But what was most exciting for me was the response I got when, with a bit of fear that the topic might discourage him from doing the interview, I told him that I was attempting to draw out the spiritual lessons from the event. There was a moment of silence from his end of the phone while my heart pounded. Then he said, "You know, you're the first person that's ever brought that up to me, but that goes to the heart of the problem."

Christopher Timm is a returning M.A.R. student at YDS. For more information about Today We Have the Power, his film about activism and spirituality at the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, see www.todaywehavethepower.com.



Dreams, Dreads, and the New Global Community

by George Rupp

The late twentieth-century collapse of state-controlled totalitarianism as a credible ideology would seem to enhance the global appeal of Western secular individualism, with its insistence on personal liberties, economic opportunity, and human rights.

Appreciation for individualism has indeed risen, notably among educated strata of society and especially in nations where variants of totalitarianism endure. In the countries of the former Soviet Union, there has been a show of public (if also subverted) support for democratic protections of individual freedom of expression and action. Resistance to totalitarian control in other such countries today – China, Egypt, Iran, Myanmar, Tunisia, Zimbabwe – is marked by advocacy for greater openness to multiple positions.

Yet resistance to totalitarian ideologies does not translate simply or directly into support for secular Western individualism. This resistance might even include a forthright rejection of what are deemed the excesses of such individualism. The rejection is especially emphatic when Western individualism threatens to take priority over all other cultural traditions.

An Enduring Antagonism

The various forms of individualism found in the West are of course themselves social and cultural products of quite particular traditions. Such traditions may well aspire to be universally relevant or compelling, yet they are nonetheless rooted in specific spatial and temporal communities. A self-aware individualism must therefore acknowledge that its identity has been shaped by particular histories and communities and not simply assume that all individuals everywhere can be abstracted from their traditions and be expected to react in predictable ways that take no account of personal, social, and cultural differences.

This imperative is urgent in a world where traditional communities view themselves as under assault from Western secular culture. These communities have their own patterns of authority, which typically depend on personal relationships established over generations. Members of such communities do not regard the forces they resist as culturally neutral

the alternative advocated here is to affirm the world's impulses for community while also remaining committed to the values of individualism, including civil liberties and human rights.

but rather as ideologically antagonistic. From their perspective this secular individualistic alternative is embedded in its own set of historical patterns.

The resistance of traditional communities to secular Western individualism is not only conceptual but institutional. Though the secular West acknowledges the formative influence of personal relations, especially within the private space of the immediate family, it also focuses attention on relatively impersonal structures to enhance individual well-being: market mechanisms, bureaucracies, and media. In contrast, traditional communities look to many other public and well-established arrangements of personal interaction: extended families, informal alliances, small-scale cooperatives, village elders, religious authorities.

The Western style of connecting the individual to the larger society directly through markets, bureaucracies, or media too often ignores or circum-

vents the network of intermediate institutions that animates traditional communities. Institutional patterns of the modern secular West in effect call into question the authority and viability of traditional relationships. Here is a sampling of instances: large-scale markets may disrupt personal exchanges; broadly based elections may undermine hereditary authority; women who earn money through small businesses may upset established gender roles.

Not surprisingly, this undermining of long-established practices elicits resistance in traditional societies. Not only the beneficiaries of established patterns but also other members of the community refuse to relinquish the rich network of highly personal relationships that provides order and texture to daily lives.

While particular communities are defined by boundaries of all kinds, impersonal mechanisms can in principle connect all individuals to each other across divides of background or family identity. Today's challenge for communities everywhere is to nurture particular traditions and intimate relationships while at the same time affirming an inclusiveness that is open to all. This endeavor can be construed as an attempt to connect individuals universally to each other. But it can also be envisioned as an effort to incorporate particular communities into increasingly more inclusive ones, a process that preserves valued historical patterns even as it encourages openness to the affirmations of other traditions.

Testimony from Religious Traditions

Central to the deeply personal, social, and cultural grounding of many – perhaps all – traditional communities are religious faith and practice. In their beliefs, rituals, and ethical imperatives, members

Do such communities exist? in practice, communities that are both self-critical and inclusive are admittedly rare.

of such communities affirm their identity, which gives adherents a sense of distinction from other traditions. Religious affirmations therefore often reinforce boundaries that separate particular communities from each other.

Yet religious traditions provide as well substantial resources not only for incorporating individuals into their immediate communities but also for preparing members to be incorporated into larger and more inclusive ones. Certainly some religious traditions appear highly individualistic, espousing

direct connections between the individual person and the ultimate or the divine. But across traditions there are also strong affirmations of the communal basis for any such individual identity, a basis that frequently deploys religious beliefs and practices to

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point beyond every local or particular community and connect to larger human, natural, or divine realities.

Chinese and Jewish traditions have perhaps been most direct in focusing on human interconnection as the way to final truth. For the Confucian, there is no access to the ultimate except through social relationships. Similarly, though there are certainly significant and arresting exceptions, the dominant pattern of Jewish commitment has been to stress the communal character of relationship to the divine.

Hindu traditions offer a striking illustration of powerful individualism dependent on particular communities even as it aspires to universal inclusion. The vast diversity of Hindu traditions includes the central affirmation that *atman* is *brahman*, that the self is one with the ultimate. This affirmation is crucial not only in the history of Indian philosophy but also for modern Hindu humanism. In that sense it is highly individualistic. Yet despite this identification of the self with the ultimate, Indian traditions build on community solidarity as the foundation for any individual attainment and also construe the ultimate as all-inclusive.

The Hindu heresy of Buddhism exhibits the same pattern in its myriad forms. The earliest Buddhist traditions flatly deny that there is a self at all: the Hindu affirmation of *atman* is negated and becomes the insistence on *anatman*, not self. In later developments, this insistence becomes an acceptance of *sunyata*, the emptiness of all reality. Yet in and through their remarkable spectrum of critical appropriations of Hindu traditions, Buddhists embrace the communities through which individuals advance – beginning with the *sangha*, the order of monks that became the bearer of Buddhist traditions.

Across the range of Christian churches there is a similar pattern: Roman Catholics may be intentionally corporate, Orthodox Christians may nurture a sense of connection to the cosmos as a whole,

and Protestants may focus on the individual self. Yet all Christians affirm the crucial role of faithful communities in mediating the relationship of the human to the divine.

Islam offers a final example, one especially apt, since so much of the most forceful resistance to Western secular individualism is anchored in Muslim conviction. Like other religious traditions, Islam incorporates enormous diversity – and is often quite public in its internal disagreements. In Islam as in other religious communities there are mystics who claim direct communion with the ultimate, with Allah. But for virtually all Muslims, the role of the community is indispensable to the faithful life. In repudiating Western secular liberalism, advocates of Islam are rejecting what they deem to be a corrosive individualism that undermines this indispensable role of the community.

Self-Critical Communities?

In contrast to this testimony from religious traditions, the consumer society and mass culture of the West at least appear to extract the individual from particular communities. With the internet, this

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secular Western individualism takes on new intensity. Across the web, new definitions of personal relationships and self-promotion flourish. Yet even this secular reductionist web-enabled individualism is in the end dependent on particular communities, namely the new online communities that it creates. This dependence is sometimes recognized; there is much talk today of the connectivity of the net. It may signal a yearning for a sense of togetherness that has been lost in offline life.

The alternative advocated here is to affirm the world's impulses for community while also remaining committed to the values of individualism, including civil liberties and human rights. This double affirmation entails significant ramifications for communities. A commitment to the values of individualism requires that a community be open to outsiders and also be prepared to see its own shortcomings. It calls, in short, for a community that allows both for self-criticism and in principle for acknowledging and incorporating members from other traditions.

Do such communities exist? In practice, communities that are both self-critical and inclusive are admittedly rare. Pressures against them come incessantly from two fronts -- from uncritical and exclusionist traditionalists, and also from a dominant impulse of uncritical individualism, which views community itself with suspicion no matter how self-critical and inclusive.

It is therefore worth exploring instances in which this combination is, if not achieved, at least envisioned as a worthy goal on the part of significant portions of the population. The combination is not so exceptional or marginal as it might appear. I will offer four quite different examples from contemporary milieus that range from familiar to exotic:

- In Western civil society, deeply rooted traditions of voluntary associations seek to integrate the activities of their individual members into larger social, economic, and political aims. Especially in the United States and Great Britain, such organizations endure even as they confront a prevailing culture of unqualified individualism.
- The emerging European Community offers another instance of the tensions between the larger entity and more particular communities, especially at times of economic stress.
- In societies as different from each other as the former Soviet Union, China, France, and Turkey, powerful secular states are contending with an already established or an emerging civil society as well as a host of traditional communities.
- Finally, in myriad local conflicts across the developing world, tribal, ethnic, and religious loyalties counter attempts to establish security and social order.

Voluntary Association, American-style

Voluntary associations offer a rich tradition of communitarian impulses. The term itself implies individual volition: the freedom to choose to associate with one organization instead of others. The very conception of voluntary associations therefore already suggests a community-minded individualism that moves beyond unquestioned belonging to a tribe.

Examples of voluntary associations are evident especially in the U.S. Perhaps the most pervasive are religious bodies that place a premium on a decision to join; evangelical Christian churches are a prominent example. Civic associations of all kinds similarly illustrate voluntary membership: civic clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, et. al.), political parties, Boy and Girl Scouts, labor unions, National Rifle Association, AARP, American Automobile Association, and the like.

teA AnD sleeP
by taha muhammad Ali

if, over this world, there's a ruler
who holds in his hand bestowal and seizure,
at whose command seeds are sown,
as with his will the harvest ripens,
i turn in prayer, asking him
to decree for the hour of my demise,
when my days draw to an end,
that i'll be sitting and taking a sip
of weak tea with a little sugar
from my favorite glass
in the gentlest shade of the late afternoon
during the summer.
And if not tea and afternoon,
then let it be the hour
of my sweet sleep just after dawn.

—

And may my compensation be—
if in fact i see compensation —
i who during my time in this world
didn't split open an ant's belly,
and never deprived an orphan of money,
didn't cheat on measures of oil
or violate a swallow's veil;
who always lit a lamp
at the shrine of our lord, shihab a-Din,
on Friday evenings,
and never sought to beat my friends
or neighbors at games,
or even those i simply knew;
i who stole neither wheat nor grain
and did not pilfer tools
would ask —
that now, for me, it be ordained
that once a month,
or every other,
i be allowed to see
the one my vision has been denied —
since that day i parted
from her when we were young.

—

but as for the pleasures of the world to come,
all i'll ask
of them will be —
the bliss of sleep, and tea.

The explosion of interest in online social networking takes the voluntary association to new conceptual levels – to the point that virtual communities may paradoxically undermine physical ones. The correlations are complex and do not imply direct cause-and-effect. Many face-to-face voluntary associations have been in decline for decades. In this sense the internet is the latest phase in a series of technology-based innovations that over the decades have allowed individuals to relate to each other more and more through media rather than face to face. Yet even in their virtual form, voluntary associations may afford ways to shape communities that are self-critical and potentially inclusive of a diversity in membership – as is evident from the recent political activism and upheaval in, for example, Iran, Tunisia, and Egypt.

European Union: A Work in Progress

The crosscurrents between particular communities and the claims of larger, more inclusive associations are inescapable in the political project of forging a union among European states. Even within countries, there are of course tensions between local traditions and national goals – at times, as in the case of Belgium, tensions that extend to multiple languages. Such tensions become all the more pro-

the West – and especially the united states – must be clear that its commitment to the values of individualism is consistent with this sense of an inclusive and self-critical community.

nounced when entire countries, with their different languages and national identities, seek to form an economic and at least partial political union with one another.

Current financial pressures reveal how precarious the project is. Though there is a single currency for most of the EU, there is no common fiscal policy, no shared financial regulation, no unified labor market, and no agreed-upon set of social benefits. Not surprisingly, the situation is ripe for acrimony and resentment that strain whatever social bonds have developed over the six decades since the formation of the precursor to the EU, the European Coal and Steel Community. Despite increased economic integration based on a common currency, centrifugal forces of language and tradition perennially resist homogenization into a single encompassing order.

Yet a sense of pan-European identity endures and perhaps even grows stronger. This larger sense

of commonality testifies to the potential of a significantly inclusive community that is at the same time self-critical. Although criticism may in the first instance be directed at the larger union or at other members, it also represents a comparative awareness that any particular perspective is partial and limited. In the latest round of economic tensions, even Germany has had to recognize the untenability of insisting that all members conform to its prescriptions. Its resistance to acknowledging this fact and its delay in acting on it have cost the entire Eurozone dearly, but belated recognition is better than continued denial.

The challenge is to avoid conceiving and institutionalizing the larger union in ways that gratuitously undermine or denigrate more particular traditions. That is admittedly daunting if a single currency is retained, since the likely consequence is movement toward more integration in fiscal policy, financial regulation, and labor markets. It is, however, not only feasible but crucial to value the particular traditions of local and regional communities even as the larger union is embraced.

It is tempting to dismiss this valuing of particular traditions as little more than a nostalgic yearning for an irretrievable past. An analogue in the U.S. would be to mourn the attenuation of regional accents in a media age. But even if local particularity almost unavoidably becomes less pronounced, it need not be denigrated. Indeed, the good-faith effort to preserve what is of value in local traditions can contribute to a more wholehearted embrace of the larger community. Such a process is emphatically preferable to a simple presumption that some least common denominator is the best or the only way forward.

The Limits of Unlimited Secularism

In contrast to these endeavors of negotiation between individual and community stand assertions of total state control. The most potent modern instances are secular adaptations of Jewish and Christian thought in the form of Marxism. As exemplified in both the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), a version of totalitarian secular ideology attempts to pre-empt any and all allegiances to less inclusive communities.

The history of both the Soviet Union and Communist China demonstrates that this kind of totalitarian claim is difficult to sustain over the long term without catastrophic effects. In the case of the transition from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation in the 1990s, ethnic and linguistic segments of the USSR became differentiated republics, albeit with major interdependence among the new

republics and especially with Russia. Even within the Russian Federation, there remain massive tensions, in particular with areas that are predominantly Muslim. Similarly, within the PRC, there are persistent tensions between the dominant Mandarin-speaking Han and multiple other discrete ethnic, linguistic, and even religious communities.

In contemporary China and Russia, a resurgence of a restless civil society adds to the tensions. China faces the emergence of a labor rights movement and growing protests against corruption. In both countries, suppressed religious impulses are also reasserting themselves. The test for such nations is to move from an all-encompassing secular order dominated by a single ethnic and linguistic group to arrangements that allow space for diversity that cannot be suppressed indefinitely.

This challenge lies in wait elsewhere. Consider Turkey and France. France is perhaps the most insistent of any European country that it is a secular state – to the point that it often seems unaware of the asymmetries that result from its history as part of Western Christendom. It therefore misses the irony, not to say perversity, of attempting to ban the wearing of headscarves while allowing crucifixes in public school classrooms. Here too a greater sense of inclusiveness together with a capacity for self-awareness and self-criticism would be welcome.

Like the USSR, the PRC, and the French Republic, the Turkey of Atatürk declared itself a resolutely secular state. The Caliphate was officially abolished in 1924. Islamic courts were closed in 1926 and replaced with a civil code modeled on Swiss judicial procedures. A unified educational system was established, designed to include girls as well as boys. And

Put bluntly, claims that either individuals can be torn away from – or that the state should be allowed to obliterate – particular underlying traditions are unsustainable.

yet over several generations, sub-communities like the Kurds have resisted assimilation, and observant Muslims have over time reasserted the implications for public policy of their religiously inspired traditions. In short, Turkey too is struggling to achieve a sense of community that is inclusive without simply suppressing particular traditions in favor of an allegedly neutral secular unity. In this respect, Turkey is further down the path that Egypt and Tunisia – from less resolutely secular starting points – will also

have to tread. In all these cases, as well as others across the Middle East, the imperative is to affirm a sense of inclusive community that allows both for the contribution of the values of individualism and also for the overall order that a non-totalitarian state affords.

Fragile States, Fragile Hopes

At the opposite extreme from the all-encompassing claims of the secular state are those all-too-frequent settings in which there is insufficient governmental authority to assure basic security for communities. Often defined as fragile states or even failed states, such settings pose their own challenges to the viability of communities that are intentionally inclusive. Yet in these instances as well, the most promising way forward is to build on the particular traditions that command respect rather than to attempt to suppress those traditions in favor of a comprehensive externally imposed order. Variations on this theme are almost endless. Congo and Afghanistan offer two illuminatingly different cases and also represent a spectrum in terms of history and geography.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) suffers from massive disadvantages in terms of governance: a very large country (roughly the size of all of Western Europe) with arbitrary borders determined by colonial powers; more than two hundred language groups; and egregiously bad rulers from King Leopold II of Belgium (who acquired property rights to Congo in 1885) through the corrupt and authoritarian regime of Mobutu Sese Seko (1971-1997) to the violent aftermath of his overthrow. The DRC has both the blessing and the curse of substantial natural resources. Its most critical challenge is to establish a process of governance that can provide a minimum of security and forge a sense of national identity that can hold together its remarkable ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Security, governance, and national identity are also crucial to the prospects for Afghanistan. For more than two millennia, Afghanistan has struggled with invading forces – Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and the Soviet Union, to name only three – and fractious relations among its linguistically and ethnically diverse regions and with its powerful neighbors. One salient lesson from this complex and contentious history is that Afghanistan does not long tolerate occupation by non-Afghan forces or government control from a central authority. Put positively, in order to have some chance of success, proposals for the governance of Afghanistan must incorporate particular traditions grounded in local

communities and from there build coalitions, almost certainly including tacit alliances with neighboring countries, that may in turn support a limited central government. Any effective sense of national identity must embrace the ethnic, linguistic, and religious pluralism that this process of consultation, negotiation, and collaboration implies.

Communitarianism's New Horizon

The tradition of voluntary associations, the struggles of the European Community, resistance to government control in thoroughly secular states, and conflicts in developing countries – all are variations on the theme of how particular communities relate to more inclusive ones. In the contemporary world, the values and rights of individualism are crucial, as is the necessity of the state or some other form of encompassing social order. But so, too, are traditional communities. Put more bluntly, claims that either individuals can be torn away from – or that the state should be allowed to obliterate – particular underlying traditions are unsustainable. Totalitarianism collapses as a defensible ideology; unqualified individualism is untenable as well.

This set of tensions is certainly not new, but it gathers special salience when traditional communities worldwide raise opposition to the individualism and secularism of the West. Under such circumstances, to affirm the value of particular communities is the right course of action for both principled and pragmatic reasons. This affirmation points to potential common ground between Western governments and multi-lateral international agencies on the one hand and traditional communities on the other.

When it acknowledges the historical particularity of its own values and traditions, the West opens up the prospect of greater appreciation for the value of other longstanding traditions. Mutually respectful encounters among such historically discrete traditions may nurture more self-critical and inclusive communities that move not only beyond the stance of uncritical and exclusionist traditionalists but also beyond state totalitarianism and unqualified individualism. Indeed, such interactions point toward a new communitarianism, one that affirms interactions among communities in search of common ground.

A new communitarianism can and should affirm the crucial role of personal liberties, economic opportunity, and human rights – the attainments of individualism as it has been institutionalized in Western history. At the same time, this new communitarianism can and should embrace the contributions that traditional community life offers. This

affirmation of the value of particular communities would address the fears and apprehensions of traditional societies that Western secular individualism is determined to supplant all other personal, social, and cultural traditions.

Western governments and international multi-lateral agencies can and should advocate this double affirmation of individualism and community. Civil society, including educational and religious institutions, must also press for this combination both globally and locally. The intention of this process may be framed as the hope to achieve a world of more self-critical and inclusive communities, even a world community.

But grand statements of ultimate goals of universal community should not be allowed to undermine actual particular communities. The aspiration for inclusive and self-critical communities must reach out from and build on the particular traditions of existing local communities – including those that are already part of global institutions, as in the world's three major missionary religions, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Though it may be deemed utopian in the pejorative sense to insist that universal community must or will be achieved at a definite

the pursuit of a new communitarianism will come to be a pragmatic necessity in the crowded, tension-filled world of the twenty-first century.

point in history, the aspiration for such an inclusive community is a worthy goal if pursuing this ideal is grounded in the experience of actual communities.

To pursue this new communitarianism will require sustained commitment over generations. But this aspiration will also come to be a pragmatic necessity in the crowded, tension-filled world of the twenty-first century. The result can be a promising move toward realizing the ideal of an inclusive and also self-critical global community.

George Rupp '67 B.D. has been president and CEO of the International Rescue Committee since 2002. He was president of Columbia University from 1993-2002. He has also been president of Rice University and dean of the Harvard Divinity School. He is the author of five books, including Globalization Challenged: Commitment, Conflict, Community (Columbia University Press, 2006).

In God We (Still) Trust: Electoral Thoughts on Faith

What ails the nation? What values are at risk of neglect in this election cycle? What wisdom can faith traditions inject into turbulent times? Reflections invited Yale Divinity School alumni to ponder these questions amid a high-anxiety political season. Here's a sampling of responses.

World Without end, Amen

By Kazimierz Bem '10 M.Div., '12 S.T.M.

Someone in my congregation told me he likes the phrases I use in the prayers – “until the ages of ages” and “world without end.” It seemed a curious thing to comment on until I thought about it in light of the question: “What values seem to be lost, neglected, and distorted in our political times?”

For me, what is lost today is a respectful sense of time, or rather the sense of infinity. Our attention spans get shorter and shorter. Services and sermons are shrinking, because an hour of our time nowadays seems excruciatingly long. We seem incapable of sitting through a movie in the cinema without checking our Facebook or Twitter accounts and playing with our iPhones.

Politicians present everything in election cycles of two, three, or five years. If someone proves unable to solve all the problems of the world *instantly*, we condemn the effort and say he or she won't be able

to solve them at all. Budget cuts, recession, global warming – all have to be solved *now* or else.

There is something profoundly egocentric about this attitude, something I feel is very difficult to bear. I yearn for someone to remind us – in any election cycle – that it took us generations to break and pillage this planet, and it will take us generations to fix it. I crave to hear someone say that he or she will try to solve one, maybe two problems, and then dare to declare that there are ample things for all of us to

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work on and try to fix as well. I crave to hear someone tell us that we should think not just about ourselves and our children – for that requires little empathy, really – but about distant future generations to come.

Christianity teaches that we are all part of one very long journey – culminating with the event and person of Jesus Christ. It stretches beyond time and puts our anxieties and insecurities in perspective. It teaches us the humility of patience and gives us strength to make tough choices – sustained by God until he is all in all ... until the ages of ages ... world without end.

Kazimierz Bem is pastor of First Church (Congregational) United Church of Christ in Marlborough, MA.

the seven Virtues Revisited

By Caroline Bacon '04 M.A.R.

Reflections' call for alumni to ponder American values at election time has been an irresistible challenge to sort out many half-articulated thoughts. Most of these concern the shortcomings of the church: its loss of membership and cultural influence, the widespread misunderstanding of its values and mission, and an apparent incapacity for effective self-examination.

Why focus on the church? Because I think that if all people in the land were to act like good Christians, we would not suffer from so many of the ills that beset us, both as individuals and as a community.

What would it be like if all citizens acted like good Christians? Think about that for a while. Well, it might be boring – vice is so entertaining. But possibly we might each of us be so absorbed in doing those things and being those people that God intended, and feeling so deeply satisfied and fulfilled, that we would not miss our vices at all.

I study the Middle Ages because I love medieval art, so I think sometimes about the seven virtues: Faith, Hope, and Love are the so-called theological virtues; Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Courage are the remaining four. The names change a bit according to the source, but always a whole panoply of good character traits are woven around and subsumed under these virtues: patience, self-control, generosity, self-sacrifice, gratitude, piety, affability, humility, thoughtfulness, diligence, respect for others, kindness, self-respect, persistence, bravery, thrift, wisdom, mercy, peacefulness, loyalty, compassion, modesty. But the most important is love of neighbor.

A broad and deep capacity for each of these in each American would go a long way toward bringing civility back to all our conversations and moving the focus away from self and toward the common good, and not just at election time.

These virtues are the native land of the church; we've had almost 2,000 years with them. With the utmost urgency and seriousness we should get on with the important business of being the Christian church, fostering these virtues and spreading the good news.

Caroline Bacon, based in Redding, CT, is an independent scholar who studies Christian iconography. She is treasurer of the Association of Scholars of Christianity in the History of Art.

Give us this bread

By Jeffrey Haggray '88 M.Div.

I am touched by the sight of everyday people gathering at political rallies, hoping for a change in their circumstances. They resemble the crowds that pursued Jesus while engaged in the perennial human search for more. John wrote that *the crowd went to Capernaum looking for Jesus* (John 6:24-35). Earlier, Jesus fed them by the thousands, satisfying their physical appetites after he had ministered to their spiritual and moral longings. The human search for food and fulfillment is equally apparent and pressing in our day.

I pray that candidates for elective office will have the wisdom and integrity to perceive that most voters are searching for something more than a charismatic personality. Political campaigns often behave as though elections are purely about personalities. A fixation on the candidates' private religious beliefs, bank

our nation is filled with frightened people who worry about whether they will enjoy a certain social and economic quality of life in the future.

accounts, and personal tastes reveals a fundamental ignorance about the human craving for survival and security. Jesus engaged in the kind of straight talk with the crowds that revealed his awareness of the banal realities underlying their searching. *You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.* Though tempted to infer that he was the object of their desire, Jesus recognized that on the most existential level they were returning to the divine hand that fed them the

fish and loaves. He challenged the crowds to seek something greater than basic survival. Pursue what makes for lasting meaning, community, wholeness, and shalom, and the basics will follow.

I pray also for those who seek political office that they will make people more conscious of the values and valuables that we truly need as a society. Our nation is filled with frightened people who worry about whether they will enjoy a certain social and economic quality of life in the future. We need to replace fear-mongering with a renewed commitment to seeing the importance of diverse people from all walks of life co-existing in a spirit of peace, community, and faith in God and one another. I challenge us all to learn anew the importance of caring for one another as human beings who are made in God's image and who deserve a quality of life that reflects that identity.

The Rev. Jeffrey Haggray is senior pastor of First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C.

Republic of Hospitality

By Kathleen O'Toole Peters '94 M.Div.

Mr. H. Jones Jr. has lived all of his seventy-plus years in the same small town and always been a member of the same "small church on the hill." He admits he has a small-town view of the world and that is just fine with him.

When the church community was considering the issue of becoming an Open and Affirming congregation, Mr. Jones had something to say about it. He admitted to living a sheltered life here and that he does not understand much about being gay or lesbian. "But I do know that if anyone felt that they would not be welcome at my church, it would break my heart. ... We need to do this!" Radical hospitality is an amazing gift that Mr. Jones always offers.

What is often missing in our current political and polarizing climate is any sense of hospitality. We no longer seem able to talk to our neighbors before we first determine their political or religious affiliation or even sexual orientation, so we can decide whether to be open to any opinion that they might express. Respectful debate is becoming a thing of the past. We can no longer agree to disagree. An attitude of com-

**it has become easier to vilify
"those people" than it is to dare
to get to know them as people.**

promise or ever trying to walk in another's shoes is in serious danger of extinction. We know what we know and you don't ... especially if you are one of the "other." It has become easier to vilify "those people" than to dare to get to know them as people. Some renounced their church membership after we did indeed vote to declare ourselves an Open and Affirming community of faith. Yet, because we

know each other as individuals and not just as labels, we can often get beyond the dividing walls and listen to one another. When you know another's whole story, their dreams, their struggles, their joys and concerns, you are able to hear what they are saying even if you don't agree with it all. Some voted no and still remain faithful members. Relationships mean genuine hospitality and a willingness to meet halfway or even more than halfway if that is what the good of the community calls for.

For Mr. Jones, hospitality means putting aside any preconceived notions in favor of welcoming, listening to, and caring for the human being that is before him. If we want to be the nation that truly is "the land of the free and the home of the brave" – the community that cares for one another, no matter who you are; the church on the hill that does not hide the light of radical hospitality that Jesus taught – it is critical that we learn to keep up with the Joneses ... Mr. H. Jones Jr., that is ... We need to do this!

The Rev. Kathleen O'Toole Peters is pastor of the United Church of Chester, CT (United Church of Christ).

God the Priority

By Walter Riedel '67 B.A., '71 M.Div.

Isn't the value and priority of God in our lives most at risk of distortion and disappearance in our moment?

Even those who claim to be Christian persistently act – and vote – as if Mammon – money – were not only more important but exclusively important. Otherwise the stubborn objection to things like universal healthcare, available in other industrialized countries, could not persist. Any time we say, "that's too expensive, it's unnecessary," it seems to me that we are really saying "money in my pocket is more important than accomplishing that goal."

The God I know is not just one value among many to be prioritized. God is *the* central value. The esteem in which we hold God (and the tasks God asks of us) is prior to all other values. When we can rationalize our selfishness and imagine that God does not suffer when we complain about helping the poor, and most especially when we deliberately *vote against* giving "also the tunic," we are showing we have *not* repented. We are showing we still have other gods before the One God. How can one ask for God's forgiveness and mercy when we are not ourselves willing consistently to be a neighbor to *anyone* in need?

I think any definition of faith that does not mean staying always mindful of God's will is a fraudulent distortion of religion. Faith is absolute commitment to God and to all God's people, all the time. This is rarely extolled or embraced as the meaning of the Christian life. These days it's fair to say it is not even taught by those who call themselves Christians.

The Rev. Walter R. Riedel is interim pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Stuart, FL. In his ministerial career he has led congregations in Florida and, for eight years, was a missionary in Papua New Guinea. He now does long-term interim pastoral work.

it takes A Village ...to teach a nation

By Jeffrey Oak '85 M.Div., '96 Ph.D.

What gives me hope at this political moment is a vision of community embodied in a village 6,000 miles from Washington, D.C.

Neve Shalom Wahat al-Salam (NSWAS), or "Oasis of Peace," is a village of some fifty-five families located on 100 barren, hilly acres midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv where Jews, Muslims, and Christians have chosen to live together in a spirit of equality and respect. Founded in 1972, NSWAS was the vision of the Rev. Bruno Hussar, a Jew born in Egypt who converted to Catholicism as a young adult and became a Dominican priest in his thirties while living in France. In 1953, at the age of forty-two, he moved to Israel committed to a vision of bringing diverse peoples together in a democratic, pluralistic community.

At the center of NSWAS is a K-7 primary school serving more than 200 children from the area in a bilingual, bicultural learning environment. Each class has one Jewish and one Arab teacher, who follow a team-teaching model: Roughly half the Arab teachers are Muslim, the other half are Christian. Children first learn to read and write in their own language, and all eventually learn Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

Most importantly, children are nurtured in their own cultural traditions, while being fully exposed to those of other students. The aim is to nurture each child's unique social, cultural, and national identity, while also cultivating her capacity for co-existence, respect, and friendship with those whose identities are so very different.



Maintaining the balance between cultural particularity and pluralism is a difficult, sometimes excruciating task at NSWAS. At a time when commentators maintain that we are more polarized than ever, when healthy and robust public discourse is so rare, I believe the vision of NSWAS is instructive.

The adults and children of NSWAS embrace a mission and vision larger than their own individual self-interest: They are committed to the common good in a deeply pluralistic world. They share the rhythms of daily life together: working, playing, going to school, grieving, celebrating, and sharing meals together. Rather than avoiding or downplaying differences, they engage each other at the very center of their differences, which are often profound.

I draw three lessons from NSWAS that I believe are helpful to our own political climate. The first is a commitment to something larger than ourselves. At its most fundamental level, political community is about the life and welfare of the polis, the citizenry. The first order of business in any polis is learning how to share public space without doing violence to each other. Rodney King's plea twenty years ago in the midst of rioting in Los Angeles comes to mind: "Can we all get along?"

Second, we cannot engage in public dialogue about the common good if the daily rhythms of our lives are never shared. The bonds of civic friendship are strengthened when we share the ordinariness of daily life together. This defies current patterns, where so many aspects of our lives are organized around preserving and maintaining, even defending, separateness.

Finally, what is most striking about NSWAS is that it was founded on difference – deep-rooted differences among Muslim, Christian, and Jew, among Arab and Israeli. The goal at NSWAS is not to smooth out these differences but to honor the cultural particularities that give rise to difference and still find a common purpose. Our nation's recent history shows how rare it is to sustain genuine public dialogue.

Since dialogue is a skill, an art even, I worry that the competencies that make it possible are diminishing. One NSWAS teacher put it well: "I enjoy teaching here very much. It is good to have dialogue and to show how things can work between Arabs and Jews. It is difficult but it works. ... We have to try to live together side by side. If it's happening here, then it can happen elsewhere. The big thing is respect."

Yes, the big thing is respect.

Jeffrey Oak is Senior Vice President at Bon Secours Health System, Inc., a faith-based, non-profit health system based in Maryland that is committed to building healthy communities. He profiled NSWAS in his Yale dissertation, called The Just Nurture of Children.

Who's Wrong, Who's Right

By Susan R. Beebe '02 M.A.R.

I was waiting in line at the airport to board a flight home. On a nearby television, politicians argued with one another—loudly. "Democrats, Republicans," grumbled the fellow beside me. "They all sound alike to me."

Really? I wondered. The parties advocate very different policies; it's odd they would sound the same to my fellow traveler. But political debate has grown so strident, many Americans are disillusioned with the entire process.

We followers of Jesus struggle with partisanship, too. our places of worship are fragmented.

What spiritual hope does the church offer in the face of such cynicism?

Good question. We followers of Jesus struggle with partisanship, too. Our places of worship are fragmented: One congregation is for traditional music, another advocates traditional views on sexuality, and the social justice crowd meets over there.

Suspensions between the groups run high. There's certainly not much friendly interaction or even-tempered debate. My own Episcopal Church has splintered over theological issues. Now we communicate, not over coffee, but by serving lawsuits. Things can get pretty fractured in the Body of Christ.

Church historians will remind us 'twas ever thus. Of course, sometimes divisions are unavoidable. I don't advocate a lockstep church any more than I promote single-party politics. But the fact that unity is difficult doesn't mean we give up on Jesus' desire that Christians "all might be one."

In fact, recent research bears out the truth that churches and politicians benefit when we remain civil and connected with those we think are plain wrong. In *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt explores how we arrive at our moral convictions in the first place. It seems we humans decide what is good and right based not on logic but intuition. Liberals, conservatives, libertarians – we listen to our gut first, then construct rational arguments to defend our positions.

But that's not the end of the story. The good news is, our political and religious beliefs aren't relegated to a series of hunches. As Haidt argues, when people with differing views emphasize a common bond and interact with kindness and respect, they influence one another positively.

"This is why it is important to have intellectual and ideological diversity within any group or institution whose goal is to find the truth," Haidt explains. We won't all agree, he suggests, but together "we can create a group that ends up producing good reasoning as an emergent property of the social system." To be our best, it seems we need each other.

Jesus' prayer that his church would live in harmony is an outrageously tall order. Yet it is exactly what our broken, disheartened culture – political and otherwise – needs to see. When followers of Christ do the hard work of honoring one another, even when we disagree, we offer salt and light to a fractured, contentious world. And we sound very different indeed.

The Rev. Susan R. Beebe is a Priest Associate at St. Gregory's Episcopal Church in Boca Raton, FL. She is the author of Meditations for Church Staff (Morehouse).

the Golden triangle

By Clyde Tuggle '88 M.Div.

I'm often asked how a divinity school graduate ended up in a beverage company. It was simple, really. In my final semester at YDS, I did my CPE unit at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, where I counseled people from all walks of life. Some were dying. That experience helped me realize that I wanted to continue making a difference in people's lives, only a lot sooner. I found I could fulfill that goal by helping create moments of happiness and optimism by joining The Coca-Cola Company. That was nearly twenty-four years ago.

Today, my responsibilities include overseeing and maintaining relationships with governments, media, bottlers, customers, and many other stakeholders around the world. We operate in more than 200 coun-

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tries, which helps put the dynamics of this country into perspective. What gives me hope both here and abroad is that more and more governments are recognizing that large, seemingly intractable problems can't be solved by government alone, and they can't be solved by finger-pointing and name-calling. Instead, effective leaders increasingly understand that complex problems require collaboration among business, government, and civil society, what our

Chairman and CEO Muhtar Kent refers to as "the golden triangle."

Take the AIDS epidemic in Africa, for example, where getting medicines the last mile to people's homes is often a monumental challenge. Through a partnership with the government of Tanzania, the Gates Foundation, and The Global Health Leadership Institute at Yale, we used our supply chain expertise to identify bottlenecks, offer practical solutions, and just as importantly, build the capabilities needed to sustain and enhance the progress we achieved. The results have been far more significant and enduring than anything we could have done alone. That's the power of partnerships.

It is projects like this one and many others that give me hope in our political system, at home and around the world. Every day I rise, full of optimism that by the grace of God and by the power of our faith and drive, we can all live lives that matter and make a difference.

Clyde Tuggle is Senior Vice President, Chief Public Affairs and Communications Officer for The Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta. He also serves on Yale's President's Council on International Activities and the Yale Divinity School Board of Advisors.

scripturespeaks

By A. Ralph Barlow '59 B.D., '64 S.T.M.

This year's elections have reawakened a classic conflict in Western society. The biblical tradition – from Second Isaiah through the New Testament – identifies it as the conflict between control and servanthood. Other traditions speak more generally of the tensions between the interrelatedness of people and the instincts of individualism.

Our explosive disagreements attest to the loss of a basic truth crucial to civil order and well-being – the dimension of concern for the whole society. In each case, an embattled group – immigrants, same-sex couples, or citizens who can't afford health insurance – is being resisted by an attitude that would deny the

At stake is an acknowledgment of the interrelatedness of American society, or – in biblical language – the theme of servanthood as distinct from the control-dominated motive.

crucial dimension of empathy that is necessary for the welfare of us all. At stake is an acknowledgment of the interrelatedness of American society, or – in biblical language – the theme of servanthood, as distinct from the control-dominated motive that refuses to extend to others the rights the majority enjoys.

It was theologian Roger Williams who identified this challenge to American society when he returned to England in 1643 to petition Parliament to grant a colonial charter for the settlement of Providence Plantations on the shores of Narragansett Bay. Banished from Massachusetts, Williams questioned

how political entities could ever be successful if people in power keep chopping off each others' heads. Why shouldn't people accept each others' humanity and value each others' contributions to the welfare of the whole society? And so, aided by Williams' leadership, the history of Rhode Island began, making its goal to build a more tolerant society. Rhode Island was the first among the American colonies to welcome Jews and Quakers.

Though a staunch Puritan himself, Williams saw how futile it is when any one group tries to control the whole of society by restricting the freedoms and self-realizations of everyone else. In effect, Williams argued that each group should be servant, not master, of a vast heterogeneous order – each group acknowledging its interrelatedness with the whole and willing to commit to the flourishing of others.

History is replete with the ironic consequences that flow from the fear of the loss of political or social control. Winston Churchill, the pre-eminent spokesman for England's "finest hour" and freedom from tyranny, was so convinced of the absolute need for Empire that he could not tolerate India's quest for independence from Britain. His intransigence, and the resulting damage to his reputation, point to the tragic consequences of denying people their freedom and self-determination.

Surely at this moment in American history we cannot miss the irony as we watch a nation of immigrants risk losing or forgetting that basic concept of interrelatedness and inclusiveness.

Surely such a pluralistic society will wake up to this danger to its very being as a nation unique in the world and rally around the restoration of something so fundamental.

A. Ralph Barlow is pastor emeritus of Beneficent Congregational Church (UCC) in Providence, RI. He can be reached at a.r.barlow@cox.net.

Divinity and Dialectic

By Mick Hirsch '03 M.Div.

On my thirty-fifth birthday, I became a Communist. Not since the day I officially declared myself a Unitarian Universalist had anything been more liberating or spiritually uplifting than my conversion to Communism.

It was a true coming-out of my political identity. Just as over time I had come to realize that the Unitarian Universalist Association was a better personal fit than the United Methodist Church for my evolving

spiritual and theological values, I came also to see that the Democratic Party was not the best champion of my political and economic values.

In neither instance have I forsaken what I learned from the traditions I left. Wesleyan perfection, sanctifying grace, faith-and-works, and especially the employment of grassroots “classes” and “bands” of renegade believers – all these Methodist-oriented principles and practices remain dear to my faith life. Similarly, the Democratic Party with its dedicated endorsement of the working class, women, minorities, the environment, and international diplomacy over internecine warfare – these principles undergird my understanding of what makes America the land of the free and home of the brave.

Nevertheless, a growing discomfort with both the UMC and the DNC compelled me to seek other paths that spoke more directly, more openly and honestly to the concerns of my heart and the crises I saw erupting throughout the world.

The Communist Party USA (CPUSA), though historically and by nomination a “party,” is really more akin to a movement – committed to developing strong working relations with liberal political organizers and others who support such causes as the labor movement, an end to racially motivated bias and violence, LGBTQ and gender equality, immigrant rights, and universal healthcare. What makes the CPUSA a viable voice in today’s political climate is the way it supports these causes with more urgency, determination, and consistency.

In the end, my political and my denominational identities fit nicely together. The UUA allows me to live out my faith in a community that, for example, speaks and acts clearly and unequivocally in solidarity with the LGBTQ community for equality in marriage, benefits, and service to God. Similarly, I am called to a vision of communist democracy – to the CPUSA’s unwavering commitment to speaking truth to power, standing with the oppressed in the face of injustice, working for a socialist society in which economic discrepancy is shunned rather than celebrated, and building a future in which our children and our children’s children will “bear one another’s burdens” so as to live in peace and commonality.

Mick Hirsch, based in Lowell, MA, is a case manager at the International Institute, a refugee assistance and resettlement organization. He is also finishing a Ph.D. in philosophy at the European Graduate School, located in Switzerland.

We’re All in this together

By Paul Stroble ’82 M.Div.

Different authors in recent years have challenged us to recover a sense of civic virtue and the common good. The economist Robert Reich has identified four “morality tales” in American civic and political discourse: the “rot at the top” (government is bad), “the mob at the gates” (the poor/the immigrants/the

the sport of demonizing government persists even though it is demonstrable that government can provide services on a much larger scale than voluntary organizations alone can.

people on welfare are the problem), “the triumphant individual” (we are responsible for our own well-being), and “the benevolent community” (people’s well-being needs government help). All these tales ultimately fall short, he argues, because each has an “us vs. them” component.

Discussing Reich’s “tales,” the ethicist Eric Mount in *Covenant, Community, and the Common Good* (Pilgrim Press, 1999) argues for a return to a religious idea in American discourse, the concept of covenant, in which personal faith is expressed

through some kind of commitment to social service and concern for others.

The idea of covenant immediately chafes against two tenacious aspects of American thinking about religion. One is the individualism of churchgoing believers who hold ideological beliefs and opinions defiantly at odds with just about any denominational (and sometimes biblical) teaching that speaks to

community solutions. The other is the wishful thinking that says if only the churches really stepped up, we could address social problems without government help.

The sport of demonizing government persists even though it is demonstrable that government can provide services on a much larger scale than voluntary organizations alone can. Rather than dismissing government as the problem, we might envision government as one of several ways – along with congregations and service organizations – to serve the public good.

A sense of “audacious openness to the other” – Mount’s term – is a key to inculcating a larger sense of the common good. A “we’re all in this together” narrative, sorely lacking in contemporary discourse, could help us view afresh our pressing social issues and challenge the dominant “us vs. them” view of the world and of each other.

Paul Stroble, of St. Louis, is a United Methodist minister and author of several books. He was principal writer for the “Faithful Citizen” curriculum (available at <http://congregationinpubliclife.org/DVDCurriculum.htm>).

expanding our Reach

By Neichelle Guidry Jones '10 M.Div.

I recently read about two Republican National Convention attendees being asked to leave after throwing peanuts to an African American camerawoman. “This is how we feed the animals,” they said to her.

This summer, the city of Chicago has been likened to a war zone: More lives have been taken by gun violence in our streets this year than the number of U.S. soldiers killed in the streets of Afghanistan.

How can faith tradition inject wisdom into turbulent times? by being visible, loud, and fully present in the turbulence.

These are only two indications of the disposability of the potential of life and the hope of the spirit. Certainly one must name the desperation and frustration that produce the violence and the ignorance that drives intolerance in its myriad forms. But how do we move from naming to overcoming?

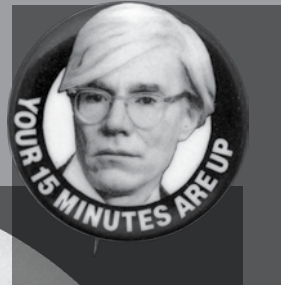
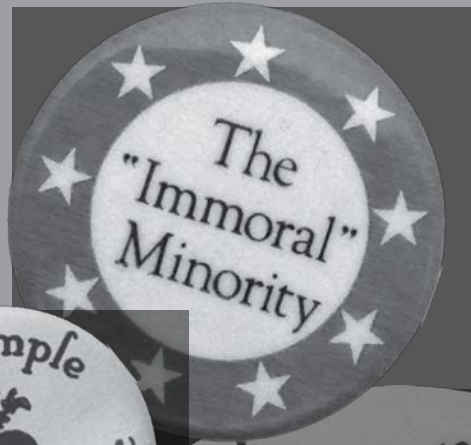
In times such as these, congregations and communities that are wholeheartedly committed to social justice encourage me. In my congregational work on the south side of Chicago, I have experienced the transformative power of the Social Gospel. I can attest to the powers of confrontational liturgy and prophetic social action. I do not believe that authentic contemporary ministries can practice one and not the other.

Such congregations and communities have ground-up relevance. In my experience, church leaders have the profound power to convince people of their divine identity and worth, and the weighty obligation of admonishing their congregations to social action. However, this cannot be done if we, as leaders of the church, are not living prophetic lives. We cannot expect to make change if we do not first embody it and live it out ourselves. We can never forget or discount our roles as models before our congregations. So I

place my foremost hope in the God of the Gospels, whose recorded life is a model of selfless and prophetic leadership and whose Word continues to turn hearts toward justice and peace. But I also place hope in the prophetic tradition that inspires my generation of young church leaders.

We cannot say we are without models, and for this, we are immeasurably blessed. We cannot say we are without ingenuity and compassion. We cannot say we are without boldness and fight. How can faith tradition inject some wisdom and perspective into turbulent times? By being visible, loud, and fully present in the midst of the turbulence. This has worked in generations past. I have no choice but to hope that its power yet remains.

The Rev. Neichelle R. Guidry Jones is Associate Pastor to Young Adults at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. She blogs at www.shepreaches.com.



Whatever Happened to sin?

By Lyn G. Brakeman, '82 M.Div.

At my writers group a question came up about sin. One of our members, feeling the strain of a daughter's critical illness, described how she wanted an inspirational mantra and the Hail Mary came to her – "out of nowhere," she said.

She's a lifelong Episcopalian and didn't remember much awareness of, and certainly not prayer to, Mary. But the Holy Mary mantra felt good to her as a woman and a mother.

Not knowing more than the beginning of the prayer, she consulted Google. "But I don't want to pray the second part," she said. "I'm not a sinner."

"Maybe sin isn't moral but spiritual – like being out of connection with the goodness in yourself, your neighbor, and God?" I said.

"I can live with that," she said.

As I pondered our conversation, some dangerous questions about American spirituality came to me – "out of nowhere." Is sin a neglected moral value? If not original, it's surely inevitable. Although fallen out of fashion and abused in the church to control others, should not sin, both word and theological concept, be proclaimed as a necessary step toward the downsizing of America's superpower ego? And the church's? Can there be true humility, right-sizedness, without admitting the fall into sin? Did we ever leave Eden?

I've been in parishes where mention of sin is avoided. I've struggled to soft-pedal it to sponsors of baptisands who are reluctant to use the condemned word in their covenantal promises. I find the Sacrament of Reconciliation refreshing. Why is it under-advertised?

Our nation's founders valued reason to shape a new identity, but they also were humble and self-reflective enough to pose soul-challenging questions based on life experiences of unjust societal structures. New answers, new checks and balances, emerged and turned the world upside down. The whole project was a huge success.

Have we now fallen into the sin of imagining we have no sin, can't fail?

*The Rev. Lyn Brakeman, a writer and Episcopal priest in Boston, MA, is the author of two books, *Spiritual Lemons: Biblical Women, Irreverent Laughter, and Righteous Rage* and *The God Between Us: A Spirituality of Relationships*, both published by Augsburg Press. She blogs at spirituallemons.blogspot.com.*

Huxtable Family Values

By Elijah Heyward III '07 M.A.R.

Matt Lauer of NBC's *The Today Show* recently asked the cast of *The Cosby Show* about the show's impact on the 2008 presidential election. Phylicia Rashad, who portrayed matriarch Clair Huxtable, stopped short of

Despite our differences, it is apparent that we all want the same things: safety, provision for food and shelter, education, and the right to live out our birthright on our own terms.

crediting the series with having a role in electing our nation's first African American president. Instead, she highlighted *The Cosby Show's* success at helping the world embrace the realization that families have more in common than is often acknowledged. On television, as in real life, families share meals, have siblings who disagree, and some even sing and dance together like the Brady Bunch.

I'm thankful that I did not grow up as a Brady or a Huxtable but as a Heyward in coastal South Carolina. My hometown is a small town made famous by

the Gullah culture, historical remnants of war and the literature of Pat Conroy. My childhood was colored by parents who often debated politics with paint that was neither blue nor red but shaded with compassion. Our dinner table rivaled *Meet the Press*. Yet it was where my sister and I learned to disagree without being disagreeable. It was where we also learned that despite the issue, people matter the most.

On the pulse of an important presidential election Americans have many questions to engage, a privilege of discourse and disagreement earned by the sacrifices of our forebears. Despite our differences, it is apparent that we all want the same things: safety, provision for food and shelter, education, and the right to live out our birthright on our own terms. Since our nation's founding, our values have guided how we achieve these aims. Whatever the outcome, we must never forget that we all play an integral role in the American family and must unite to achieve our common goals.

Elijah Heyward III, a Beaufort, SC, native, is Director of the Youth Scholar Academy in Washington, D.C.

expanding our Reach

By Robert Mansbach '66 S.T.M.

When I use the word "values," I include approaches that are rights-oriented, principle-oriented, and goal-oriented. For many who still support such value structures, the problem we face today seems to be an unexamined or even intentional shrinking of said values' ethical "reach."

Value-laden words like love, justice, liberty, equality, honesty, autonomy, and beneficence are seen as applying to smaller and smaller circles that involve family, religious group, political party, nation, or just "people like us." This frees supposedly ethical persons and groups from responsibility for anyone or any community foreign to the chosen narrower circle.

Thus, such rights, principles of moral obligation, or ends/goals lose their power precisely because they no longer apply beyond the particular group espousing them. Ironically, persons or groups taking such an approach arrive at the same point as those who espouse no values whatsoever beyond personal benefit, since values narrowly limited without universal "character" are no values at all.

The Rev. Robert Mansbach, Ph.D., an ordained Lutheran pastor, is an emeritus religion professor at Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY.

Carlos Eire’s identity as a scholar, writer, and American is tied to his dramatic background: In 1962 he was eleven when he was airlifted to the U.S. to escape Castro’s Cuba. He was eventually reunited with his mother in Chicago but his father never got out of Cuba, and Eire never saw him again.

Today Eire is Riggs Professor of History and Religious Studies at Yale. His books include War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship From Erasmus to Calvin (1986) and A Very Brief History of Eternity (2010). His memoir Waiting for Snow in Havana (2003) won the National Book Award. A second memoir is Learning to Die in Miami (2010). Reflections interviewed him last month.

REFLECTIONS: “American values” – what words come to mind to you?

CARLOS EIRE: My understanding is very different from that of many who were born here. I came from a totalitarian state where you can land in jail just for saying what you’re thinking. To me, American values mean specific things: freedom of thought, of speech, of assembly.

REFLECTIONS: Do we neglect those freedoms here?

EIRE: The meaning of freedom here gets more complicated, tangled. Take the freedom of speech. I think of the recent case of the Chick-fil-A owner who stated his opinion on marriage. There were boycotts launched against his company. And attempts were made to shut him down, just for voicing his opinion. Is this a climate for genuine freedom of expression? There seems to be less room for genuine dialogue in the public sphere than there used to be.

REFLECTIONS: What would that look like?

EIRE: We need to stop demonizing each other. We have to remain committed to civil discourse. Watching the 2008 campaign and now the 2012 election, it’s not encouraging. I hear no intellectual arguments, just emotional ones. I see a lot of identity politics: You define yourself or are defined by others as liberal, conservative, blue-collar, or whatever, and you are stuck with the package that comes with each of those definitions, and nothing can be added, substituted, or taken out. For instance, if one is pro-life, one can very easily be pegged by those who buy the liberal package as being a misogynist. I’m pro-life, and I have had discussions with pro-choice people who could only see the issue on emotional terms, or strictly from the perspective of women’s rights and were surprised by intellectual arguments about the sanctity of life. They had no idea there could be any rational position other than theirs, or

that anyone could be pro-life and still favor equal rights for women. So, after conversing, we come to understand each other a little better. We aren’t demonizing each other.

REFLECTIONS: Can we have values without religion?

EIRE: Judaeo-Christian values used to be the core of Western civilization, and that’s no longer the case. Pragmatism or other values are argued now – the greatest social good for the greatest number of people, for instance. As a Christian I’d rather see Judaeo-Christian values at the center of issues of life and death. But in a pluralistic society, it’s impossible to make appeals to special revelation. I think believers are going to have to get better at making rationalistic arguments in order to defend their values in secular society. It can be done. Kant tried to do this by simply boiling down ethics to the Golden Rule, but that no longer works in our age. We have to try harder, and we need to keep trying.

REFLECTIONS: You teach the Reformation period. Are there lessons to learn from 500 years ago?

EIRE: Two points come to mind. The first is: the necessity of avoiding violence when we disagree. We must keep in mind the importance of civil discourse and tolerance. The chief lesson the West learned from the violence of the Reformation era was that of tolerance. Another lesson was the need to maintain equilibrium when there are differences of opinion. We are fortunate to have checks and balances that ensure that no one side or group dominates with its opinion. But such freedoms are a fragile thing. If there were a catastrophe, some sort of economic collapse, or a plague or a war, then I worry that those freedoms could easily disappear, as they did in Germany in the 1920s and 30s.

Second: the importance of acknowledging that beliefs and values actually do define societies, cultures, and civilizations. I say this because intellectual history as an academic discipline is nearly dead. What has taken its place is a crypto-Marxist notion that material factors and issues of class, race, and gender are the only “real” dimension in history. According to this dominant point of view, beliefs are just symptoms of deeper, purely material concerns, not causal factors. This makes religion as inconsequential as a hiccup. But certainly societies are moved by beliefs and ideals, even if these are in constant interplay with material factors. I believe ideals and values are as real as grain prices, and make even more of a difference in the way people live. I also believe that some beliefs and ideals are infinitely better than others. Moral relativism is undoubtedly as great a threat to the human race today as intolerance and nuclear and biological warfare. And, paradoxically, the toughest question we face in the West is whether or not we can afford to tolerate those who espouse intolerance at one extreme and moral relativism at the other.

Suffer the Children: American Lessons from Middle School

by christina baik

He strutted up the stage like any other cool high school senior with an attitude. But I noticed a certain heaviness in his steps as he approached the mic and took it in his hand. He slowly unfolded a wrinkled piece of notebook paper and closed his eyes. The theatre grew still and he started to read his piece.

My breath tightened as I listened to the raw anger of his poetry. In a tumble of rhymes, he told us the story of returning home from school to learn that his dad walked out on him and his mom. While he hid his eyes from us, I could hear him struggling against hot tears as he spat his last words.

After a brief silence and awkward clapping from his classmates, he returned to his seat a few rows ahead of me. He pulled his hood over his head and slouched deep into his chair.

This caught us off guard. Usually at these monthly open mic events, the high school students wrote love poetry to get the attention of a crush in the

in some ways, the election season looks like middle school on a larger scale, with the rumors, name-calling, and measures of popularity.

room or did covers of popular rap songs. The last time a student shared about an emotional struggle, several students laughed at her. But something opened up this time.

Another student stepped up to the stage. He took the mic and started pacing the floor with his poem in hand. He disclosed a similar story about a father who left him. He described how his anger and confusion festered into bitterness and self-blame. His words were piercingly honest and echoed much of the earlier reading. But he read with a steady voice and his piece took a turn that made the previous poet look up.

The poet on stage slowed down and read verses about the steps he took over the years to try to make sense of his dad's decision to leave. In his struggle to understand the one who hurt him most, he found relief in choosing to forgive.

As this poet took his seat, the previous one's shoulders softened and he looked over at his classmate with a question in his eyes.

After the event, I watched them walk out together to the bus.

Lowering Our Guard

I was working at the time at an arts center in Philadelphia that hosted these open mic events for local middle and high school students. I left the theatre that day deeply encouraged. It is rare to see such voluntary vulnerability in a public setting, let alone on a stage where others who took a similar risk before were met with ridicule. It was stunning to witness a moment in which one person's breaking open was met by another bringing hope into the pain. Generally we are conditioned to be on our guard, invulnerable. So we keep our mouths shut – and miss out on opportunities to learn from each other. When we are honest, we may recognize ourselves among the silencers.

The exchange I witnessed that day left a lasting impression. The following year, I started teaching middle school humanities at a Friends school out of a conviction to create safe spaces for risk-taking and to foster rich levels of critical and personal engagement with some of life's most pressing concerns. What I saw at the open mic turned out to be just a sliver of the possibilities. In my students I ended

up finding some of my greatest hope for the future. In the travails of its young people, perhaps America could learn something about honest self-searching and reconciliation.

Most people I know are not fond of middle school. They remember it as one of the most uncomfortable and painful periods of their lives—rife with self-consciousness, silencing, and social division. It is sobering to recognize that, in many ways, the middle school experience hasn't progressed very far over the years. We still deal with low self-image, bullying, and in-group vs. out-group dynamics. As much as we as a society want to think that we move on from those tumultuous adolescent years, they serve as an acute microcosm of our greater culture. I've found that the middle school classroom can be an invaluable space for strategizing concrete steps toward positive change.

Accessing the "Other"

One such step is to reflect on "the danger of single stories." As conversations about race came up in my classrooms, I grew very cognizant of my own identity as one of few faculty members of color in the middle school and the only Asian one. I saw how students' limited access to the multiple, authentic life narratives of their peers and teachers led to narrow understandings of each other as individuals and members of particular groups. In my first year, my curriculum began with *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, where we discussed the consequences of a mindless society and the importance of critically examining the world around us. The book awakened the students' critical thinking and writing skills, but I wanted them to reach for a more personal level and open up to each other much sooner. So the next year I assigned *Bronx Masquerade* by Nikki Grimes and Chimamanda Adichie's TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story" before Bradbury's novel, to give students a more scaffolded understanding of being an individual in community. These works challenged students about their preconceptions of each other.

The more voices we read and discussed, whether from short stories and poems, articles about local bullying incidents, or their peers' writing, the more my students realized how much they shared in their habits and insecurities. Some of the more confident students shared their own stories about being both victim *and* perpetrator of assumptions and labels. This encouraged the shyer ones to do the same. Naming and exploring the danger of prejudicial perceptions in the curriculum early on created a safe space much sooner.

This school exercise might sound simple or quaint, but contemporary adult society isn't so far beyond middle school as we think. The evidence of the omnipresence of micro- and macro-aggressions—the unchecked prejudice, whether it has to do with race, class, sexuality, religion, or any other identifier—demonstrates how much more we need to seek out and share alternative stories to the ones we know by heart.

I am writing this from Israel, where my heart aches to see the fear and anxiety fueled by the incessant "single stories" on both sides of the wall. During a YDS travel seminar to Israel/Palestine in March, we visited holy sites and met with religious and political leaders. One of the most salient visits for me was to the University of Bethlehem, where Palestinian students told us that they didn't have any Israeli friends. In one student's words, "How can we, when we never meet any Israelis?" Her comment made "the danger of single stories" all the more universal and real to me. Access to more narratives about the "other" and friendships across the wall are absolutely necessary.

Otherwise, we will continue to read about incidents like the mob attack in Jerusalem's Zion Square just last month. A Palestinian teenage boy was beaten unconscious by a group of Jewish adolescents in front of hundreds of people. The incident immediately brought me back to news stories about the mob attack at South Philadelphia High School in 2010. In Zion Square, it was Jewish teenagers who attacked Palestinian teenagers; at the Philadelphia school, it was black students who attacked Chinese and Vietnamese students. In both cases, young people were hospitalized. The victims and victimizers could easily have been switched, considering the long, complex histories of tension between these ethnic groups. The youth pick up such cruelty from what adults around them profess about the "other." Uprooting the entrenched "us vs. them" mentality that leads to such violence is an incredibly daunting task. Where does our hope come from?

The Choice to Forgive

When I am discouraged, I remind myself of the second open mic poet's decision to forgive the one who hurt him most. I recall the slouched poet straighten up in his seat ahead of me as his shoulders softened to the story of a classmate who also lost a father but found peace. And I remember that there can be healing when we are honest about our struggles and choose to forgive. I also think back to my eighth-grade English classroom and their "single-story" revelations.

One of my most powerful memories as a teacher is what happened when I decided to model the openness I sought from my students. Once I gathered the nerve in class to share my own stories, as both a victim of false assumptions and one who makes them, students relaxed. They knew I would not judge them, and our conversations gained much depth.

During my first year, for instance, I hesitated to tell my students about how just before the school year, I was attacked by a group of black middle school students in the city. They had yelled racial epithets and thrown chunks of concrete at me from the broken sidewalk as I was biking just north of Chinatown. By my second year, I was able to admit to my students that on the rest of my ride home, I involuntarily winced at every black face I saw. I emphasized to my students how I do not assume all black people will harm me, but that incident humbled me to realize how human I am to draw such associations in a moment of fear and panic, even when I know better. Becoming this unguarded to my students and asking for their understanding opened them up to each other in some powerful ways. A white, affluent boy admitted to his black friend (and as it turns out, his neighbor) that when he met her last year, he assumed that she was “from the ‘hood, poor, and part of a gang.” We were all taken aback by both his stereotyping and brute honesty. I was impressed by her easy way of assuring him that she forgives him and it’s okay. There were many such instances of honesty and forgiveness that year.

This is Not Okay

Even as we were breaking through to candid discussions in class and my students were reading, writing, and sharing vividly honest work, that second year I was rudely reminded of the continued urgency of this work. During recess, a group of boys were playing a game they called “Minority Four-Square.” They each claimed a minority identity, such as Mexican or black. Strikingly, a couple of students of color were playing along. When one got out, he would shout, “It’s because I’m Mexican!” or “It’s because I’m black!” and the others would routinely roll their eyes and laugh. They all thought this was hilarious. The derisive way in which my students played a game that made fun of those who claim a disadvantage due to racism was alarming.

I had been nearby, trying to process what was happening, when they asked me to join the game and choose what minority I would like to be. My eyes widened and nothing came out of my mouth. Perhaps they didn’t see that I was already an ethnic

minority because they knew me as Christina, their English teacher. Since I was too emotional at this point to make this a “teachable moment,” I just pulled the two leaders of this group aside and briefly told them how inappropriate this was. Then, I went inside to organize my tangled feelings and thoughts before bringing all the participants in for a full discussion the following morning. I understood that thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds may not be devel-

in the travails of its young people, perhaps America could learn something about honest self-searching and reconciliation.

opmentally able to fully comprehend the meaning behind their game. At the same time, I knew that several of these kids loved social commentary and most likely thought they were making a witty point about “playing the race card.” One part of me was wary of over-dramatizing the situation; another part of me shouted, *No! This is not okay!* My alarm was not eased when one of the colleagues I confided in replied with, “Oh yeah, the diversity thing.” Others were much more supportive, but this colleague’s comment highlighted the pressing need to actively resist such a lackadaisical attitude toward social issues.

The election season raises our attention to urgent social issues while illuminating the partisanship and drama that we’ve grown to expect from politics. In some ways, it looks like middle school on a larger scale, with the rumors, name-calling, and measures of popularity. Such an exhibition of the human condition may lead one to numbness, irritation, or despair. But I share my stories about two high school seniors and my middle school students because they chose to be vulnerable and forgiving in such a climate. My students kept me on my toes by not so gently reminding me to avoid complacency. As a teacher, I strived to equip my students to overcome the indifference, self-centeredness, and despair that too often characterize people’s reactions to conflict, and choose instead to engage in further action toward good. My students provided a hefty challenge. They also offered me hope.

Christina Baik is a second-year M.A.R. student at YDS. Previously she taught eighth-grade English, sixth-grade Spanish, and a supplementary course she created for her eighth graders called “Identity in Community” at a Quaker school outside of Philadelphia. She graduated from Swarthmore College in 2008.

notes on the cAPitAlist PeRsuaSion
by John Haines

i

"everything is connected to everything ..."

so runs the executive saw,
cutting both ways
on the theme of all improvement:
Your string is my string
when i pull it my way.

in my detachment is your dependency.

in your small and backward nation
some minor wealth still beckons –
was it lumber, gas, or only sugar?
thus by imperial logic,
with carefully aimed negotiation,
my increase is your poverty.

When the mortgage payments falter,
then in fair market exchange
your account is my account,
your savings become my bonus,
your home my house to sell.

in my approval is your dispossession.

ii

often in distress all social bonds
are broken. Your wife may then
be my wife, your children
my dependents – if i want them.

so, too, our intellectual custom:
Your ideas are my ideas
when i choose to take them.
Your book is my book,
your title mine to steal,
your poem mine to publish.

in my acclaim is your remaindering.

suppose i sit in an oval office:
the public polls are sliding,
and to prove i am still in command
i begin a distant war. then,
in obedience to reciprocal fate,
by which everything is connected,
my war is your war,
my adventure your misfortune.

As when the dead come home,
and we are still connected,
my truce is your surrender,
my triumph your despair.

Politics and the Impossible Pulpit

by charles lemert

Religiously I am a kind of manic-depressive. Currently, to the good fortune of fellow worshippers at our Episcopal church, I am in a mildly depressed state. This means I attend for the liturgy and the music. It helps also that there is a bit of exercise in the standing, kneeling, going forth for the Eucharist. When the preaching is bad, as everywhere it sometimes is, I can be glad for the solace of the liturgical activities.

Yet, because I was ordained in 1963 in a free-church tradition, where the pulpit was meant to be the focus of worship, I cannot let go of my manic attitude toward preaching. After many years of therapy, I have concluded that the bipolar irregularities of my spiritual life owe to the fact that I became a churchgoer when I was ten. I discerned that on Sunday mornings, when my depressive father threw his weekly fit over my mother's burnt bacon, they could

today, what trust there once was has been eroded by a failure of political leaders to preach the limits of political power. When that happens, then unembarrassed ideologies of self-interest corrupt the public sphere.

not object to my getting out of the house by going to church. The preacher at the Westwood Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati was the Reverend Everett C. Morehead, an imposing man of gray hair, eminent stature, excellent diction, and gentlemanly grace. It helped that his son, Bruce, was my best friend. Still, while I recall not a word of what Bruce's father said, I was somehow moved by it – at least to the extent of escaping the parental fights.

Many years later, after an erratic youth, the manic pole of my religious life was at its height when, after college, I became a seminary student in Boston. In

that day, the early 1960s, the city had more than its fair share of great preachers. I pursued them Sunday after Sunday when my seminarian duties at a nearby Congregational church permitted. Among the more satisfying preachers, as I remember them, were Frederick M. Meek at Old South Church on Copley Square, Theodore Parker Ferris at Trinity Episcopal just across Copley Square, Harold J. Ockenga at Park Street Church, Rhys Williams at First Church Unitarian on Marlboro Street, and a long succession of visiting preachers at Harvard Memorial Church. Neither doctrine nor denomination mattered. In the years following, in what preaching I did, I borrowed as best I could from what I had heard.

Good Preaching and Bad

When my brief ministry of less than a decade was ending I went back to graduate school, finished a doctorate, and became an academic. I was not the only leftish liberal minister to do that. For myself, it had mostly to do with the oddly bipolar domestic reasons I first went to churches as a child. For a long stretch early in my academic career the depressive phase of my spiritual life dominated. I attended churches sporadically. After a few decades I lapsed back into a manic period in which I had the insane idea of becoming an Episcopal priest. My bishop laid down the reality principle, suggesting that I did not seem to be the kind of fellow who could be obedient to a bishop. I said, "Good point."

Yet, through it all, I never lost my fascination with preaching. When it was bad, as it usually was, I mumbled under my breath. My kid told me to shut up. What I was mumbling about was the embarrassment of reflecting on my own preaching, which was mostly awful. In the words of a deacon in my first church, “Very fancy philosophy, Charles.” And that was one of the better ones. Today I realize it is hard work, this preaching.

We who have preached from a pulpit of any kind understand, if we are sensible, that it is a place from which it is impossible to do what one is called upon to do. Faith, whether religious or secular, demands that one preach a transcending word as best she can. It is all too easy to fail – and this is a warning that applies equally well to the political rhetoric to which we are subjected, no more urgently than in election seasons like the one Americans are now suffering through. November 2012 cannot come soon enough.

No matter how nicely appointed, with symbols or flags, a pulpit of any sort is a precipice. A preacher is expected to declaim some promise that what those gathered want or need can be had. The trick here is when the need cannot be requited one must avoid attending solely to wants and wishes of the moment. From time to time even the most haphazard of preachers stumbles upon a spark of wisdom that justifies this calling. More often the crowd must settle for a sincere gesture that circles around some seasonal doctrine vaguely pertinent to human needs.

Trusting Higher Powers

The problem here is that in religion as in politics the needs addressed are too deep to be satisfied in near time. Both holy and mundane public discourse face the thin prospect of doing more than stir the crowd to trust the higher powers at hand until the end – whether the end is of this life or, as regards political rhetoric, the end of the election season. When the trust of those gathered is sustained, the preacher will have done well.

In the religious sphere, the impossibility of the pulpit is just what it should be. Preaching before the faithful ought to be a modest exercise performed before the transcending fact that even when the gods make themselves known they must be regarded as inscrutable. Otherwise there is no point to having a god, however ruthless or remote he may be.

But in politics, pulpit or platform work suffers the lack of a well-agreed-upon transcending fact of public life. In modern politics, after the disappearance of true royal authority, the politician has had to

resort to holding forth on nakedly partisan notions justified by allegations that they are the *will of the people*. It is widely considered important to the ruse to end a political homily with a plea for the blessing of the local deity.

Unfortunately the thoughts of well-established gods like Allah or Yahweh, Krishna, or even Zeus are decidedly inscrutable; hence pulpit work requires heavy reliance on sacred texts or in the case of political homilies authoritative political codes. When political figures call for divine blessing they convince none but the already convinced. It is the nature of gods to stand apart, perhaps to send mysterious hints as to their thinking on the affairs of lesser beings.

Civil Religion Endures

The claim I make for the hazards of both sacred and profane pulpits is somewhat different from more familiar arguments as to the prominence of civil religion. In the United States, as nowhere in the world with the possible exceptions of places like Iran, the religious dilemma intrudes upon the political sphere. There is a reliable history that traces religious ideas back to English colonizers in the seventeenth century who understood their settlements as divinely ordained. From them we get such secular equivalents as American exceptionalism. The civil religion idea goes back at least to Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762, who observed that in the pagan

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societies “each State had its cult and its gods,” an arrangement that passed on through Hellenic and Roman times into the modern era.

For our times, Robert Bellah’s 1967 essay “Civil Religion in America” remains the classic study. Bellah’s main idea was that, while “some have argued that Christianity is the national faith, and others that church and synagogue celebrate only the generalized religion of ‘the American Way of Life,’ few have realized that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America.” Few would deny that, for better or worse, American political life draws upon religious ideas, ranging from “America the Beautiful,” a harmless hymn to American exceptionalism, to raw political

arguments that justify even the most outrageous policies like the denial of health care to women or civil rights to LGBT people as against some ill-constructed god's will. The most benign of these are inoffensive for the most part, even welcome as proof of America's amiable innocence as to its global destiny.

What is not well-emphasized in the civil religion idea is the role of the pulpit as more than a mere platform for high-minded discourse. The pulpit, literally, is a place set aside – a ritual reality illustrated no less by the lectern in a store-front church, or a cleared stone for blessing soldiers entering battle, as by high church altars raised above the level plane. A pulpit is figuratively, if not always physically, elevated. The pulpit is raised up by the longings of people who seek some word of a better world. The preacher must engage these wishes that are never satisfied in this world. The work is not for fools.

Will of the People?

When a pulpit is lodged in the public sphere it strives to achieve a similar advantage. The political preacher seeks to persuade others to follow a path he means to occupy in order to bring the will of the *people* into a majority position. Needless to say, *the people* is a fungible concept meaning in some cases “the mass of the lesser folk,” in others, the embodied high culture of a nation's public will. Either way, the appeal has a sacred tone without possessing very much potential to sway mind or heart. Yet it recurs time and again in public talk.

This relative vacuity of political invocations of a popular higher power illustrates their differences from even run-of-the-mill religious ones. When, however clumsily, a plausibly honest word of another world is offered from a pulpit paid for by hard-working adherents, a cynic exhibits bad faith to assume that their good faith is without merit. By contrast, overwrought public pronouncements of the truthiness of a partisan avowal of the will of the people seldom hold up from crowd to crowd. In the long run of a religiously implicated nation like the American one, the strains of new immigrant populations upon the already radically pluralist traditions of American culture begin to unravel the very idea that anything like the will of *the* American people might exist, except as a normal declarative expediency of organized civil societies.

Niebuhr Still Matters

This is the hard lesson that the American political and social system has yet to learn. When it comes to values there is never for very long a strong core belief. There may be, as surely there are, common

values that must be learned in school or naturalization classes, but these are of a lower moral order – principles of practical responsibility as opposed to an essential doctrine. Yet, they serve a good purpose. Nations do come together in times of crisis in the interest of fending off an evil force. In the longer

For more than thirty years Reinhold Niebuhr was the acknowledged voice of left-liberal politics in America and this without the least quiver in his just-as-strong christian voice.

run what political cohesion there is serves to calm internal dissent for no better reason than to prevent one's piece of the political and economic pie from being eaten up in the confusion.

This is the still, for some, hard-to-swallow but enduring lesson of Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, published in 1932. He was then, still early in the economic crisis of the 1930s, attacking the idea that complex social and international problems can be resolved by an ethic of love issuing from the good intentions of pious individuals. Society, including the State and its political apparatus, can never be counted upon to pursue so much as justice, much less love. Hence, the forlorn divide between the individual and society. Niebuhr insisted that the only way a social ethic of “the people” can come to pass is through coercion, which means that in domestic politics conflict must be an option, as it is in the international sphere.

Yet, Niebuhr, one of Yale Divinity School's most notable alumni, never qualified his strong religious beliefs. Indeed, though he spent but thirteen years as pastor of a settled parish, even while teaching at Union Seminary in New York City he considered himself an itinerant preacher. Few of his day, or any other, have come close to Niebuhr's standard for filling both religious and political pulpits. For more than thirty years he was the acknowledged voice of left-liberal politics in America and this without the least quiver in his just-as-strong Christian voice. He was as effective a preacher before political groups and statesmen as before hard-bitten college students and small rural churches. What Niebuhr understood, as have few since, is the lesson of the pulpit. One mounts to utter some higher word but can never know what each and every one of those gathered needs, any more than God's will for them can be assuredly discerned. Yet preachers of all kinds must say something. That something is (or ought to be) that we cannot know what will happen.

The well-disciplined believer may believe in a life beyond this one, but she cannot *know* it for sure. She must trust. Likewise, the well-disciplined patriot cannot know that his national people are truly righteous. What one can know, if he or she will, is that in the end all that is left for the present moment is to trust. This is the ideal that stands behind all good preaching wherever it occurs.

Today, in 2012, in the United States and Europe notably, what trust there once was has been eroded by a failure of political leaders to preach the limits of political power. When that happens, as it has, then unembarrassed ideologies of self-interest corrupt the public sphere. Conflict takes the form not of coercing the State to do better but of beating up on opponents by all manner of distortions and re-criminations. And so, in the United States, we suffer through an election season that, more than any in recent memory, crushes the will of the people, as indefinite as it may be, with out-of-control spending, televised half-truths, public attacks on the humanity of opponents, pseudo-revolutionary movements, and worse. The will of the people is not much to appeal to, but without it neither the pious love of individual believers nor the righteous judgment of the dogmatic will get us anywhere.

Never a Final Word

It is of course counterintuitive to suggest that pulpits well served are meant to hold the impossible before those who long for something more definite. Yet, life is impossible to the end. Politics disappoint because there is never a final word, only a probe for the best that can be done now. This mortifying attitude is the true contribution of religion to politics.

One can only hope that politicians who mouth religious platitudes might for a change listen to a higher power, thus to know that there are things even they cannot change. The better of those who preach in churches often get this. In *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, reflecting on his own parish preaching, Reinhold Niebuhr said: "There is something ludicrous about a callow young fool like myself standing up to preach a sermon to these good folks." All who attempt the impossible are ludicrous before good folk. It is the politicians who have the harder time accepting this fact of life.

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neiGHboRs
by clemens starck

new neighbors
building a house up on the hill ...
she raises goats. He works at the pen.
From my back door
it's thirty miles, as the crow flies,
over the mountains to the coast. it used to be
i could imagine
walking it – unimpeded.
no fences. nothing but deer trails and logging roads.

now i'm surrounded by neighbors.

Which is better: seeking the recluse
in the mountains, and finding he's not at home,
or helping the goat-lady
rig up a new wooden pedestal
for our mailboxes?

Biblical traditions recall the deeds of many women who acted decisively and effectively on behalf of both themselves and others in the community. Unlike the contemporary ideal – or idol – of the entrepreneur or self-made man, most of these women, while certainly enterprising, as well as courageous, were not simply out to advance their own interests. Instead, their actions were meant to contribute to the well-being of other persons and of the larger communities in which they lived.

Several biblical texts emphasize the importance of caring for widows and other vulnerable persons in the community. Laws intended to assist such persons can be characterized aptly as “biblical social welfare legislation,” which provided them a kind of safety net or social security through a series of practical arrangements. Throughout the Old Testament it is understood that YHWH was concerned with the welfare of his people. Biblical laws regularly give expression to this same concern.

Old Testament law and practice can be contrasted with the modern ideology of autonomous (or rugged) individualism. In its extreme form, proponents of this ideology insist that it is right to seek one’s own advantage, but wrong to assist others except in exchange for equal value received.¹ According to this vision, life from cradle to grave consists of a perpetual process of bargaining or trading value for value.² The tacit corollary is that social safety nets are anathema, and that people who are unable to pay their own way should be so obliging as to perish quietly, preferably out of sight, without disturbing the more fortunate. Those who cannot pay their way, including children, the ill, disabled, unemployed, disaster victims, future generations, and all kinds of domestic animals and wildlife, do not count, since, necessarily, they are unable to exchange quid pro quo with present-day entrepreneurs.

It may be appropriate to mention that something like rugged individualism is said to have been at the root of the brutal anarchy, characterized by rape, murder, civil war, genocide, and the nearly total disintegration of what had been the emerging nation of Israel that obtained during the latter part of the Period of the Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.”³

In our time, people who care about others are sometimes dismissed as bleeding hearts or liberals. And persons who serve in helping professions such as school teachers, nurses, public defenders, and primary care physicians – whether male or female – are likely to be paid substantially less than those who undertake to advance their careers in more prestigious and remunerative vocations. The appar-

ent rational for such low esteem and compensation seems to be that helping others is considered less important than helping one’s self.⁴ Only a few decades ago, in the McCarthy era, many Americans believed that people who were concerned about others in the community must be “communists,” “socialists,” and anyhow “un-American.” It is significant that there is no basis in biblical tradition for the notion that there is something wrong or unworthy about caring for or serving the welfare of others and the larger community. Quite the contrary.

notes

1. This ideology comes to clear expression in the writings of Ayn Rand, particularly in her book *The Virtue of Selfishness*. See Sturm, *Solidarity and Suffering*, for a quite different vision of the human condition, emphasizing community rather than the individual. Robert Bellah and others have reflected on the peculiar difficulty Americans have explaining their involvement in community concerns on the basis of individual self-interest. See Bellah, et. al. in *Habits of the Heart*. Reinhold Niebuhr’s reflections on the themes of the individual and community are perhaps even more relevant to understanding and evaluating the American scene in the second decade of the twenty-first century than when he first set them down. See e.g. Niebuhr, *Children of Light*, esp. chapter 11; also *Irony of American History and Man’s Nature and Communities*. See also Rebecca Hiers, “Leadership from the Heart,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 26 (2011) pp.541-83 (reflecting on Native American values and practices), and Sarah Vowell, *The Wordy Shipmates* (examining the modern relevance of Puritan ideals).

2. Wendell Berry draws a sketch of modern marriage grounded on such norms: “Marriage, in what is evidently its most popular version, is now on the one hand an intimate ‘relationship’ involving (ideally) two successful careerists in the same bed, and on the other hand a sort of private political system in which rights and interests must be constantly asserted and defended. Marriage, in other words, has now taken the form of divorce: a prolonged and impassioned negotiation as to how things shall be divided.” *What Are People For?*, p. 180.

3. Judges 17-21 describes the course of gruesome events during those chaotic years (approx. 1200-1000 BCE). The thematic statement quoted here (Judges 17:6 and 21:25) frames or brackets the book’s account of these events. The biblical narrator-commentator clearly condemned and expected readers to condemn the atrocities against women (and men) described in these pages.

4. The same is generally the case as to people in service occupations, such as: farm workers, fire fighters, grocery clerks, hotel and motel housekeepers, janitors, police officers, postal workers, restaurant and fast food waiters and waitresses, street cleaners, and trash collectors.

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Igniting a Revolution of the Heart

by matthew s. Vogel

Dorothy Day, a founder of the Catholic Worker movement, was once approached by a young man struggling with a major life decision, seeking her advice. To paraphrase (these are my words, not hers), she responded with three succinct points: 1) stay close to the poor; 2) be accountable to your community; and 3) this sounds like an ego trip to me. I have seen first-hand how compelling these deceptively simple ideas are. Before graduate school, for several years in the last decade, I lived and worked in the New York Catholic Worker community.

This is a part of the larger Catholic Worker movement that Dorothy Day (1897-1980) and Peter Maurin (1877-1949) started in the midst of the Depression, and is a community trying to meet the basic needs of those living on the streets while struggling to confront those systems, structures, and attitudes that have cast them out. The New York Catholic Worker consists of two houses of hospitality in New York City and a farm a couple of hours north. When I lived there, roughly twenty-five to thirty people lived in each of the city houses at any given time. Some twenty to twenty-five of the residents in each

A political life focused strictly on voting sees its touchstone solely in terms of the lone citizen in the voting booth. However, in social justice communities we can support marginalized people to take back power that is rightfully theirs.

house had come to the Worker from the streets. Our life together centered around three practices, as it had since the 1930s: the daily practice of the Works of Mercy; regular worship and prayer; and involvement in broader work for justice and peace, whether organizing for the closure of the detention facilities in Guantánamo, or protesting the ongoing U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, or working for justice for immigrants

and their families. It was here that I first heard this story, and it is from out of my Catholic Worker experience that Dorothy Day's three points continue to challenge me today.

Staying Close to the Suffering

First, "stay close to the poor." It is no accident that this comes first – it was certainly a touchstone of Day's life. The question of proximity, of whom and what we place ourselves amidst and among, is absolutely central, for there is much truth in the saying that where one stands determines what one sees. And hears. And experiences. What we see, hear, and experience in turn largely shape how we understand and evaluate the world around us. And, together, all of these directly inform how and why we act in the political realm.

Staying close – *physically close* – to the poor and suffering, to those pushed to the margins of our society, is crucially important for Christians, just as it was for Jesus, who consistently and constantly *chose* to remain close to people who were poor and oppressed – for there we are sure to find God. Such a choice is a revolutionary act, and after making that leap, one soon sees that no particular political program or policy will ever bring justice in its fullness. Even with the most sympathetic government, people will still suffer, yet we know that God will still be choosing to stand with those who do, a recognition that there is work yet to be done. The struggle for justice, then, is not one that can be attended to only

once every four years, simply in the polling booth. Dorothy Day knew that it is truly a *personal struggle*, a daily fight we must each undertake *against* those forces that dehumanize and crush, and *for* dignity, justice, and peace, and that this struggle happens in the streets, schools, and stores, as well as the halls of power and privilege.

For those of us who are more privileged, for whatever reason, this is certainly not an easy process. At least it hasn't been for me. Daily at the Catholic Worker, in myriad ways I was confronted with my own prejudices and assumptions – about myself, about others, and about what we were do-

Daily at the catholic Worker, i was confronted with my own prejudices and assumptions – about myself, about others, and about what we were doing.

ing. But it was the building of relationships with the other residents and the many people who knocked on our door in need that, for me, inaugurated what Dorothy Day called a “revolution of the heart.” This revolution began in me nothing less than a new life, spiritually and politically, which gives me the faith and strength to continue the work. Though I have not always been sure where I would arrive, it has always been clear with whom I need to be traveling.

The lawyer and theologian William Stringfellow often described poverty, oppression, and marginalization as forces of death, forces that literally kill people. Physical proximity to the death, dehumanization, and destruction hanging over poor people and neighborhoods clarifies for us that a politics concerned solely and abstractly with agency budgets and party platforms, with government policies and programs, is itself impoverished and cannot but be blind to real and lasting justice.

Committing and Submitting

Second, “be accountable to your community.” This is a paraphrase of Dorothy Day’s advice to the young man, who was in a religious order, but it captures an important aspect of what she meant. There is much talk these days about community. At times there seems to be a “community” for everything. Everywhere I turn, I’m invited to become a part of – or I’m informed that I am already a member of – various communities, whether or not I have ever met anybody else in that community or ever will. Day’s second prescription invites me to something deeper, however: Before I can be accountable to

a community, I need to be sure the community is capable of demanding accountability from me, and that I am capable of hearing – and heeding – those demands.

The kind of deep commitment and involvement in struggles for justice that “stay close to the poor” demands can only meaningfully be sustained with other people. We cannot do this alone; we must build communities not only to sustain the struggle and us in it, but to be attentive to the signs of the times and the Holy Spirit, and to hold each other accountable to the demands of the Gospel and to those we join in the work at hand. We must seek out and build up communities marked by conscience, commitment, action, even resistance – creative, audacious communities that are excited to “build a new society within the shell of the old,” as the Catholic Worker says, adopting an old IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) slogan.

Elections, though, reinforce the idea that the political life is a solitary one: A political life focused strictly on voting sees its touchstone solely in terms of the solitary voter in the voting booth. However, in communities that sustain and grow movements for social justice and nourish and empower their members, we can support and act with those who have been pushed to the margins to take back and rebuild the power that is rightfully theirs, power to make demands and seek change, power that cannot go ignored. This work is not something to be undertaken every few years or only in connection with elections or political parties. Its demands are constant and constantly expanding, and require people personally engaged over time. Such communities, though, must be those to which we can commit – and *submit* – ourselves. Together we can discern the way forward, and together we can, and must, hold each other to our commitments. But, this can only happen if we let it, if we take responsibility and allow ourselves to be taken to task. In organizing against Guantánamo, we have deliberately worked not simply to bring people together for demonstrations, but to create a community of people throughout the country who are committed to closing down Guantánamo and to building relationships with each other as well as with those who are or have been locked away in that prison nightmare. These relationships not only push us to ask each other what we are doing to close Guantánamo, but run deeper, pressing us to unearth the roots of the injustices in Guantánamo – and to take them on as well.

Accountability operates on two crucial levels. These communities cannot survive, much less thrive, if their members are not accountable to one another, as Dorothy Day understood. With that, though, accountability to the people alongside whom we struggle, those who daily face the dehumanization of oppression, is irreplaceable. Without the former sense of accountability, a community

in staying close to the poor we learn that the least worst candidate is not nearly good enough. the various governmental programs still leave people suffering, no matter who gets elected.

lacks any real sense of obligation to draw and hold itself together. And without the latter sense, it binds itself too tightly, making itself its only reason for existence. Without both senses of accountability, such a community will suffer from a deadly hubris.

The Spiritual Base

This hubris goes directly to the heart of the third admonition: “sounds like an ego trip to me.” Dorothy Day knew we need perspective, especially on ourselves, to remain faithful and committed to these struggles. Humility is crucial, and the temptations leading us away from it are legion. Communities can be very helpful in this, connecting us to people different from ourselves, who see things from other vantage points but maintain the same, or similar, commitments of conscience. The habit of listening also becomes a critical responsibility. Opening oneself to the experience of another and being challenged by it not only makes the way for accountability but relativizes one’s own limited experience.

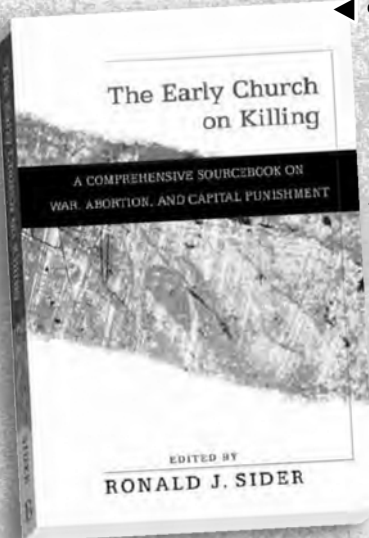
However, as Dorothy Day’s life shows, nothing can replace a deep spiritual base for reminding us of what is most important, and in giving the strength to continue to struggle, really struggle, for justice, day after day. If it all depends strictly on us, if everything depends on the work we do or decisions we make, we are bound to lose heart, because we will fail and we will lose. But that doesn’t have to be the end of the story if we live and work together, along with those who suffer, and stay grounded in a spirituality that is alert to the injustices that daily affect and shape people’s lives, including our own.

It can be tempting to think that we’ve done our political duty if we help elect the candidate we think is the right one, but these three short admonitions should give pause. They tell us that the customary

frame for our political responsibilities is too narrow, that our understanding of the origins and effects of political policies and programs is too shallow, and that our view of our own responsibilities is too limited. In staying close to the poor we learn that the least worst candidate is not nearly good enough. We discover that various political and governmental programs still leave people suffering, no matter who gets elected. Once we commit ourselves to struggling alongside those who are poor and suffering, then settling for such programs, even if they are the best we can hope to obtain from the current political climate, is simply not an option. This is one approach to a truly “preferential” option for the poor, as the ecclesial language has named it: Learn to see the questions of justice and politics surrounding us every day from the vantage point of those who are excluded, and build communities capable of struggling together for lasting justice, moving beyond the confining boundaries of political parties, government programs, and electoral politics. Injustice becomes a deeply moral and political matter *personally*, and we become impelled to take personal responsibility for the injustices we see. As injustice and inequality pile up upon the backs of the marginalized, can God be asking for anything less?

Matthew Vogel is in the final year of a joint M.A.R.-J.D. program with Yale Law School and intends after graduation to shape a law practice committed to social justice.

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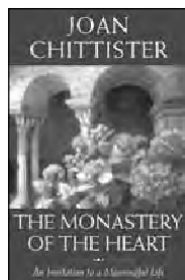
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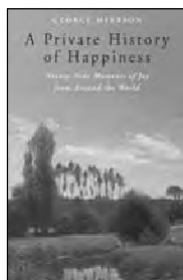
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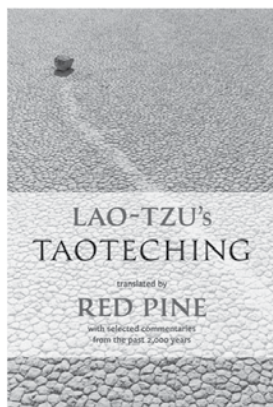
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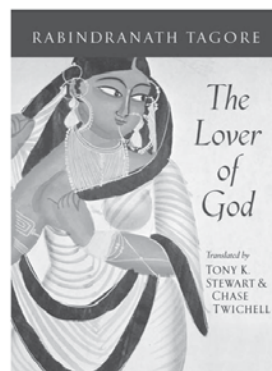
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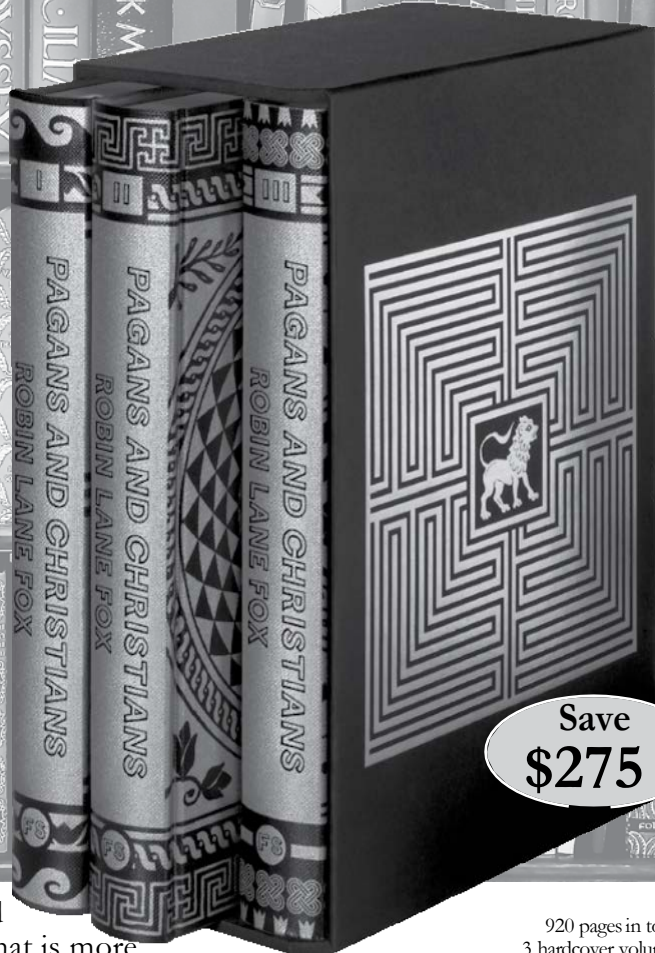
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From the Editor: Flag Day

by Ray Waddle



Like everyone else after 9/11, artist Michael Seri was traumatized. So he did a needful and, for him, natural thing. He turned to art to hammer out the vocabulary of heart-break. He painted an American flag.

The flag Seri created on plywood looked beaten up, stressed, a symbol traumatized. But Seri wasn't finished. On the flag-painted wood he poured glue and laid a pane of glass upon it. Then he smashed it. The raw effect captured his feelings.

But he noticed something. Though the splintered glass had broken away around the edges, the broken pane remained intact despite the direct hit of his hammer. The glue had held it together. And the flag was still there.

The artwork, "Mournings After (September 11th)," is the featured cover art of this Fall 2012 *Reflections*. The elements of the piece – flag, broken glass, resilient glue – all invite metaphorical meaning. Seri agrees.

"We lived in a glass house before 9/11, and now the glass house was shattered," says Seri, who is based in Danbury, CT.

"We were no longer the same after that morning, and we've been trying to find our way back ever since, despite a bad economy and political divisions. Because something still holds us together. The glue holding us together is our humanity. Rich or poor, Democrat or Republican, we're all trying to have a better life, striving for the same things, trying to be good to our fellow human beings, and giving back to the country."

Seri, a U.S. Army veteran and a wide-ranging arts organizer in New England, looks to art to hold together ambivalent or conflicting emotions in one place, one canvas, one artistic space, and bring people together to a zone of common feeling. Exhibiting his flag art, he finds people attracted to it for reasons they find hard to articulate.

"I think the American flag is apolitical – it points beyond politics," he says. "It's a symbol of how we persevere and carry on despite tragedy."

This *Reflections* issue examines the tissue of values, the glue that keeps the fragments of national identity and purpose from flying apart. Around the edges of political or spiritual life, shards are always breaking off – that's the prerogative and self-defeating fate of extremism. The rest of us are working somewhere in the pragmatic middle, despite today's eager (and lucrative) partisan impulses that promote national fragmentation and disdain the fund of decency we could together draw on to face our problems.

Reassessing the role of values in a democracy is the work of everyone, including those who labor and harvest in the vineyard of religious faith. That assessment has always meant a delicate dance between individualism, community spirit, humane learning, constitutional law, freethinking skepticism, and sacred wisdom.

There's reason to think the balance is out of whack today. The high-decibel theater of polemic suggests ideological purity matters more to more individuals now than religious belief does. Political passion – hatred of the opposing party, indifference to facts – threatens to overwhelm the old power of religious teaching to seek a transformed outlook, a forgiving spirit, a sense of proportion.

But counterweights to the prevailing exasperation still exist. The contributing writers to this *Reflections* issue on American values come at their subject from diverse angles – whether as preacher, middle-school teacher, environmentalist, pollster, chaplain, theologian, former candidate for office, filmmaker, historian, international relief aid executive, sociologist, law professor, divinity student, or poet. But they assume that the well of values is deep and available to individuals and institutions, still stirring creativity and courage. May it then be possible once more to defy conventional discouragement and seek new consensus under the battle-tested national flag.

FRONT COVER ARTWORK

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POETRY

Taha Muhammad Ali (1931-2011), born in Galilee, was a Palestinian poet and short story writer who ran a souvenir shop in Nazareth. Translated into English, his books include *Never Mind: Twenty Poems and a Story* (Ibis, 2000) and *So What: New & Selected Poems, 1971–2005* (Copper Canyon Press, 2006).

“Tea and Sleep” from *So What: New & Selected Poems, 1971–2005*. Copyright 2006 by Taha Muhammad Ali. Reprinted with permission of Copper Canyon Press.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, born in Yonkers, a veteran of World War II, has been a pioneering poet, publisher, and social critic since the 1950s. He is a co-founder of City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco and the author of *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New Directions, 1958) and *How to Paint Sunlight* (New Directions, 2002), among other books.

“A Buddha in the Woodpile” by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, from *These Are My Rivers: New and Selected Poems 1955-1993*. Copyright ©1993 by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

John Haines (1924-2011) was born in Norfolk, VA, but as a young man became a homesteader in Alaska and made nature a central theme of his poetry.

“The Last Election” and “Notes on the Capitalist Persuasion” from *For the Century’s End: Poems 1990-1999*. Copyright 2001 by John Haines. Reprinted with permission of University of Washington Press.

Clemens Starck is a poet who in his working life has been a carpenter, construction foreman, merchant seaman, ranch hand, and Wall Street reporter. His poetry includes *Journeyman’s Wages* (Story Line Press, 2005), *Studying Russian on Company Time* (Silverfish Review Press, 1999), and *Rembrandt, Chainsaw* (Tangram, 2008).

“Neighbors” from *Rembrandt, Chainsaw*. Copyright © 2008 by Clemens Starck. Reprinted by permission of the poet.

Connie Wanek, born in Madison, WI, is the author of *Hartley Field* (Holy Cow! Press, 2002) and *Bonfire* (New Rivers Press, 1997).

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