

>> This is the July 2015 issue containing the August Bible Study Lessons

Baptists ODAY

NEWS JOURNAL



4

GLENN HINSON REMEMBERS
THOMAS MERTON

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Lessons *from* 'The Field'

BY J.V. MCKINNEY 14



A conversation with
Bill Leonard about
Protestant privilege,
permanent transitions 36

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17

John D. Pierce
Executive Editor
editor@baptiststoday.org

Julie Steele
Chief Operations Officer
jsteele@baptiststoday.org

Jackie B. Riley
Managing Editor
jackie@baptiststoday.org

Tony W. Cartledge
Contributing Editor
cartledge@baptiststoday.org

Bruce T. Gourley
Online Editor/Contributing Writer
gourley@baptiststoday.org

David Cassidy
Church Resources Editor
david@thefaithlab.com

Vickie Frayne
Art Director

Jannie Lister
Customer Service Manager
jannie@baptiststoday.org

Kimberly L. Hovis
Marketing Associate
kim@baptiststoday.org

Lex Horton
Nurturing Faith Resources Manager
lex@nurturingfaith.net

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PERSPECTIVES

The continuing self-definition of
American evangelical Christianity **7**
By John Pierce

Does your church know its 'place'? **30**
By Stan Wilson

IN THE NEWS

New Pew study reveals significant
religious trends in U.S. **8**

Missions professor: Don't equate Christianity
with U.S. statistics **9**

Mercer dedicates Interfaith Prayer Garden
on Atlanta campus **10**

Israeli soldier's ham sandwich nearly
lands him in military prison **10**

John M. Templeton Jr. advanced
faith/science reconciliation **11**

Mormon-dominated Utah buys more candy
than any other state **11**

Baptist baptism of a baby sets off debate **12**
India's Christians concerned about
growing attacks on religious minorities **13**

Congregation recognized by news journal
for faithful support **35**

Nonreligious voters set sights on 2016 campaign **42**
Vatican looks to reform its media operations **42**

'Pro-choice' label preferred by half of Americans **43**

FEATURE

Media: At 90, Jimmy Carter reflects on 'a full life'
By John Pierce **15**

Religion and the American Presidents:
John Adams (1797-1801)
By Bruce Gourley **32**

**NURTURING FAITH
EXPERIENCES:
ADVENTURE AND
INSPIRATION**

34



COVER PHOTO by John Pierce. Baseball games on
Division Street in the '50s taught J.V. McKinney a lot about
unity, understanding and peace. **Page 14.**

Top right cover: Trappist monk Thomas Merton. Photo
courtesy RNS and used with permission of the Merton
Legacy Trust and the Merton Center at Bellarmine University.



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San Quentin chaplain reflects on
Charles Manson, capital punish-
ment and life on death row

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Quotation Remarks	6
Editorial	7
Classifieds	28
In the Know	28
Lighter Side	29
Reblog	40

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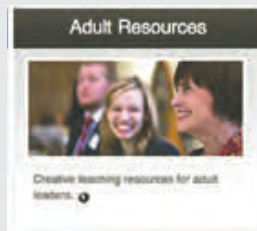
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Thomas Merton



Glenn Hinson recalls friendship with the influential contemplative

ATLANTA — “A precocious monk, poet, prophet and thinker who etched himself ineradicably on my life and thought” is how longtime Baptist professor Glenn Hinson described Thomas Merton to a May gathering at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology.

Hinson said he is “among an increasingly small number of people still living, apart from the monks at Gethsemani, who knew [Merton] personally and attended klatches in his hermitage.”

That friendship, he said, was “one of my happiest accidents.”

‘OUR BONUS’

In November 1960, Hinson took a group of church history students from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to the Abbey of Gethsemani near Bardstown, Ky., for the first time. Sometimes that story has been misrepresented.

“No, I didn’t take them to meet Thomas Merton, about whom I knew virtually nothing,” said Hinson. “I wanted to expose them to the Middle Ages; and they were, for Gethsemani was a very austere place in those days.”

Encountering Merton, said Hinson, “was our bonus.” Merton shared insightfully with the students about life in the monastery.

“His insight, humor and engaging manner disarmed us,” said Hinson.

Hinson recalled an embarrassing question from one Baptist student, basically asking Merton why a bright person like him would throw his life away in such a place. Hinson expected the student to be devoured by the sharp-minded monk.

Instead, Hinson recalled, Merton grinned and said, “I am here because I believe in prayer; that is my vocation.”

BEYOND BUSYNESS

“I had never met anyone who believed in prayer enough to think of it as a vocation,” said Hinson. Merton’s response caused Hinson to wrestle with that idea and how it contrasted

with Protestant-fueled busyness.

“All the way back to the seminary that day his statement kept echoing down the corridors of my mind alongside the Protestant rubric, ‘God has no hands but our hands, no feet but our feet, no voice but our voice,’” said Hinson. “And I kept thinking, ‘If our axiom is right — that everything depends on us — then our world is in a desperate condition.’”

Hinson pondered and prayed over Merton’s assumption “that the God of this vast universe is doing something we can’t control and thus need to pay attention to.”

A couple of weeks later Hinson received a note from Merton that he would be coming to Louisville and would like to pay a visit. Hinson asked Merton to speak to his class.

“I can’t speak to groups,” the monk wrote in response, “but if some of my friends happen to be around I can talk to them.”

So Hinson assembled the seminary faculty for a two-hour conversation among “friends” with Thomas Merton. Criticism from some colleagues about taking students to the

Catholic monastery ceased after that, he said.

Hinson’s friendship with “Tom” grew as he took groups to the monastery each semester — and Hinson was invited several times to take part in seminars in Merton’s hermitage.

INFLUENCE

Merton’s writings — for Hinson and others — were not well known until after his tragic death at age 53 in December 1968. On a trip to Bangkok, Merton was accidentally electrocuted.

“I must confess that I didn’t really get to know his writing and thinking until after his death,” said Hinson. “... What prompted me to read Merton’s writings, all then in print, were invitations just after his death to speak about him.”

Best known is Merton’s 1948 autobiographical *The Seven Storey Mountain*.

As Hinson read and spoke on Merton, such as lectures at a Baptist college in Wales in 1970, he began to incorporate some of Merton’s thinking into his own. He was attracted to Merton’s “progression from radical



Glenn Hinson signs a copy of his book *Baptist Spirituality: A Call for Renewed Attentiveness to God*, for Julie Pennington-Russell. The book, published by Nurturing Faith in collaboration with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, urges Baptists to recover the contemplative tradition in which they began and reflects some of Thomas Merton’s influence on Hinson.

world denial to critical world affirmation.”

And Hinson began to plug into the contemplative tradition as being vital for all followers of Jesus.

While Merton’s writings have gained great notoriety, Hinson warns that Merton “would never have thought he had spoken a final and definitive word on any subject.”

Merton, he added, “continually fed earlier thoughts through his fertile mind in an effort to come up with more mature perspectives.”

PROGRESSION

The evolution of Merton’s thinking reveals no attempt at creating something new, said Hinson. Rather, Merton was simply plugging into the contemplative tradition that had rescued him.

“In the worst of times he could cling to the contemplative tradition like a shipwrecked sailor would cling to whatever flotsam he could lay hold of,” said Hinson descriptively.

Merton was an “unconventional traditionalist,” said Hinson. He entered the monastery in December 1941 as “a badly scarred youth ... who wanted to clang the doors shut and never go back into the ‘world’ that had inflicted so much hurt and seemed so hopeless.”

That perspective was radically changed in 1958, at the corner of 4th and Walnut in Louisville — now marked by a plaque. Merton’s “epiphany” was an overwhelming realization that all those varied people moving about the city were connected and valued.

“It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness,” Hinson quoted from Merton’s recollection.

That revelation and fresh perspective brought relief and joy to the monk.

“It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God Himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race,” Merton wrote in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. “A member of the human race! To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake.”

While that experience was dramatic, Hinson said it was not as sudden as many assume. Merton’s writings showed a slower progression of thinking about the world he had left to its own.

Hinson noted a journal entry in 1948 in which Merton wrote: “Perhaps the things I resented about the world when I left it were

defects of my own that I had projected upon it.”

Merton’s new thinking, however sudden or protracted, said Hinson, is why his influence has continued to expand since his death.

“Were it not for this ‘second conversion,’” said Hinson, “we would not have gathered here to commemorate Merton’s 100th birthday — thinking about how we might extend his message to a wider circle of humankind.”

GREAT GIFT

Merton’s great gift to broader communities of faith is obvious, said Hinson.

It was “his determined effort to convince people caught up in active pursuits that they need contemplation, that contemplation could do much to enrich their lives and indeed might lead to transformation of the world.”

Hinson quoted from Merton’s *No Man Is an Island*: “Action is charity looking outward to other men [and women], and contemplation is charity drawn inward to its own divine source. Action is the stream, and contemplation is the spring. ... When action and contemplation dwell together, filling our whole life because we are moved in all things by the Spirit of God, then we are spiritually mature.”

Merton’s ecumenical and interfaith engagements were strengthened by his evolved understandings, said Hinson. So were his perspectives on critical social issues, particularly racism, violence and technology.

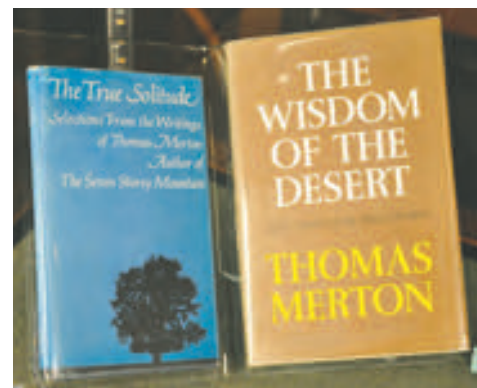
While Merton called the nonviolent civil rights movement “one of the most positive and successful expressions of Christian social action that has been seen anywhere in the 20th century,” Hinson warned of being too eager to presume Merton’s thinking on modern social issues.

One helpful, “prophetic insight” Merton brought to light, said Hinson, was his concern over “autonomous technology.” Technology itself was not the problem, according to Merton, but unlimited possibilities that it offered for destructive as well as constructive purposes.

With foresight, he warned of human beings becoming slaves to the machines they designed to serve them.

LEGACY

The legacy of Thomas Merton, said Hinson, is best honored by immersing ourselves “in the contemplative tradition that was Merton’s fallow-ground;” by “becoming contemplatives in a



Hinson’s presentation, sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s peer learning groups, coincided with an exhibit at Emory University’s Pitts Theology Library that marks the 100th anniversary of Thomas Merton’s birth. Among the items on display are photographs, books and a bronze statue of the late monk designed by David Kocka and acquired by the library.

world of action;” and by practicing the spiritual disciplines that lead to “attentiveness to God.”

Doing so outside a monastic setting is more difficult, Hinson confessed: “We live in a busy and distracting culture filled with activity.”

“Indeed, as Merton observed, we get caught up in activity for activity’s sake,” said Hinson. “That is why we need to draw another insight from the monastic model — the retreat.”

While the monastery is a lifetime retreat, those of us living active lives must seek and be satisfied with short-term retreats, said Hinson.

“Solitude allows us to get away from the constant bombardment we experience in our daily lives,” he said. “Silence sensitizes and enables us to be better listeners, to be more attuned to others and to God beyond in our midst.”

He urged daily (such as a walk) and weekly retreats as well as longer ones at least annually and then extended sabbaticals.

Finally, said Hinson, Merton offers a lesson for our churches.

“I would propose that, despite their differences from monasteries, our churches should set as their goal to become ‘schools of love,’” said Hinson, borrowing Bernard of Clairvaux’s description of Cistercian monasteries.

“I love God. Love carries me all around. I don’t want to do anything but love...,” wrote Merton in a 1948 journal entry. “Love is kicking me all around like a gong, I tell you; love is the only thing that makes it possible for me to continue to tick.”

Noting the Apostle Paul’s call to the struggling church at Corinth, recorded in 1 Corinthians 13, Hinson asked in conclusion: “Wouldn’t that be truer to the intention of Jesus than that our churches be businesses marketing religion?” **BT**



quotation ” remarks

“There aren’t a lot of lepers to cleanse in 21st-century America, but there are people who have been excluded from our communities, and pushed to the margins of society. There aren’t a lot of demons to cast out in these modern times, but there are people who struggle with depression and anxiety who need to be loved and understood. I haven’t raised any dead people lately, but I have heard people talk about having hope again for the first time in years. And every time we take the time to listen or put an arm around someone’s shoulder or offer to say a prayer, we are doing the work of healing.”

—Jim Somerville, pastor of First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va. (*EthicsDaily.com*)

“We’re nearing the point in youth sports where we need to stop the ‘elite’ and ‘select’ madness because we’re raising a generation with too much self-esteem. They can’t handle failure because they’ve been conditioned to believe they’re too good to fail.”

—ESPN senior writer Tim Keown

“With nearly 1 million likes on Facebook and a quarter of a million followers on Twitter, Franklin Graham can inexpensively influence and incite his followers without the infrastructure his father required to persuade the masses.”

—Scott Thumma, professor of sociology and religion at Hartford Institute for Religion Research (RNS)

“Many people view a church like the ice cream parlor down the road. They think, ‘When I’m in the mood, I can go.’ Church leaders can take it as good news: People haven’t ruled them out. But they have to be a little unsettled at how little people are thinking about this.”

—Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research (RNS)

“I see a new generation of younger clergy who haven’t spent their careers dealing with 50 years of decline. They are fresh, they have good ideas, and I think congregations need to hire them and listen to them.”

—Tom Ehrlich, in his final column for Religion News Service

“The reality is that same-sex marriage and religious dissent can coexist in this country, but it will require hard work and a lot of good will from all sides.”

—Robin Fretwell Wilson, professor of law at the University of Illinois (USA Today)

“Believe me, if I run and I win, I will be the greatest representative of the Christians they’ve had in a long time.”

—Real estate magnate and perennial presidential candidate Donald Trump in a Christian Broadcasting Network interview (Christianity Today)

“The ‘sacred hour’ of 11 a.m. is no longer the worship time for a majority of churches. Though we don’t have definitive information on the origin of the 11 a.m. worship time, it appears to be related to an agrarian society.”

—LifeWay Christian Resources President Thom S. Rainer, noting that the most popular Sunday morning worship times now start between 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. (Christian Post)

“Neither a person’s religion nor the potential need to accommodate a religious practice should be a basis for denying a prospective employee a job.”

—General Counsel Holly Hollman of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, praising a June 1 Supreme Court ruling that Abercrombie & Fitch violated the civil rights of a Muslim woman not hired because the hijab she wears violates the store’s “look policy” (BJC)

“In my own development as a leader, I regret that it took me longer than I wish it had taken to learn about the contagious and positive motivational energy of laughter and playfulness. Our work is serious, but serious is vastly different from somber.”

—Guy Sayles, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., now a consultant with the Center for Healthy Churches (*EthicsDaily.com*)

“Everybody gains from equality — even those who didn’t think they wanted it.”

—Fintan O’Toole, literary editor and columnist of The Irish Times

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The continuing self-definition of American evangelical Christianity

American Christianity suffers from an ongoing self-definition of discrimination fueled by alarmism. It is the result of every cultural shift related to human rights being met with a common message, regardless of the particular issue.

That message, in summary, is: “This is in opposition to God’s design and, if not stopped, will destroy America.”

It’s not enough for many high-profile evangelical Christian leaders to express discomfort with and opposition to social change. “Chicken Little” predictions are employed as well.

For example, granting legal rights to same-sex couples, said one Christian author, “will serve as the death knell to the America we’ve known and loved.”

A fear-mongering presidential candidate warned, “We are now threatening the foundation of religious liberty by criminalizing Christianity ...”

Those are just two of several quotes offered recently by Southern Baptist editor Gerald Harris, of *The Christian Index*, about the “fundamental harm” such equality would bring upon our nation.

Evangelist Franklin Graham took to Facebook to battle against same-sex marriage that he described as “a wicked, wicked thing.” Then came his doomsday warning that “as a society we cannot survive if we turn our back on God’s standards and His definition of marriage.”

While various opinions are expected and understandable, it should be easy to see both the familiar pattern here and the disproportionate angst.

Gay and lesbian persons are a minority somewhere in the single-digit range. For gay and lesbian couples, many already living in committed relationships, to have the same legal opportunities and protections as couples of opposite gender, whether one agrees in principle or not, is probably survivable.

The exaggerated claims of destruction and persecution are amazingly irresponsible.

Can we survive all the cultural changes of the past but not a very small minority of American citizens having licenses that allow

them tax, property and other rights that married couples have long enjoyed? Really?

History can be our teacher — or should be — when facing social change that threatens one’s comfort and biblical conclusions.

In the slavery debate, Albert Taylor Bledsoe, publisher of *Southern Review*, denounced the abolitionists’ “willful and violent perversions of the sacred text” and their eagerness to “consider themselves above the scriptures.”

He warned of the falling dominoes that would result from abolishing slavery: It won’t stop there! (Sound familiar?)

Those same abolitionists, Bledsoe claimed, would seek emancipation for women “from subjection to the law which God has imposed on them.”

“There is no deformity of human character from which we turn with deeper loathing than from a woman forgetful of her nature, and clamorous for the vocation and rights of men,” he wrote.

And Bledsoe warned of the “legitimate consequences” that would come from using (or misusing, in his opinion) the Bible in support of such drastic social change.

Here’s that familiar pattern that continues to be played out today:

One: I don’t like social change. (Fill in the blank with the social issue at hand.)

Two: God agrees with me. (So those who disagree with me are really in disagreement with God.)



Three: The Bible clearly supports my position. (To hold any other position is a clear denial of biblical authority in favor of modern culture.)

Four: If this happens, then our beloved society will be destroyed forever. (Again, fill in the blank.)

A recent quote by comedian Dan Mintz, shared through social media, reveals both his comedic talent and the tragic self-definition of American evangelicalism.

“I’m not usually religious, but one time I was on a plane that was going through some really frightening and violent turbulence,” said Mintz. “So, I immediately began taking rights away from gay people.”

Discrimination — fueled by alarmism — has defined a large portion of American Christianity. It is a well-earned self-definition.

In his May 28 editorial, anticipating the Supreme Court decision, Harris lamented that providing equal benefits to same-sex couples “will silence the voice of the church in America.”

Oh, that it would! At least those loud voices that continually ramp up unfounded fear.

The voice of the church in America is not being silenced by any government action. It is simply a less relevant voice due to growing religious diversity and the self-definition of American Christians as intolerant, fearful, alarmist and more concerned about their own rights than those of others.

Hysteria and false claims of persecution are not helpful in advancing the mission of the church. Neither is consistently landing on the wrong side of justice for all. **BT**

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Shifting landscape

New Pew study reveals significant religious trends in U.S.

The Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing,” so reported the Pew Research Center in mid-May following an extensive new survey of 35,000 Americans.

These changes, Pew reported, are taking place across the religious landscape, affecting all regions of the country and many demographic groups. And while the drop in Christian affiliation is more significant among younger adults, it is occurring among Americans of all ages.

This shifting is widespread. The same trends were found among whites, blacks and Latinos — and among college-educated adults as well as those who completed high school only. And, yes, among women — often the backbones of religious communities — as well as men.

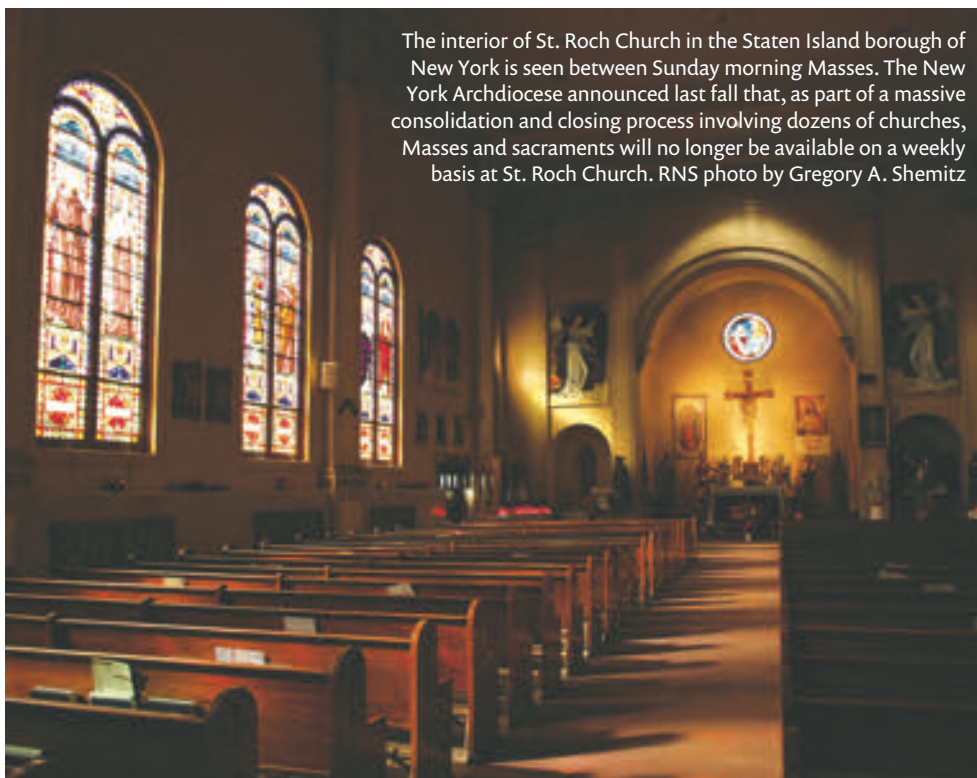
CHRISTIAN MAJORITY

The report noted, however, that the U.S. remains home to more Christians than any other country. And a significant majority — about seven in 10 persons — continues to identify with some branch of the Christian faith.

Yet, the new survey found that the percentage of those adults who describe themselves as Christians has dropped by nearly eight percentage points in just seven years — from 78.4 percent in a similar extensive Pew Research survey in 2007 to 70.6 percent in 2014.

Meanwhile, over that time frame, the percentage of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated jumped more than six points, from 16.1 percent to 22.8 percent, the survey summary stated. This category includes those who identified themselves as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” — now often known as “nones.”

The share of Americans who identify with non-Christian faiths rose by 1.2 percentage points, the report said, from 4.7 percent in 2007 to 5.9 percent in 2014. While starting from a low base, the greater percentage growth was among Muslims and Hindus.



The interior of St. Roch Church in the Staten Island borough of New York is seen between Sunday morning Masses. The New York Archdiocese announced last fall that, as part of a massive consolidation and closing process involving dozens of churches, Masses and sacraments will no longer be available on a weekly basis at St. Roch Church. RNS photo by Gregory A. Shemitz

While mainline Protestants and Catholics have each shrunk by approximately three percentage points since 2007, evangelical Protestants declined as well, yet more slowly — falling about one percentage point.

OTHER FINDINGS

Additional findings from this first reporting on the 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study included:

- **Christians probably have lost ground not only in their relative share of the U.S. population but also in absolute numbers.**

Between 2007 and 2014, the overall size of the U.S. adult population grew by about 18 million people, to nearly 245 million. But the share of adults who identify as Christians fell from a little more than 78 percent to just under 71 percent, or approximately 173 million Americans, a net decline of about 5 million.

- **American Christians — like the U.S. population as a whole — are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse.**

Non-Hispanic whites now account for smaller shares of evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and Catholics than they did seven years earlier, while Hispanics have grown as a share of all three religious groups.

- **Religious intermarriage appears to be on the rise.**

Among Americans who have gotten married since 2010, nearly four-in-10 (39 percent) report that they are in religiously mixed marriages, compared with 19 percent among those who got married before 1960.

- **While many U.S. religious groups are aging, the unaffiliated are getting younger, on average, over time.**

The median age of unaffiliated adults (“nones”) has dropped to 36, down from 38 in 2007 and far lower than the general (adult) population’s median age of 46. By contrast, the median age of mainline Protestant adults in the new survey is 52 (up from 50 in 2007), and the median age of Catholic adults is 49 (up from 45 seven years earlier).

- **Switching religion is a common occurrence in the United States.**

If all Protestants were treated as a single religious group, then fully 34 percent of American adults currently have a religious identity different from the one in which they were raised. This is up six points since 2007, when 28 percent of adults identified with a religion different from their childhood faith. If switching among the three Protestant traditions (e.g., from mainline Protestantism to evangelicalism, or from evangelicalism to a historically black Protestant denomination) is added to the total, then the share of Americans who currently have a different religion than they did in childhood rises to 42 percent.

- **Christianity — and especially Catholicism — has been losing more adherents through religious switching than it has been gaining.**

More than 85 percent of American adults were raised Christian, but nearly a quarter of them no longer identify with Christianity. Former Christians represent 19.2 percent of U.S. adults overall. Mainline and historically black Protestant traditions have lost more members than they have gained through religious switching, but within Christianity the greatest net losses, by far, have been experienced by Catholics. Nearly one-third of American adults (31.7 percent) say they were raised Catholic. Among that group, fully 41 percent no longer identify with Catholicism.

- **The evangelical Protestant tradition is the only major Christian group in the survey that has gained more members than it has lost through religious switching.**

About 10 percent of U.S. adults now identify with evangelical Protestantism after having been raised in another tradition, which more than offsets the roughly 8 percent who were raised as evangelicals but left for another religious tradition or who no longer identify with any organized faith.

- **The Christian share of the population is declining and the religiously unaffiliated share is growing in all four major geographic regions of the country.**

Religious “nones” now constitute 19 percent of the adult population in the South (up from 13 percent in 2007), 22 percent of the population in the Midwest (up from 16 percent), 25 percent of the population in the Northeast (up from 16 percent) and 28 percent of the population in the West (up from 21 percent). In the West, the religiously unaffiliated are more numerous than Catholics

Don't equate Christianity with U.S. statistics, says missions professor

CAMPBELLSVILLE, Ky. —

“Christianity is dying.” To some, that may be inferred by the results of the recent, comprehensive U.S. Religious Landscape Study by Pew Research.

But not so fast, said Twyla K. Hernández, assistant professor of Christian Missions in Campbellsville University's School of Theology.

The drop by eight percentage points of the Christian population in the U.S. over the past seven years, she noted, has caused “many North American religious gurus and pundits ... to lament, justify, and wring their collective hands about the disturbing results.”

While this latest research is an insightful and accurate depiction of what is happening on the religious front in the U.S. — and helpful information for church leaders to consider — Hernández offers a reminder:

“We must all remember that Christianity is a global religion and, since the first century, has never been limited to a single country.”

She points to Philip Jenkins' book, *The Next Christendom*, to note that Christianity is returning to its roots.

“While Christianity is on the decline in the United States, it is flourishing in

other parts of the world,” said Hernández.

Pointing to various reports that show the growth of Christianity in Latin America, China, Africa, and even Muslim-dominated countries, Hernández said U.S. Christians can benefit from a more-global perspective.

“We must acknowledge that we no longer have a corner of the market of Christianity, not that we ever did,” she said.

Hernández said “the typical Christian” will continue to look different than what we have been used to seeing in many U.S. churches.

Globally, according to David Livermore's 2013 book *Serving with Eyes Wide Open*, she noted, “The vast majority of Christians are young, poor, theologically conservative, female and people of color.”

Global Christianity has some helpful lessons to teach Christians in the U.S. in a time of change, said Hernández.

“As American Christians, we must also awaken to the fact that we have much to learn from our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world,” said Hernández. “In their part of the globe, Christianity equals neither influence nor affluence.”

Hernández also called for American Christians to confront their waning cultural influence with compassion — and faithfulness to the Christian mission.

“Jesus looked with compassion on those who did not know him,” said Hernández. “He saved his theological arguments for those who were ‘religious’ — and, at the same time, he prayed for more workers to carry the Gospel to all who are weary.” **BT**



Twyla Hernández

(23 percent), evangelicals (22 percent) and every other religious group.

- **Whites continue to be more likely than both blacks and Hispanics to identify as religiously unaffiliated.**

Among whites, 24 percent say they have no religion, compared with 20 percent of Hispanics and 18 percent of blacks. But the religiously unaffiliated have grown (and Christians have declined) as a share of the population within all three of these racial and ethnic groups.

TRACKING RELIGION

Religious identity or affiliation is not asked in the U.S. census, and self-reporting by religious organizations is often limited or even suspect. The Religious Landscape Studies are more extensive and comprehensive than the many other surveys regarding religion in America.

It is conducted by Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan “fact tank” subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts. Lilly Endowment Inc. helped fund this major research. **BT**



Photo by John Pierce

Mercer dedicates Interfaith Prayer Garden on Atlanta campus

ATTLANTA — Mercer University, in partnership with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia, dedicated a new interfaith prayer garden May 14 on the Cecil B. Day Graduate and Professional Campus in Atlanta.

The site includes a labyrinth and outdoor classroom and is intended to be “a garden, a spiritual oasis, a place where friendship that crosses every ethnicity, culture and faith tradition could grow,” said Charlotte Connah, co-chair of the Baptist-Muslim Committee of the CBF/GA Interfaith Task Force. The task force is a partner organization of the university’s McAfee School of Theology.

“This campus is wondrously rich in diversity, and this committee fully believes that our young people are our future’s best shot at building a better world, one of bridges rather than walls, one of dialogue rather than reaction, one of friendship and not division,” said Connah, who envisioned the garden, during the ceremony.

A fundraising campaign, initiated through CBF/GA, received contributions from approximately 40 donors representing multiple religious faiths. The lead gift was made by Aziz Dhanani, a Muslim community leader and CEO of Premier Petroleum Inc.

The garden was dedicated in memory

of his parents, Zehrakhanu and Allauddin Dhanani.

“Aziz, you and fellow Muslims have taken a big step by investing in this historically Baptist institution, and we hope you will find this to be only the beginning of a relationship that will cross religious and cultural boundaries and make all of us better and more tolerant people,” said University President Bill Underwood.

Landscaper Andrew Powell designed and planted the garden, with guidance from John Rhodes of the Labyrinth Society. Students, faculty, staff and others participated in the placement of stones and slate chips. **BT**

Israeli soldier’s ham sandwich nearly lands him in military prison

By Michele Chabin
Religion News Service

JERUSALEM — A U.S.-born Israeli soldier who brought a ham sandwich to his army base was initially sentenced to 11 days in a military prison before a media frenzy prompted the Israel Defense Forces to drop all disciplinary measures.

In a rare apology, IDF spokesman Brig. Gen. Motti Almoz wrote on Facebook: “We were wrong. The IDF will continue to keep kosher on the one hand, but will not probe

a soldier’s sandwich on the other. There are tensions in Israeli society and there are different stances and opinions. There is room for everyone in the IDF.”

In May, the soldier, an unnamed new immigrant from Boston, reportedly brought a ham sandwich prepared by his grandmother to his base. He was initially sentenced to military prison, a sentence later reduced to being confined to his base, and ultimately to no punishment at all.

Israel’s military bases are supposed to adhere to kosher dietary laws that ban pork

as well as shellfish. They also require a strict separation of meat and dairy products in keeping with Jewish dietary laws.

Pork products are available for sale in Israel, and many immigrants from the former Soviet Union buy them regularly.

The brouhaha was the latest tug of war between very religious Jews in Israeli society, who would like the public to adhere to a much stricter standard of Jewish law, and secular and moderately religious Jews, who accuse the ultra-Orthodox Jewish leadership and politicians of religious coercion. **BT**

Philanthropist John M. Templeton Jr., dies at 75

By Cathy Lynn Grossman
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — John M. Templeton Jr., a pediatric surgeon who left medicine to carry on his father's passion for pursuing "new spiritual information" through the sciences as president and chairman of the Templeton Foundation, has died. He was 75.

Known as "Jack," the younger Templeton retired as director of the trauma program at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia in 1995 to take the foundation reins and became chairman after his father's death in 2008.

Sir John Templeton Sr. created the Templeton Foundation in 1987 with the fortune he built as the pioneering founder of the Templeton Fund investments in 1954. The foundation provides support for science and medical research and for related research on the "big questions" of human purpose.

His often-expressed goal was to "reconcile the worlds of science and religion."

The foundation is also known for awarding the annual "Templeton Prize" — always calculated to be a higher monetary award than the Nobel Prize — for "exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension." It has gone to physicists, mathematicians, philosophers and religious leaders such as Billy Graham and Mother Teresa.

The 2015 prize was awarded to Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, serving people with intellectual disabilities, at a ceremony in London held May 18. News of Templeton's May 16 death at his home in Bryn Mawr, Pa., was delayed until after the ceremony.

Templeton, an evangelical Christian, not only inherited his father's interest in revealing the truth of faith in a scientific world; he inherited the controversies that came with that goal.

Critics alleged that the foundation's funding led grant-hungry scientists away from pure research to investigating the impact of spirituality and religion. Supporters, in turn, said the foundation did not steer their research or cook the books on findings.

For example, the foundation publicly reported that a study it funded to investigate the value of people praying for strangers' health showed that such prayer failed to help patients and may even have had a bad effect on people who were aware of the prayers.

Along with grants in physics, cosmology, genetics and other pure sciences, the foundation has backed studies and projects to foster character and virtue development, genius, gratitude and religious liberty.



It also publishes books, including two by Templeton (*Thrift and Generosity: The Joy of Giving* and an autobiography, *John M. Templeton Jr.: Physician, Philanthropist, Seeker*), and an award-winning literary science magazine, *Nautilus*.

According to the foundation, John Marks Templeton Jr. was born on Feb. 19, 1940, in New York City. He received a BA in history from Yale University in 1962 and a medical degree from Harvard Medical School in 1968.

He began his medical training in pediatric surgery at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia in 1973 and returned there in 1977 after serving as a physician in the Navy for two years.

He and his wife, Josephine, a pediatric anesthesiologist, developed a specialty in dealing with conjoined twins. Templeton was director of the trauma program and a professor of pediatric surgery at the University of Pennsylvania before leaving to join the foundation.

He was a fellow of the American College of Surgeons, served as vice chairman of the American Trauma Society and was a president of its Pennsylvania division. He served on various boards, including the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, Foreign Policy Research Institute, American Trauma Society, National Bible Association and Templeton Growth Fund Ltd. **BT**

SWEET INDULGENCE: Utah buys more candy than any other state

By Kathy Stephenson
Salt Lake Tribune

SALT LAKE CITY (RNS) — While many Utahns have the willpower to avoid alcohol, coffee and tobacco, they just can't stay away from the candy.

The state buys confections — candy, mints and gum — at the highest rate in the nation, according to sales data from The Hershey Co.

Residents of the Beehive State are especially fond of Hershey's licorice Twizzlers, said Lisha Bassett, sales manager for Hershey's Salt Lake City District, which includes all of Utah and parts of Idaho, Nevada and Wyoming.

The red-colored variety is the favorite, she said, but chocolate also is "incredibly popular in our market, which is unique."

Confections are a multibillion-dollar U.S.

industry, generating \$17 billion to \$18 billion in sales each year, said Bob Goodpaster, Hershey's chief global knowledge officer.

Nationally, about \$15,000 worth of candy is sold for every \$1 million of total grocery sales, he said.

In Utah, however, \$23,000 worth of candy is sold for every \$1 million in total grocery sales. That's the country's highest percentage, basically making Utah the nation's sweet-tooth capital.

The Hershey Pennsylvania District — where the national candy company is headquartered — runs neck and neck with Utah, but still takes second place, said Goodpaster. The figures were calculated using 12-month sales data from June 2013 to June 2014.

Glenn Christensen, a marketing professor at Brigham Young University's Marriott School of Management, has a theory about what

drives Utah's candy sales.

More than 60 percent of Utahns are Mormons, who typically abstain from alcohol, coffee and tobacco. With those vices frowned upon, candy is an acceptable treat, he said. Sweets are ubiquitous at family gatherings and LDS events.

"We don't drink alcohol, we don't smoke, we avoid coffee — but we certainly do sugar," Christensen said. "It's the only allowed indulgence."

Utah also has a large population of children — candy's biggest fans. In 2013, 31 percent of the state's residents were under 18, while the national average was 23 percent.

Hershey has been taking a closer look at its sales statistics and using them as a guide to "help us determine what to put on the shelf and what to promote" in various parts of the country, Goodpaster said. **BT**

A disqualifying deed?

Baptist baptism of baby sets off debate

The sprinkling-style baptism of a Dayton, Ohio, infant — a scene heartwarming and commonplace for Catholics and mainline Protestants — is touching off accusations of doctrinal heresy in the evangelical world.

In April, an influential American Baptist Churches USA pastor performed the rite, which most Baptists believe is reserved for Christians who are able to make a mature confession of faith.

Although there are dozens of Baptist denominations in the U.S., the news made instant waves among those who know and understand Baptist teachings.

Before long, a Southern Baptist seminary president compared the notion of Baptists baptizing infants to vegetarians eating steak.

But while denominations squabble about doctrine, the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, routinely immerses children age 5 and younger.

A task force report based on 2012 figures said that age group was the only one seeing growth in numbers of baptisms, although a top researcher in the denomination said that's no longer the case.

In light of new survey data showing a decline in the number of self-professing Christians, some have wondered whether denominational heads are urging younger baptisms as a way to provide a membership boost.

Others discounted that theory.

"There's pressure to go downward in age because parents are kind of convinced that their kids are understanding it earlier, and it's easier to baptize kids," said Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research.

"I don't think it is a preservationist

instinct," he said. "It's more of a precociousness instinct."

The meaning of infant baptism varies slightly among denominations that practice it.

In the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church encouraged infant baptism after fears arose that babies not baptized might die without the chance of salvation. Today, the sacrament is still understood to wipe away original sin inherited from Adam and Eve.

Baptists, on the other hand, believe the practice is rooted in Jesus' own baptism story, said Yolanda Smith, a Yale Divinity School research scholar who specializes in Baptist theology and the black church.

In the biblical account, Jesus was baptized as an adult, and his immersion symbolizes dying to sin and being reborn — a foreshadowing of his death and resurrection, Smith said. For Baptists, making that choice also symbolizes full integration into the church.

Pastor Rodney Kennedy of First Baptist Church of Dayton, who baptized the 7-month-old boy, said the fact that his church accepts members who were baptized as infants without immersing them as adults influenced his decision. He said the backlash doesn't surprise him.

"The Christian community needs to have a conversation about baptism," said Kennedy, a seminary professor who has served terms as president of the Dayton Area Baptist Association. "Our nation is becoming progressively pagan, and we're going to sit here and argue about when we need to baptize people? ... I am no longer interested whether confession of faith comes before or after baptism."

He said he performed the baptism with the support of his church's executive council and faced no repercussions from his denomination and no loss of membership.

David Dark, author of *The Sacredness of Questioning Everything* and assistant professor

of religion and the arts at Belmont University in Nashville, said people's beliefs have always been fluid, but that fact is getting more attention.

"I think that there is the growing belief that, even if we don't share every approach to religion with people of other traditions or faiths, everyone is in the same relationship with God the way that we're in the same relationship with oxygen," he said. "Increasingly, we receive the wisdom whatever the source without policing the boundaries of traditions."

But Jason Allen, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, who wrote a popular blog post on the subject, was adamant: "Baptizing infants is not Baptist," Allen said. "It's a disqualifier."

"If you are baptizing someone, regardless of age — 4 or 44 — and they don't have a sufficient understanding of the gospel, or they do understand and their heart has not been pierced by it, it's an injustice to that person. They'll be inclined to think they have a right standing before God."

A recent Southern Baptist Convention task force found a two-decade decline in baptism and issued a report last year encouraging parents and church leaders to "make the claims of Christ clear to the Next Generation."

Alvin Reid, evangelism professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., who served on that task force, said the idea was to focus on young people from middle school through college.

It's troubling to hear about 3-year-olds being baptized, Reid said, but he said he was not aware of any Southern Baptist church that receives people into membership who have been baptized as infants. Most Southern Baptist churches require a believer's baptism.

"We have to understand that people don't come to church because we put out a sign and put on a pageant. We have to be missional and living the gospel." **BT**

"I don't think it is a preservationist instinct; it's more of a precociousness instinct."

—ED STETZER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LIFEWAY RESEARCH

India's Christians concerned about growing attacks on religious minorities

NEW DELHI — Each day, children on their way to Mount Carmel School pass through gates under the watch of armed security guards, and now city police officers stop there on government orders after a nearby Catholic convent and school were broken into.

Vandals stole money, tampered with security cameras and ransacked the principal's office in February. The crime itself was relatively minor, but it rippled through other Christian schools.

It was the sixth attack this year in an ongoing series targeting Christian communities and schools across India. It was also the turning point for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to address the growing safety concerns of India's minority Christian community.

Modi immediately asked the Delhi police commissioner to investigate the attacks, and he addressed a Christian community, saying, "Government will not allow any religious group, belonging to the majority or the minority, to incite hatred against others overtly or covertly. Mine will be a government that gives equal respect to all religions."

But even after Modi's address, the attacks continued. Recently, the annual report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom cited an "increase of harassment and violence" among India's Christian community.

The attacks have come against a background of fear, triggered by Hindus in Modi's party, that Christians are increasing their efforts to proselytize — especially in schools.

What is not widely understood outside of India is that these Christian schools are largely Hindu. Of Mount Carmel's 2,500 students, for example, 75 percent are Hindu, 17 percent are Christian and fewer than 2 percent are Muslim. There are some Buddhist students as well.

The emphasis at Mount Carmel is not on religion since most of the students and teachers are not Christians. This is common practice in India, and Christian schools have been known for their emphasis on quality education since the days of colonization.

Gauri Viswanathan, a professor in the humanities at Columbia University, has studied the ongoing discourse on conversion in India for decades. She said proselytizing in Christian schools was not as overt as perhaps imagined



Women raise their hands and voices during a rally held in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, after a nun was raped in Kolkata, West Bengal. Religion News Service photo by Arielle Dreher

even back in the 19th century.

"Literacy through a Christian lens meant reading and learning English through Milton or other Christian scholars," she said. "It was subliminal."

While the current Bharatiya Janata Party government voices strong support for minority groups, it draws the line at conversion. Tarun Vijay, an elected member of the upper house of Parliament in India and a member of the BJP, said he was one of the first to stand up for equal rights for Christians, citing Jesus as one of the best examples of love. But proselytizing in Christian schools concerns Vijay.

Conversion, he said, is a remnant of colonial rule. "We firmly believe that converting Hindus to Islam or Christianity is a political movement that started with the British," Vijay said.

John Thatamanil, a theology and world religions professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, said that post-independence India has not had issues with proselytizing in Christian schools.

At Mount Carmel, Principal Vijay Williams does not hesitate to explain his personal affinity to Christianity to visitors and students alike, even if he does not encourage sermonizing.

"Students are not forced to convert or even

take a Bible class," he said. "God converts them — we don't convert them."

Williams has reservations about Modi and the current government despite its response to the break-in. He cited secularism, defined in Articles 21 and 25 of the Indian Constitution, as a basis for Modi's condemnation of violence against minorities.

"It is not a question of you standing with us," Williams said. "It is a question of you standing with the Constitution."

According to Columbia's Viswanathan, waves of violence against Christians are not a new phenomenon.

"This is a deep-seated fear," she said. "Even the East India Company would not allow missionaries into India until 1813."

Viswanathan understands the recent violence as the religious right's way of pushing its agenda forward. Social issues and attitudes are changing in India, as is the desire for a return to traditional Indian ideals.

At just 2.3 to 2.5 percent of the Indian population, Christians do not pose a threat to the large Hindu majority in the country, and Thatamanil would like to see it stay that way.

"I don't want a future where Christians and Hindus are pitted against each other," he said. **BT**

By J.V. McKinney

Lessons from ‘The Field’

My brother Bub and I grew up in a small East Arkansas Delta town in the '40s and '50s. We lived in a modest rental house in the last block of South Division Street, just before it passed under the railroad tracks and entered the African-American community.

I was 11 in the spring of '53, a time when kids could “just be” and parents did not micro-manage. Bub and I and three white friends from that tiny block loved baseball, but had no place to play. Just beyond the tracks, across Division, was a weed-covered field. My dad asked the owners to mow it for us.

After school, the five of us grabbed our gloves, bats and a ball and headed down to the field, pulling a red wagon filled with backyard dirt for a pitcher's mound. The freshly mown grass smelled wonderful, and there was room to run and throw and to hit as hard as we could without breaking a window.

It was pretty much heaven.

Soon, some black kids about our age drifted in and watched from the sidelines. After a time, the oldest one came over and asked if they could join us.

“Of course not,” I said. “This is our field, and besides, you don't have any gloves or bats.” Mainly, you just didn't do things like that back then in the Delta.

When we returned the next afternoon, our pitcher's mound had been kicked to smithereens and the black kids were sitting quietly on the sideline. We immediately went home, refilled the wagon, returned, rebuilt the mound, and played ball the rest of the day.

The next afternoon, our mound was flattened again. This destroy-and-rebuild malarkey went on for more than a week. But something just didn't feel right.

One afternoon I walked over to the kid who had asked about playing. I told him my name and he told me his. When I handed him my glove he smiled and said, “Thanks.”

We shared equipment, and players doubled from five to ten. We could hit to all fields, instead of being out if we hit to right. Ten kids had a blast that afternoon until dark, and the phrase “our field” forever took on new meaning.

After school the next day, the pitcher's mound was undisturbed, and someone had chalked baselines from home to first and third. Burlap bags filled with sawdust had replaced our flimsy cardboard bases. The Field had become a very special place for some lucky kids from both sides of the tracks.

Four years later in Little Rock, grown-ups politicked to fears, activated troops, closed schools, embarrassed the state forever, and took years to accomplish far less than a few kids did in little more than a week at The Field.

On blazing hot summer days the whole crew would come to our house and play a creative version of “small ball” in the shade of the huge walnut tree in our backyard. Over a three-year period, we wore the grass down to bare dirt. The ball bounced true like on a gym floor. Mom furnished Kool-Aid for everyone.

It did not last forever. By junior high we had found other interests at different schools and drifted apart. The grass regrew in our backyard, and I played organized baseball through four years of college and almost 20 years of adult league softball. But I never again played a single game with a black teammate — never.

In 1969, dangerous racial tensions were crackling in our small Delta town. Mom and Dad still lived in the old house on Division, and my brother and I, both married and living in other cities, were very concerned for them. Back home for a brief visit that summer, we were sitting on the front porch when a huge African-American man approached us.

He was one of our friends from The Field.

The three of us talked, laughed and shared stories about beautiful times together years before. Eventually, the conversation turned to the ugly things happening in the town we loved. As our friend rose to leave, he quietly said, “Don't worry about your parents. They will be safe.”

The Field has become one of the driving narratives of my life. The small rental house is gone, but The Field still exists, both literally in dirt and grass and powerfully in metaphor.

I can still return to my hometown, walk to the center of The Field, and “just be.”

I can remember the sweet smell of fresh-cut grass, the surprise of sawdust bags and chalked baselines, the way black and white hands looked together “climbing the bat” for first pick when choosing sides, and the reverence our new friends displayed the first time they held a Jackie Robinson bat.

I will never forget the deep emotions stirred when our friend assured us of our parents' safety.

My life has been filled with tremendous blessings. Without question, one was being part of a small group of kids, just being kids, years ago in the East Arkansas Delta, playing ball past sundown — on the same side of Division.

It was pretty much heaven. **BT**

—J.V. McKinney is retired from a 38-year career with YMCA and “loves to use the outstanding *Nurturing Faith* materials from Baptists Today to teach Sunday school at Second Baptist, Little Rock.”

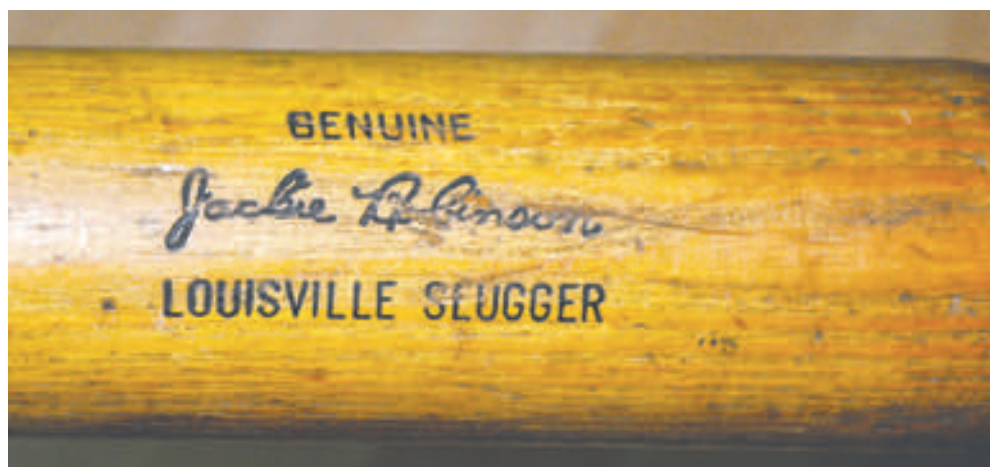


Photo by John Pierce

By John Pierce

At 90, Jimmy Carter reflects on ‘a full life’

As an eighth-grade member of Future Farmers of America, Jimmy Carter honed his woodworking skills in the school’s shop. For his final project that academic year, the youngster created a scale model of a stately edifice hundreds of miles and a world away from rural Southwest Georgia: the White House.

“There was an intimate and almost constant interrelationship between what we were learning in school and what we were doing on the farm,” writes Carter in *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*, to be released July 7 by Simon & Schuster.

Self-sufficiency was the way of life in the farming community of Archery, near Plains, Ga., where Carter’s father, Earl, was farmer, blacksmith, cobbler, forester, carpenter and more. Likewise, young Jimmy dutifully learned the varied ways of rural success.

“I enjoyed a sense of accomplishment and self-satisfaction, knowing that I had done all that was humanly possible, even as a boy, and had left behind me the visible proof of my work,” he wrote, adding: “The pleasure has not faded as the years have passed...”

Carter recalled helping milk eight cows that produced dairy products for the family, with the excess milk, buttermilk, butter and cream becoming sources of revenue. Milk, flavored with either chocolate or vanilla, would be poured into small bottles and sold in area stores as well.

A separator provided desirable pure cream, with the remaining milk — called “blue john” — given to the hogs. That “skim milk,” Carter noted, is all that he and his wife Rosalynn drink now.

Of his father, he said: “Whenever possible I followed him around, and wanted to emulate everything he did.”

Even as a 5-year-old, Carter was entrepreneurial. He’d pull peanuts in the afternoon and bring them home in his wagon. After washing them and soaking them in saltwater overnight, he’d boil them in a large pot the next morning

and put them in paper bags to be sold in Plains.

At a nickel a bag he could make a dollar a day, the same as a skilled farm laborer. Wise savings and investments led Carter to own rental houses that he maintained himself — until leaving home at age 16.

From his mother Lillian, however, he learned different lessons: “Even when I was a child, my mother was known within our community for her refusal to accept any restraints on her treatment of black citizens as equal.”

Except for one railroad worker, the Carters were the only white family in Archery, a rural community of about 200. So Jimmy’s neighbors and playmates were all African Americans.

He had a particularly close relationship with Rachel Clark, an African-American woman with whom he’d work the fields. He recalled the times “she would take me fishing with her in the nearby creeks, and during those excursions she gave me gentle lectures about wildlife and my proper relationship with God and with other people.”

Carter reflects on his experiences related to race — including “the unearned deference” his black friends showed him as a 14-year-old. The profound impact of that experience led Carter to pen “The Pasture Gate,” that is included among other poetry in the book. It concluded, “A silent line was drawn between friend and friend, race and race.”

With equal emotion and detail, Carter recalls his college years, his marriage to hometown-girl Rosalynn Smith, and a Navy career that took him to battleships, submarines and near-death experiences.

“I realized how fragile was my existence, and how fallible were even the most dedicated and experienced seamen.”

His two-hour interview with Captain Hyman Rickover, who oversaw a secret nuclear

submarine program, revealed the wide knowledge Carter had obtained through reading and experience. He was asked about Shakespeare, Hemingway, Faulkner, classical music and more — all with which Carter was acquainted.

“Rickover leaned forward and asked, ‘What’s your favorite opera?’ I blurted out, ‘Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*,’ and he asked, ‘Which movement do you prefer?’ Fortunately, I was able to name the ending, known as ‘Liebestod,’ or ‘love death.’ I was thankful that my roommate and I had known this music and played it often at Annapolis.”

Rickover got Carter to confess that even at 59th in a class of 820 at the Naval Academy, he had not always done his very best. Answering that question honestly, Carter believes, is what gained Rickover’s approval.

Often Carter’s life is told as simply a farmer who became president. But much happened between his early roots and the presidency. And much has happened since he and Rosalynn left the White House in defeat in 1981.

Still sharp of mind and wit, Carter reflects on the many and varied experiences throughout his nine decades of earthly experience — including the challenges he has addressed politically and privately to improve the quality of life for people around the globe.

In what could be called a reflective biography, Carter’s Baptist-bred passion for justice, equality and peace seems stronger than ever. And, not surprising, he dedicates this latest in a long string of books to his wife Rosalynn — “who has kept my life full of love.”

“The life we have now is the best of all,” he concludes. “We have an expanding and harmonious family, a rich life in our church and the Plains community, and a diversity of projects at The Carter Center that is adventurous and exciting.” **BT**



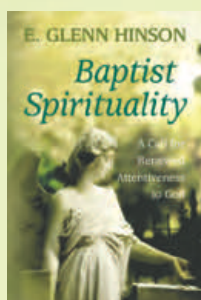
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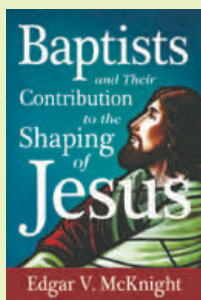


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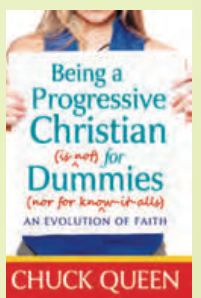


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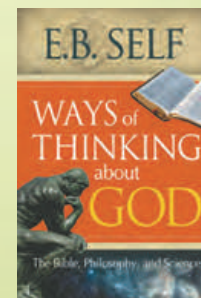


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August lessons in this issue

The Trouble with Kings: They're Human, Too

Aug. 2, 2015

You're the Man
2 Samuel 11:26-12:15a

Aug. 9, 2015

Paying the Price
2 Samuel 18:1-33

Aug. 16, 2015

Redeeming a Shaky Start
1 Kings 2:1-12, 3:3-14

Aug. 23, 2015

Prayers for Now and Later
1 Kings 8:1-53

Serious Church: Lessons from the Book of James

Aug. 30, 2015

Real Religion
James 1:17-27



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Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

2 Samuel 11:26-12:15a

Aug. 2, 2015

You're the Man

Do you like surprises? Do you like stories? Most of us do: Humans are hard-wired to appreciate a well-told tale that keeps us in suspense and has a discernible resolution.

The familiar text we find in 2 Samuel 12 contains both a story and a surprise, but the intended recipient didn't like either one. You wouldn't have, either.

David's deeds (11:26-27)

For readers familiar with the life of David, the sordid tale of his dalliance with Bathsheba is all too familiar. The story would be bad enough if it were limited to adultery, but David went beyond taking another man's wife: To cover his sin, he took the man's life.

The man's name was Uriah, who was apparently of Hittite ancestry, but had proven himself to be among the most valiant of David's soldiers, and was on duty in Ammon. 🛡️ After learning that Bathsheba was pregnant, David recalled Uriah from the battlefield on the pretense of seeking news, hoping the faithful warrior would sleep with his wife and become the presumed father of her child.

🛡️ **The thirty** – In 2 Samuel 23 we find a list of David's three most renowned soldiers and some of their exploits, along with a further list of "the thirty" who had also achieved acclaim. The last name on the list of "the thirty" – perhaps to emphasize his presence and the betrayal that led to his death – is Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 24:39).

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



Uriah refused, however, on the grounds that he had taken the customary vow to remain celibate while at war: With his fellow soldiers living in a war camp, he asked, "Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?" Uriah swore that he would not do such a thing (11:8-11).

The following day David succeeded in getting Uriah drunk, but still failed to persuade his loyal soldier to sleep with his wife. In a desperate bid to cover his illicit transgression, David sent Uriah back to the front with sealed orders for Joab, his military chief, to engineer Uriah's death in battle by having other soldiers abandon him.

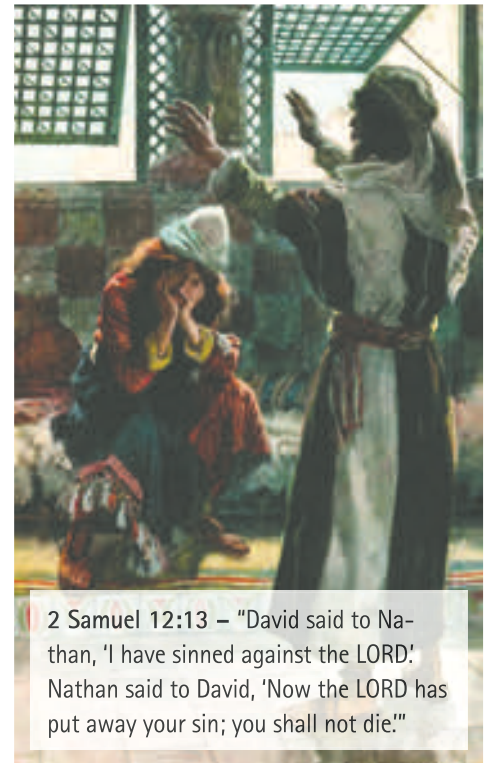
Joab followed David's orders, though in a less obvious way than David had suggested, and it cost additional Israelite lives. He sent an apologetic report to the king, but David counseled Joab not to worry: "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours one and now another ..." (11:25).

Those words would come back to haunt the king. The NRSV's "Do not let this matter trouble you" translates the Hebrew idiom "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes." Just two verses later, after recounting David's marriage to Uriah's widow and the subsequent birth of their son, the narrator tells us "but the thing David had done displeased the LORD" (11:27). The narrator has used the same idiom: what David had done "was evil in the eyes of Yahweh."

Humans have an innate ability to rationalize our actions and make them seem right in our own eyes. The judgment that matters, however, is "in the eyes of the LORD."

Nathan's parable (12:1-6)

The last phrase of 11:27 serves as an artful transition to the next chapter, for it is grammatically connected to the



2 Samuel 12:13 – "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die.'"

Nathan Rebukes David, James Tissot

opening words of chapter 12: "... and Yahweh sent Nathan to David."

This may lead us to believe that Nathan had quickly confronted David for his sin, but months had passed. David had married Uriah's widow and the child conceived of their extramarital union had been born – an apparently healthy baby boy. David may have thought his plan had worked and his sin had gone unmarked.

Not so.

The prophet Nathan had first entered the biblical story in 2 Samuel 7, where he had communicated God's promise to establish David's house as a dynasty that would rule over Israel forever. We would presume that Nathan had been supportive of David, and thus would have easy access to the king. God sent him back to David with a story designed to puncture his illusions of invulnerability with a very sharp point. 🛡️

The story contrasts two men. One is rich, powerful, and arrogant. The other is poor, helpless, and humble. The rich man has more livestock than he can count,

📖 **Trial by story** – Scholars describe the story Nathan told David as a “juridical parable.” Similar parables, told to convey a judgment, can be found in 2 Sam. 14:1-20 (the wise woman of Tekoa), 1 Kgs. 20:39-40 (a judgment on King Ahab), and Isa. 5:1-7 (the song of the vineyard).

while the poor man has just one ewe lamb, which he loves like a child. When the wealthy man is obligated to entertain a passing traveler, he steals the poor man’s only lamb, slaughters it, and feeds it to his guest (vv. 2-4).

The characters are so clearly drawn and the rich man’s behavior so contemptible that David responded with great anger and an oath, declaring the wealthy man to be worthy of punishment (v. 5). 📖 English translations attribute to David the words “he deserves to die!” It is possible, however, that the expression – literally, “he is a son of death” – may have been intended as a negative epithet, not unlike a popular English idiom beginning with “son of ...” 📖

Reading “son of death” as an invective sidesteps the difficult problem of David’s handing down two different sentences: one of death and the other a financial penalty. While calling the rich man a “son of death,” David declares in v. 6 that he must restore the stolen lamb four times over. According to the law, the standard penalty for sheep stealing was fourfold restitution (Exod. 22:1). 📖

Nathan’s point (12:7-15)

Nathan responded to David’s heated judgment with a presumably pointed finger and the words: “*You are the man!*” The story had been about David all along, and the crestfallen king’s own words of judgment now rested on his own head. Nathan’s accusation, pronounced as a message direct from God, uses a striking combination of first person and second person verbs to remind David of the shocking nature of his sin: “*I anointed you ... I rescued you ... I gave you ... I would have added as much more*” (12:7-8). But, *you* despised

the word of the Lord ... *you* have struck down Uriah ... *you* have taken his wife ... *you* have killed him ... (12:9).

A third person verb marks the transition from accusation to judgment: “the sword shall never depart from your house” (12:10), then the narrator shifts back to first person verbs to show it is Yahweh who will wield the punishing blade: “*I will raise up trouble ... I will take your wives ... and give them to your neighbor*” (12:11). David’s sin was committed in secret, but his punishment would be a matter of public record (12:12).

The reference to David’s anointing as king probably points to Samuel’s prophetic anointing in 1 Sam. 16:13 rather than the two official ceremonies described in 2 Sam. 2:4 and 5:3. The point is that *Yahweh*, not just popular acclaim, was behind David’s rise to the throne.

Nathan’s insistence that David had “despised the word of the Lord” (12:9) probably refers to the law rather than any direct instructions. David had violated the commandments against coveting, adultery, theft, and murder. Sufficient time had passed for the child conceived in David’s sin to be born with no apparent trouble, but if David thought his crime would be forgotten, he was mistaken.

God had not forgotten, and Nathan’s fiery charges targeted David’s evil in no uncertain terms as he twice accused David of murder: “you have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword,” and “(you) have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites” (12:9). “Sword” in this case is metaphorical, for Uriah was actually killed by Ammonite archers (11:24), but at David’s orders.

David had told Joab not to worry, for “the sword devours now one and now another” (11:25), but Nathan turns the metaphor to David with a prediction

that “the sword shall never depart from your house” (12:10) and that God “will raise up trouble against you from within your own house” (v. 11a). Tragic and bitter events will unfold in ensuing chapters, culminating in public humiliation for the king, the private rape of David’s daughter, the public abuse of his secondary wives, and the deaths of three sons.

Nathan’s cutting words had their intended effect, though David’s response is downplayed to keep the spotlight on Nathan. Was David downtrodden? Did he fall to his knees? Did he weep? We don’t know. The narrator tells us only that David said “I have sinned against the Lord” (12:13a).

Remarkably, although he had predicted painful punishments to come, the prophet declared on Yahweh’s behalf that “I have put away your sin; you shall not die” (12:13b). 📖 The law prescribed capital punishment for both adultery (Lev. 20:10, Deut. 22:22) and for murder (Lev. 24:17), but David would not die. 📖

David found grace, but it was not cheap grace. He had “utterly scorned the LORD,” and his sin could not be easily dismissed. Rather than falling upon David, however, the death penalty David deserved was transferred to the innocent child of his adultery (12:14-15), who would die in David’s behalf – a sad story told in the remainder of the chapter.

David’s actions in the Bathsheba-Uriah affair remind us of how one sin may often lead to greater sin and greater sorrow. David was neither the first nor the last to have done something wrong, and then compounded the problem while trying to cover up the error.

Sin, as Paul reminds us, ultimately leads to death (Rom. 6:23). It may lead to physical death, though not always the death of the sinner. Sin may also bring the death of relationships, the death of good health, the death of a career, or the death of hopes and dreams.

Can you think of ways in which you or your loved ones have experienced some kind of death as a result of sin?

Isn’t it better to foster *life*? **BT**

Bible Study

2 Samuel 18:1-33

with Tony W. Cartledge

Aug. 9, 2015

Paying the Price

There was a day when my late friend Johnny Brown persuaded me to ride around the pasture on a mule of his, “to keep him from getting too wild.” I agreed before realizing that Johnny had no saddle or bridle. He picked up a piece of baling twine and twisted it through the mule’s mouth, then ran a length of the twine along each side of the mule’s head and said “Here you go!”

And here I went – wherever the mule wanted to go. He paid no attention to the thin bridle, no matter how hard I pulled, and soon he had chewed through the twine, leaving me with nothing to do but hold onto his mane and try to stay aboard.

The mule broke for the barn at a gallop, which wouldn’t have been so bad except for a steel cable across the top of the gate, draped with an insecticide-soaked rag designed to treat the cows when they walked beneath it. The cable caught me right in the chest as the mule ran into the feedlot, and soon I was flat on my back, seeing shooting stars in broad daylight.

Agreeing to ride that mule was not one of my better decisions, but it was not as bad as Absalom’s choice to ride his royal mule into a most precarious place.

A one-sided war (vv. 1-8)

Our text recalls the sad story of how David’s son Absalom orchestrated a coup against his father, proclaimed himself king in Jerusalem, and died while trying to eliminate the former regime. 📖

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon



David Mourning the Death of Absalom, Gustave Doré

2 Samuel 18:33b –
“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

The conflict between David and his son had been a long time coming, and it culminated with a disaffected and power-hungry Absalom recruiting an army of supporters in an effort to topple his father from the throne. [For more, see “The Hardest Question” online.]

Absalom “stole the hearts of the men of Israel,” the narrator claims, and his rebellion garnered so much support that when he advanced on Jerusalem, David fled the city rather than subject it to war. Accompanied by his most ardent supporters and loyal soldiers, David traveled eastward, crossed the Jordan River, and set up camp in the city of Mahanaim, a day’s journey beyond.

Unsatisfied with his occupation of Jerusalem, Absalom armed his new recruits and went after David, hoping to remove his father from the political equation. As Absalom’s army advanced, David changed his course from retreat to attack, dividing his elite soldiers into three groups led by veteran commanders.

David volunteered to lead the army, but his men insisted that he stay behind, since the king’s safety was not only

paramount, but also the entire point of the battle: If David died, the rebellion would have succeeded (18:1-4). Relegated to supporting his soldiers from behind, David reviewed the troops as they left Mahanaim, loudly ordering his commanders to “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom” (18:5). 📖

The account of the actual combat is so abbreviated that it seems like no battle at all. Absalom’s army of conscripts and recruits were numerous, but green. David’s forces were smaller but composed of seasoned professionals who had fought many battles for David. The king’s veteran soldiers flanked Absalom’s army on three sides and forced them into the dense forests of Ephraim, where the exultant narrator claims the forest “devoured” more victims than the soldiers (18:6-8). 📖

An ill-considered death (vv. 9-15)

Absalom had made the poor decision to accompany his army into battle while riding on his mule, standard transportation for kings in those days. Perhaps

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the mule became spooked: As it ran beneath an oak tree, Absalom's head got caught in the low-hanging branches while the mule kept running, leaving the would-be king swaying between heaven and earth (18:9). 📖

When one of David's soldiers spotted Absalom's helpless state, he reported it to his commander Joab, who was incensed that the man had kept Absalom alive (18:10-13) and left him with a difficult decision. 📖 It would have been easy to capture the usurper and bring him to David unharmed, but Joab feared that if he did, David would do nothing more than put him under house arrest and Absalom would be free to continue making trouble.

Joab was a man of action who was guided by strategy rather than emotion. He was not bound to the royal scion by the same cords of love that clouded David's judgment, and so Joab found it relatively easy to disobey his king for the sake of his country. He decided to kill Absalom (18:14-15). 📖

A broken-hearted man (vv. 16-33)

After seeing to Absalom's death, Joab restrained the troops, ordering horns to be sounded so that his men would cease pursuing their fellow Israelites. With Absalom dead, there was no need to continue killing those who had been caught up in his rebellion.

Joab likewise ordered his men to bury Absalom in a great pit in the forest so that David would not see what remained of his son. Strategically, he delayed the messengers who would deliver news of the victory, so that the deed was done before David ever knew (18:16-17).

As the reader wonders how David will take the news, the narrator builds suspense by spinning a tale of two messengers. Ahimaaz, a son of the high priest Zadok, had been chosen by David to carry secret messages before, and he wanted the job. Knowing how distraught David would be, Joab would not allow Ahimaaz to go, fearing that David might hurt him when he heard the news. 📖

Joab ordered Ahimaaz to stand aside, and chose instead to send an unnamed Cushite with the message. The Cushite, probably a mercenary, was an African man in a Hebrew world. Not knowing the danger, perhaps, he ran to tell David the news.

Ahimaaz remained persistent, however, and Joab finally agreed to let him go, believing the Cushite had such a head start that things would have settled down by the time Ahimaaz got there. Ahimaaz took a short cut, however, and managed to get there before the Cushite. He told David that the victory had been won, but when he saw that David was concerned only with Absalom, he pretended that he didn't know what happened and left it for the guileless Cushite to break the news that Absalom was dead.

David responded with the purest example of abject mourning to be found in scripture. Despite the victory won by his brave soldiers against his rebellious offspring, all David could do was to cry out "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (18:33).

Not-so-easy choices

What are we to do with this difficult text? What can we learn from this remarkable soap opera, from these "Days of Their Lives"? Perhaps we can gain something from examining the choices its characters made.

Absalom's choices were consistently selfish and foolish. He had everything going for him. He was the best-looking man in the kingdom, and talented, too. But his head got too big for his shoulders. Absalom's decision to rebel against his father's kingdom led to his own early death.

David's choices leading up to the battle were made on the basis of what it takes to survive with the least possible

conflict. Unfortunately, that isn't always possible. When conflict is present, it needs to be dealt with openly before it reaches the boiling point.

Joab was a pragmatic man. He chose to do what he believed should be done for the larger good, and to use whatever means were at his disposal to accomplish his goals. It was not the first time he had killed someone that David wanted alive, and it would not be the last. Joab's violence overshadows all of his other choices.

The unnamed warrior chose to stay out of trouble. When he saw a difficult situation in which he could not win, he chose to avoid it. That soldier's ability to recognize trouble ahead of time and the wisdom he demonstrated in avoiding it is worth remembering.

Ahimaaz wanted to be in the center of things. He was filled with excitement and wanted to tell the good news, but his fervor was greater than his courage, and he told only part of the story.

One thing all these decisions have in common is that God does not appear to be involved in any of them. In fact, God is wholly absent from this chapter except for two references, when Ahimaaz and the Cushite used the standard formula of praising God for the good news when they report it to the king. There is no evidence that God was consulted in the making of any of these decisions.

There are many areas of life in which God expects us to use our own minds and make good decisions based on the information we have and the love in our hearts, but always within the context of Jesus' teaching. When we make our decisions without any reference to God's will for our lives, we are asking for trouble.

All of us face hard choices in life, and sometimes the lines between good and evil, wisdom and folly, prudence and impudence are not at all clear. In those times, especially, talking things out with God and seeking divine direction are essential. There's no guarantee we will always choose rightly, but a prayerful approach certainly increases our chances. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 Kings 2:1-12, 3:3-14

Aug. 16, 2015

Redeeming a Shaky Start

Old things pass away; new things come. Times change. All of us know this. No one remains president or peon, king or commoner forever. We live, we die, and a new generation takes our place.

We acknowledge change, and some of us even embrace it, but that doesn't make it any easier. Even when we're the ones who've been chanting "Out with the old and in with the new," we know that change can be hard.

Today's text involves the first peaceful transition of power in Israel's new monarchy, but it was far less peaceful than one might expect. 🇺

A dying father's advice? (2:1-4)

The text begins with a dying David giving solemn advice and ignoble orders to his son Solomon, who had been named as his successor, though his older brother Adonijah had also sought the throne. 🇺

The reader imagines that David sensed death's call and summoned Solomon to impart fatherly advice before shuffling off the scene. The first few sentences of this advice sound more like the Deuteronomistic narrator than David, and should probably be seen as an editorial embellishment. 🇺

David's opening counsel that Solomon should "Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways ..." (2:2-3) reflects the theology that pervades most of the Old Testament. After Moses' death, God instructed Joshua to "be strong and courageous"

1 Kings 3:9 –
"Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

no less than four times in Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18; and Joshua in turn promised the Israelites that they would win the land if they were strong and courageous (Josh. 1:25).

Success, according to the theology underlying the books of Joshua-2 Kings, comes from obedience to God and keeping the statutes, commandments, ordinances, and testimonies "as written in the law of Moses" (2:3) – all typical Deuteronomistic terminology. The advice is what one would expect from a man who followed God closely and wanted his son to do the same.

The promise of v. 4 refers back to 2 Samuel 7, where Yahweh had promised David that his descendants would rule Israel in an unbroken dynastic succession. The promise is more conditional here, however: Solomon's heirs would remain on the throne only so long as they "take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul" (v. 4). This is yet another reflection of the beliefs (compare Deut. 6:1-6) that guided the writing of Joshua-2 Kings.

Whether David spoke these words or

not, they bear a sharp contrast to the less inspirational instructions that followed.

An old king's revenge (2:5-12)

David's further directives served to settle some old accounts with people who had offended or opposed him while also removing them as threats to Solomon's rule. The first target was David's nephew Joab, who had long served as his military chief (2:5-6). Not only had David's crusty commander supported Adonijah over Solomon, but during his earlier service to David he had twice murdered persons whom David wanted to honor (Abner, 2 Samuel 2; and Amasa, 2 Samuel 20). Solomon's disposition of Joab is recorded in 2:28-35: Even though Joab fled to the supposed sanctuary of the altar and pled for his life, Solomon ordered Benaiah to strike him down.

David charged Solomon to honor persons who had aided David when he fled Jerusalem during Absalom's revolt (2:7, cf. 2 Sam 17:27-29; 19:31-40), but to punish Shimei of Bahurim, who had cursed David on that same occasion (2:8-9, cf. 2 Sam. 19:23). David had

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



promised that he would not harm the vocal critic – but he charged Solomon to “not hold him guiltless” and “bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.” The account of Shimei’s demise is found in 2:36-46.

David’s last words thus reflect the hard and bloody road he had traveled since his youth, when he had been known as “a man after God’s own heart.” David’s death and burial are reported in 2:10-11, after which Solomon found a way to rid himself of his rival brother, Adonijah (2:13-25). [For more, see “The Hardest Question” online.]

At the end of a pathway marked by blood and tears, the narrator could say “So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon” (2:12, 46b). 📖

A new king’s wish (3:3-14)

To cement his rule, Solomon entered an alliance with Egypt by marrying the Pharaoh’s daughter (3:1). The narrator adds that people “were sacrificing on the high places” at that time, because “no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD” (3:2).

These verses foreshadow Solomon’s positive contribution of overseeing construction of the temple, but also something for which the writer would later condemn him: He married many other foreign wives to seal political alliances, but also built temples for their gods and reportedly worshiped them himself (1 Kgs. 11:1-13). 📖

When most of us think of Solomon, we probably call to mind his wealth and his wisdom, both of which became legendary. How Solomon came to possess such wisdom is the subject of 3:3-14, a charming story of innocent piety that is a welcome change from the previous accounts of violent power.

The story begins with the glowing remark that “Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David.” Before the temple was built, we are told, Solomon offered sacrifices to God on the high places (3:3), including a primary site at Gibeon where he reportedly “used to offer a thousand

burnt offerings on that altar” (3:4).

Such an effort would have been a multi-day event, and Solomon would have slept on location. It was not unusual, in the ancient Near East, for persons to seek a word from God by sleeping in a sacred space and hoping that God would speak in a dream. Old Testament characters such as Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, the Pharaoh, Samuel, Daniel, and others heard from God in dreams, though most did not actively seek them. 📖 The text does not indicate whether Solomon was seeking a vision, but he got one anyway. While at Gibeon, God appeared to him and offered to grant Solomon one wish: anything he asked (3:5).

Can you imagine such an offer? If you could ask for just one thing, what would it be?

Solomon’s response was a model of humility. He thanked God for having loved his father David and having made him king in David’s place. When it came to ruling such a great people, though, Solomon professed to being like a little child who didn’t know when to go out or come in (3:6-8). Thus, he prayed, “Give to your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil ...” (3:9).

The expression translated as “understanding mind” (NRSV) or “discerning mind” (NET) is literally “a listening heart.” Hebrew thought assigned mental faculties – especially those related to decision-making – to the heart. A “listening heart” is one that would be open to God’s guidance in making wise decisions. 📖

God was pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom rather than the expected request of long life, riches, or victory over enemies. As a reward, God promised to give Solomon riches and honor in addition to the wisdom for which he asked. Victory over enemies was also implied in the promise that

“no other king shall compare with you” (3:10-13).

God also pledged to give Solomon long life – but only “if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked” (3:14). Readers both past and present know that David did not always walk in God’s ways, so we are not surprised that Solomon would later turn from the path. For the present, however, Solomon had redeemed the bloody beginnings of his rule by seeking a better way, proving himself to be a wise and capable ruler.

What can we take from this multi-layered story in which both David and Solomon appear as alternately upstanding and lowdown?

The narrator remembers David’s earlier love for Yahweh and puts into his mouth a charge for Solomon to follow the path of obedience to God – but also to take vengeance on his enemies.

Solomon does David’s dirty work and forcefully consolidates his rule, but he also leads the people in worship through offering sacrifices, and prays humbly for the wisdom needed to rule God’s people.

The narrator doesn’t want us to miss the fact that Israel’s two greatest kings had potential for both good and bad. Both did great things when they utilized a listening heart – when they sought to follow God’s way and put the people’s interests above their own. Yet, they both were subject to human frailties: to selfishness, to pettiness, to self-aggrandizement at the expense of other people.

Isn’t this the way it is in our own lives? We all are capable of good or evil, of humility or pride, of obedience or rebellion. We all have the ability to love unselfishly or to turn our desires inward.

Choices lie before us every day. Making good choices does not make us immune from mistakes; making bad choices does not take us hopelessly off the path. Life with God is an ongoing affair in which faithfulness and failure are always before us.

What guides your choices? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 Kings 8:1-53

Aug. 23, 2015

Prayers for Now and Later

Have you ever heard anyone use a prayer as an opportunity to preach? Sometimes it happens when someone who wanted to preach at a particular occasion is asked to pray instead, or when someone with a favorite agenda makes a point of bringing it up whenever the opportunity to pray arises.

The shift often goes like this:

“... and Lord, may we always remember to do so and so,” or “may you bless us as we do such and such,” with “so and so” or “such and such” representing sins to avoid, behaviors to practice, or positions the pray-er hopes the congregation will support.

We sometimes say that a preacher has stopped preaching and gone to meddling. This is a case when someone stops praying and has gone to preaching. Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8 is a prime example of a sermonic supplication. 📖

A celebration to remember (vv. 1-11)

The text is centered around the dedication of the temple, the construction of which is detailed in chapters 5-7. 📖 After overseeing seven years of construction involving more than 180,000 workers, it’s not surprising that Solomon would host a huge service of dedication as the temple began operations. 📖 To emphasize continuity with the past, leaders from every tribe and ancestral family were invited to join a triumphal entrance procession and witness the final act that would establish the temple as the “house of the LORD” – the installation of the Ark of the Covenant in the sacred room



1 Kings 8:27 –
“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!”

at the back of the temple, the Holy of Holies.

When David had first brought the Ark into Jerusalem, he did so with great care, many sacrifices, and joyful celebration (2 Sam. 6:12-19). Solomon followed suit, but with a grander sweep. As the priests and Levites brought the Ark and other sacred items from the old tent to the new temple, “King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel” were “sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered” (v. 5).

The priests carefully positioned the Ark in the holy place, and as they emerged, “a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (vv. 10-11). 📖

A promise kept (vv. 12-21)

The appearance of the thick cloud was understood as a visible mark of heavenly acceptance: a sign that God

had indeed chosen to dwell in the “house of the LORD” and imbue the holy place with the divine presence, or glory. 📖

Solomon himself pronounced an invocation, one fraught with theological overtones. Verses 12-13 are poetic in form, and some scholars consider them to be an excerpt from a temple hymn. The “thick darkness” in which God was said to dwell could refer to the heavy cloud, or to the Holy of Holies, where the Ark was closed off by a heavy curtain and thus kept in darkness.

The word translated as “dwell” in v. 12 is *shaken*, which means “to sojourn,” a word typically used to describe God’s presence moving about with the Israelites during their journey through the wilderness. But Solomon now claims to have brought an end to God’s wandering days. “I have built you an exalted house,” he said, “a place for you to dwell in forever” (v. 13). The verb used here is *yashav*, which suggests a more permanent dwelling: Solomon intends the temple to be a

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon



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place for Yahweh “to dwell in forever.”

Following the invocation, Solomon turned to the people and reminded them of God’s dynastic promises to David. Recounting the divine promise in a fashion closer to Psalm 89 than 2 Samuel 7, Solomon said God had praised David for wanting to build a temple, but that the job would go to his son (vv. 15-19).^U Solomon then praised God for fulfilling the promise to David while congratulating himself for having done his part:

“I have risen to the place of my father David; I sit on the throne of Israel ... I have built the house for name of the LORD ... I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with our ancestors ...” (vv. 20-21).

A prayer for the future (vv. 22-61)

With v. 22, Solomon adopted a posture of prayer and praised God’s unmatched majesty and God’s reputation for “keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart” (vv. 22-23). Returning to a more self-focused concern, Solomon thanked God for having shown faithfulness to David, and prayed for God to confirm that promise by remaining true to David’s descendants who walked faithfully before him (vv. 25-26).

Verses 27-30 backtrack a bit by affirming that God’s presence cannot be limited to the temple, indeed, even to all heaven and earth. Still, the temple serves as a portal of prayer through which people facing various trials could come to God in search of solace (v. 30).

The prayer continues by naming several categories of potential petitions the Israelites might bring, echoing the belief that troubles often result from sin (Lev. 26:14-39, Deut. 28:15-68). The temple would be an appropriate place of prayer for those seeking justice (vv. 31-32); for petitions seeking deliverance from enemy oppression after national sin (vv. 33-34); for those suffering from drought as divine punishment for sin (vv. 35-36); and for pleas for aid during

times of famine, pestilence, or plague (vv. 37-40).^U

Though Israel-centric, the prayer asked further that God would hear the prayers of foreigners who come “from a distant land because of your name” and respond to them in a way that all peoples would fear God and “know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built” (vv. 41-43).

But what of times when the distressed are far from the temple, such as when soldiers are away at war? Even then, Solomon insisted, the temple remained important as a portal of prayer. He asked that God would also hear and respond to fighters on the battlefield who faced Jerusalem and prayed in the direction of the temple (vv. 44-45).

More pointedly, the prayer then turns to the possibility of exile. If the people should sin, Solomon prayed, so that God allowed them to be defeated and carried into captivity ... if the exiles should “come to their senses” and “repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies,” praying toward “the city that you have chosen, and your house that I built for your name,” God should hear their prayer and forgive (vv. 46-53).

This is where the narrator most clearly leaves off praying and goes to preaching. While the prayer purports to reflect the words of Solomon at the temple’s dedication, the words may well derive from the hand of a writer during the exile itself, when the large unit from Joshua-2 Kings reached its final form.

The primary audience of 1 Kings 8 was not a free nation contemplating captivity, but actual exiles who believed that God had given them over to the Babylonians because of the nation’s deep and persistent sin. They could draw hope from Solomon’s prayer that if they turned their faces toward the temple in Jerusalem, and turned their hearts back

to God, that forgiveness and restoration might come.

The prayer attributed to Solomon may have gone to preaching, but it is a welcome message of hope. Even though the temple had been destroyed in 587 BCE, the people could still look toward Jerusalem and pray for the day when the temple would be rebuilt and God’s presence would once again bless the grateful Hebrews.

With the temple long destroyed – including its replacement – and Christian people living under a new covenant, what are we to make of this account? The parts of the prayer that emphasize a connection between royal power and religious establishments call to mind a temptation the church has faced through the years, one in which kings and cathedrals are closely connected and access to God is guarded by church authorities. If we believe the claims of Jesus, heeding God’s call and following God’s way are far more about service to others than about exercising power over them.

Many people still hold to the common belief that success or failure is a direct result of piety or perversion, but we know that the righteous often suffer while the wicked prosper. For followers of Jesus the point of faith is not to be rewarded, but to be faithful – not to be blessed, but to be a blessing.

As king of the country and builder of the temple, Solomon had a vested interest in promoting the temple as the locus of Israelite religion and the gateway to God, but even his self-serving prayer acknowledged that God cannot be limited to a sacred box, a holy place, or a designated city. Nor is God limited to the church, neither the institution nor any building associated with it. God is approachable from any place, at any time.

There is one area of the prayer that continues to speak plainly: Humans are sinful, but God is merciful. It is not a turning toward Jerusalem that matters, but a turning toward God, who remains willing to hear and to forgive.

Hallelujah. **BT**

Bible Study

James 1:17-27

with Tony W. Cartledge

Aug. 30, 2015

Real Religion

The book of James almost didn't make it into the New Testament. It was one of the last to be regarded as canonical – so is it really worth studying? Martin Luther, famed pioneer of the Protestant Reformation, called it “a right strawy epistle,” largely because James emphasizes the importance of work so much that he seems to minimize the role of grace.

Others might join Luther in wishing that James wasn't in the Bible, but for less theological reasons. James pulls no punches, but tells us to take our faith seriously and get to work. Many of us would rather not hear that.

The book of James bears a strong similarity to the Old Testament wisdom literature such as Proverbs: the author moves from topic to topic with no clear outline but with a few important ideas that are expressed over and over in different ways. For James, the most important idea is this: *faith works*.

True faith is faith that works. Faith that counts for something is faith that works. An over-emphasis on some other New Testament texts might lead one to think that faith is everything. James is here to remind us that our works count for something, too.

What is work worth? We often hear of workers or their advocates who seek higher pay or better benefits because their work is worth more than they are being compensated. James would have us to understand that the value of work is not just found in the financial compensation it brings us. Some values and benefits cannot be measured with dollar signs, even in the millions.

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon



James 1:22 –
“But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”

Accepting God's grace (vv. 17-21)

James is not unaware that works of faith must still begin with grace. Our first work, in a sense, is to accept God's good gifts. “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above,” James says, “coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (v. 17).

Here is something we can count on: God is real, God is good, and God bestows good gifts. Every act of generosity is a glimmer of God's compassion. Every good gift is a reminder of God's love. We can count on God's goodness and generosity and grace.

It was by grace that God granted us “birth by the word of truth” (v. 18) – that is, new birth through the life and love of Jesus Christ. Looking back to v. 15 is key to understanding this verse. There James spoke of how one's own desire conceives and gives birth to sin.

Here, he speaks of God's desire to grant us birth to a new life in Christ.

James' readers were first-generation Christians. They were the “first fruits” resulting from Christ's work. Today, we are the fruit, not only of Christ, but also of what the church has done through the years. When others believe after us, they will be the fruit of our work, as well.

That work begins with our acceptance of the good and gracious gifts that come to us from God. But James insists that there is work involved in fully accepting God's gifts: we have some cleaning up to do. Other things that come between God and us have to be moved out of the way.

What kind of things? Things like the attitude that we already know everything or should always get our way. It is that attitude that leads us to speak without listening and to be angry when others disagree with us. So, James tells us it is essential that we “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;

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for your anger does not produce God's righteousness" (vv. 19-20).

Graceful living cannot coexist with a selfish lifestyle any more than a tomato vine and poison ivy can occupy the same bit of soil. "Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls" (v. 21). ↓

Those are strong and unpleasant words. None of us like to think of our lives as being sordid or rank – but James considers anything that could screen us from God's presence to be forms of wickedness.

Some think of James' language as reflecting the baptismal image of stripping off what is old and putting on what is new, but it can also be read as a garden metaphor. We can't plant the word of life in a spot that is already choked with weeds and briars and brush. We have to clean out the wild growth to make room for new plantings. It is only common sense to understand that God will not fill our lives with grace if our hearts are choked with self-interest.

Only when we've cleaned the weeds from our lives can we "welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls." The term *logos* in "the implanted word" can carry a double sense here. John's gospel speaks of Jesus as "the Word" of God. Those who experience the power of God's salvation are those who open their hearts to the Master Gardener, who plants in their hearts the Word of life. But *logos* can also refer to a message, and that is its more common sense in this section. Those who receive Christ the Word are also called to live out Christ's message. The day we become Christians is our first day of work in the kingdom of God.

Doing God's work (vv. 22-27)

So, James says, "be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves" (v. 22). We are not to be just hearers of the word, or watchers

of the word, or commentators upon the word. We are to be *doers* of the word.

In this context, "word" refers to the content of Christ's teaching, which calls us to love God with all our being and to love others in the same unselfish way that Jesus loves us. "To be doers of the word" is to be followers of the message that calls us to love.

An old saying sadly observes: "When all is said and done, more is said than done." James knew it is not what we say or claim to believe that demonstrates our faith, but what we *do*.

The kind of learning that changes our lives comes only through practice: we learn best by doing. James illustrated the emptiness of some people's faith by saying they were like a person who looked intently into a mirror, and then immediately forgot what he or she was like (v. 24).

How are we to understand this? One way is to recognize that the very act of examining oneself in a mirror implies the intent to do something about what one sees. But if a man sees a dirty face that needs washing, then quickly forgets and does nothing about it, his face will remain unwashed.

A closer look at the Greek text provides a different angle. James did not just speak of looking at one's face, but of one "who looks at the face of his origin." Looking in a mirror does not only reveal the appearance of one's face in the moment, but also reminds us of our origins, of our family – of who we are by birth. When we forget who we are, we are in trouble.

Recall that James had just spoken of believers having experienced a new birth in Christ. If we claim to believe but do not practice, we have forgotten who we are. In contrast, when we look at ourselves as children born of God and called to follow Jesus' teaching, we remember who we are and begin to look

like authentic Christians, because others can see Christ at work in us.

So, James went on to add, "those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing" (v. 25). In contrast, those who think they are being religious but who live without restraint have deceived themselves (v. 26). ↓

It is not enough for us to come to church like cars stopping periodically at the gas pump, passively waiting to get our tanks filled. We may catch a glimpse of God in the worship service, and it may uplift us for a while, but if we do not put our faith to work day in and day out, it soon becomes meaningless. ↓

Religion that matters is not just passive Sunday mornings of inspiration, but a daily dedication to the teaching of Jesus. If you want to see real religion, James said – religion that is "pure and undefiled" – it is this: "to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (v. 27).

In the ancient world there was no life insurance, no welfare, no social security beyond money saved and children raised. Widows were often left with no means of support and few legitimate opportunities to make a living wage. In desperation, orphaned children were sometimes sold into indentured service just to assure that they would have a place to stay and food to eat.

Of course, James never intended to suggest that our concern should be limited to literal widows and orphans, but all who are in need and subject to exploitation. It's possible to be "widowed" from jobs or means of support, or "orphaned" from sustaining relationships. Give some thought to who might be the "widows and orphans" who need our care. ↓

James insists that real religion involves both interpersonal charity and personal purity. Would others consider our religion to be genuine, or a formality?

James is not the only one who wants to know. **BT**

In the Know

Michael J. Clingenpeel will retire later this year from the pastorate of River Road Church, Baptist in Richmond, Va. He came to the church in 2004 after serving as editor of the *Religious Herald*.

John Daugherty has joined the staff of OperationInAsMuch in Knoxville, Tenn. He previously served as co-pastor of CityGate Ministries in Fort Myers, Fla.

G. Daniel Jones died May 27 at age 74. He was pastor emeritus of Grace Baptist Church in Germantown, Penn., where he served for 31 years. He served in many leadership roles with American Baptists.

Phil Lineberger died May 31 at age 69. He was pastor of Sugar Land Baptist Church (formerly Williams Trace Baptist Church) near Houston. He served as president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas among other leadership roles in Baptist life.

Bailey Edwards Nelson is pastor of Fernwood Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C. She previously served Flat Rock Baptist Church in Mount Airy, N.C.

Stacy Cochran Nowell is pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntersville, N.C., coming from Harrisonburg (Va.) Baptist Church.

Eldon Earl "Bud" Strawn died May 21 in St. Petersburg, Fla., at age 84. He was active in the First Baptist Church there and in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Patricia. **BT**

President/CEO: Developmental Disabilities Ministries of Georgia is seeking a successor to Bill Neal, who is retiring. Information about the agency and a detailed job description for the president, along with the procedure for submitting applications and nominations, can be found on the "employment" page at ddmga.org.

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Senior Pastor: Kirkwood Baptist Church (KBC), founded in 1870 in St. Louis County, Mo., is seeking a senior pastor. KBC has been a leader in moderate Baptist life since 1990 and has been actively affiliated with the national CBF and CBF Heartland since their founding. We worship in a warm, traditional/liturgical style. Christian education is based on biblical authority and a respect for open inquiry with the goal of understanding and applying the radical claims of the gospel to all areas of life. KBC has a long commitment to cooperative and hands-on missions. The senior pastor we seek will possess strong preaching skills, be involved in moderate Baptist life, be committed to Baptist distinctives, and have the desire and ability to lead the congregation spiritually and administratively. Interested candidates are encouraged to visit our website, kirkwoodbaptist.org, to get to know us better. Send résumés to Pastor Search Committee, Kirkwood Baptist Church, 211 N. Woodlawn Ave., Kirkwood, MO 63122, or to pastorsearch@kirkwoodbaptist.org.

Senior Pastor: First Baptist Church of Biscoe, N.C., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. We are a relatively small, but inclusive congregation from various ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds with a strong belief in the radical love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for all persons. A sense of community is our strength, with a "love in action" attitude and a focus on local missions. We partner primarily with CBF and Montgomery County Churches in Action. Our congregation strives to use its many gifts, one of which is music, to fellowship, worship and serve. We are seeking a pastor who is a divinity school graduate, has excellent skills in building relationships, and will lead us to grow spiritually as we respond to the call of Jesus. Please send résumés by early July to: newfbcpastor@gmail.com or Pastor Search Team, Dwight Saunders, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 36, Biscoe, NC 27209.

Student Minister: First Baptist Church, Aiken, S.C., (fbcaiken.org) is seeking a full-time associate minister in student ministries. Located in the heart of the historic downtown area, our congregation is moderate, traditional and ecumenical with a rich heritage in worship, mission and nurture. As a member of our pastoral staff team, our student minister will have responsibility for all middle school, high school and college-age group ministries. Seminary training and transferrable ministry experience are expected. Send résumé with references to Randy R. Duckett, Search Committee Chair, P.O. Box 3157, Aiken, SC 29802.

Minister of Children and Families: First Baptist Church, Jefferson, Ga., located between Athens and Gainesville off Hwy. 129 and three miles off I-85, is seeking a minister of children and families. FBC is dually aligned with the CBF and the SBC

Classifieds

and adheres to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message. Our church has both traditional and contemporary services of worship. The ideal candidate will be a seminary graduate or have a degree related to the Christian education of children and families, and have some ministry experience. This candidate should be called to ministry as a Christian vocation, to children's and family ministry as a primary calling, and be able to affirm FBC's mission, vision and values. A job description is posted at fbcjefferson.org. Submit résumés to Fred Gurley, Personnel Committee Chairman, First Baptist Church, 81 Institute St., Jefferson, GA 30549.

Minister of Children: Second Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., is seeking a full-time minister of children who will work with the Second Baptist team to continue the vision of Second Baptist: a loving community, transformed by Christ for unbounded service. The principal functions are to develop and implement programs designed to provide Christian guidance and nurture the spiritual growth of children and their families, and to direct a comprehensive program of religious education for children, birth through fifth grade. For more details, email childrensministersbc@gmail.com.

Director of Music Ministries: Northside Drive Baptist Church (NDBC) in Atlanta, Ga., is currently accepting applications for the part-time position of director of music ministries. The director of music ministries is responsible for implementing all aspects of the music ministry of NDBC, which has a rich history of liturgical worship and fine music. NDBC seeks an individual with an advanced knowledge of music repertoire who demonstrates competence and creativity as a conductor of musical ensembles. The director of music ministries works under the supervision of the senior pastor of NDBC. In addition to considering applications for the part-time position of director of music ministries, the NDBC search committee will also receive and consider applications from individuals with demonstrable skills to serve as both choir master and organist. A complete application should include a cover letter, a curriculum vitae with a detailed listing of education and work experience, and a description of the applicant's philosophy/theology of church music ministry (not to exceed one page in length). For a complete job description, see the NDBC website: northsidedrive.org. Direct inquiries to Ms. Jo Lanier Meeks, chair of the search committee, at joianiermeeks@gmail.com. All application materials should be sent electronically to musicdirectorsearch@northsidedrive.org. No recordings should be submitted now. Compensation for the position is competitive, and applications will be accepted until the position is filled.

How not to preach a children's sermon

The senior pastor believes Ethan is thinking, "It is so great to have our own special time in worship with the pastor. He knows how to talk to children. He understands that 6-year-olds love metaphors. I wonder what object he has today. Maybe we'll get Skittles and learn how God helps us taste the rainbow. I can't wait."

Ethan is actually thinking, "I hate my shoes. Why can't I wear flip flops like Aiden? Sophia's mom brings Laffy Taffy. My mom brings raisins. How fair is that? I need a break from mom and it's children's time — our time to shine. I hope Isabella says something that makes everyone laughs. Why does the preacher always bring something? It never makes sense, but Starburst day was pretty good. Why doesn't he tell a story? I like stories. If I scoot a little, I can touch that candle. Mom's probably watching, but she can't get me from there. I'm going to take off my shoes."

Children's sermons must be hard, because most of us have heard more bad ones than good. Eager preachers hope the children will say funny things so the grownups will think the preacher is clever. Desperate preachers use party hats, horns, leis, popsicles and cats. Preschool comedians see this as a chance to start their career. Church members secretly hope some child decides to practice rolling.

Have you ever heard, "The red on this candy cane is the blood Jesus shed," and thought, "That should keep the children from eating candy canes"?

Maybe you have heard, "This sucker is sweet just like God is sweet to us," and thought "Not really."

If the minister is holding a pair of scissors, do you pray the subject is anything other than circumcision?

Have the children in your church been told more about Calvinism than first graders need to know?

Perhaps you have heard children's sermons on biblical texts that are not the best choices — Song of Solomon, David and Bathsheba, almost anything in Leviticus, the slaughter of the innocents, or Elisha calling on two bears to maul a group of children who called him "Baldy."

Children's sermons would be better if ministers stopped using confusing props. Object lessons are popular with those who never talk with children. Six-year-olds do not make the intellectual leap from seeds in Dixie cups to how the Kingdom grows. Children do not think in object lesson logic. No children's sermon should begin:

"Here's a bent spoon. Let's imagine the woman with a crooked back."

"I brought two slices of bread, peanut butter and a knife, because today we're talking about sanctification."

"Look at this picture of a zebra because our Bible lesson is about who goes to heaven."

"Here's a walnut. Picture the Gospel in a nutshell."

"I brought a T-shirt with the Nike logo. Let's just do it."

"Here's a cell phone that reminds us of five things you need to know about prayer. Text messages, for instance."

"I brought my favorite Transformer, Devastator, because he reminds me of St. Paul."

"Here's a key ring. It's mine. Who has the key to your heart?"

"I brought a bag of fortune cookies because we're starting a sermon series on the prophets."

"This is a camera. Let's focus on justification."

"I brought a snake, but it's a rubber snake, or is it?"

Ministers should not use children as props. Children's sermons are often filled with questions that are thinly veiled attempts to entertain the congregation. The preacher should not be going for laughs from the adults. No one should ask these questions during the children's time:

"How is God like this rock?"

"What does your Sunday school teacher teach you?"

"Who is the oldest person in the church?"

"What's the worst thing about church?"

"What does your mother call your father?"

"Could you say some funny things?"

The phrase "children's sermon" is not



found in any concordance. If we continue the practice, we should do better. Consider the following suggestions:

- Prepare thoughtfully and prayerfully.
- Pay attention to children at times other than the children's sermon.
- Remember that the purpose is to talk about God's love.
- Engage the children on a child's level.
- Do not offer abstract thinking that is developmentally inappropriate for concrete-thinking children.
- Resist the temptation to put children on display.
- If you ask questions, ask real ones and listen to the children's answers.
- Tell the truth that will matter to a child.

Children deserve better than a dumbed-down, cutesy version of the morning message with an attention-grabbing prop — though everyone loves M&Ms.

Skeptical people might ask, "If the children's sermon is for the children, then why doesn't the preacher meet with the children when the adults aren't around?" The skeptics might have a point. **BT**

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.

Editor's note: This article in the series "Transitions: Helping churches and church leaders in changing times" is provided in partnership with the Center for Healthy Churches (chchurches.org).

Does your church know its 'place'?

By Stan Wilson

Wendell Berry, in *How To Be a Poet*, wrote: "There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places."

Our congregation was originally sent to a particular place on the north side of Clinton, Miss., in 1969, but over time that place became somewhat incidental to our identity.

As many members moved out to larger houses and then likeminded others started driving in, the place was quietly disregarded. If we had not built a sanctuary there, we easily could have moved our meeting place somewhere else without losing any of the essential characteristics of our church.

It's good we built.

Today we are "coming to our sense of place" like the prodigal son who realized how much he had squandered by leaving home. We are beginning to see our particular place on the map as part and parcel of our identity, but this is very much a work in progress.

Our story is not at all unusual. Most churches were sent originally to particular places, and very many became, like us, "drive-in" churches, who mainly use the places they inhabit for gathering and leaving.

It's rare to find a church embedded in its neighborhood. It is time we learn to tell our stories of migration away from place as a confession of disordered desire and tragic failure of imagination.

Whenever we fail to see the place we inhabit in its own unique capacity to reveal God's presence, we miss an opportunity to witness to the peaceable reign of Christ over all the earth.

To be fair, not much in our background prepared us to see place as inseparably intertwined

with ministry. Most of us were brought up on an ethos of expansion and growth; we heard about "manifest destiny" in our youth, and something deep within us has been restless to move on to the next place ever since.

Theologically, many of us were taught a spiritualized gospel, with a thin version of individual salvation — in heaven, after death, out of body. We were not set up very well to imagine the kingdom on earth, as neighbors welcoming strangers to their kitchens, or as a people learning to live humbly and wisely on the land they were given.

Some in our congregation began to realize our estrangement from the neighborhood when we took a walk a few years ago to pass out invitations to Vacation Bible School. Mostly we just walked, looked around and noticed things.

We met a kid sitting alone on the curb while his mother was at work. On a sidewalk we met some friendly people we had never known who surprised us by not knowing our church even existed.

We met one woman who was ill and lonely, in need of companionship. Two doors down we met another woman who was retired and looking for something meaningful to do. We introduced her to her neighbor.

One way to begin again to see the places you inhabit as the places where God can be revealed is to learn their stories.

Our congregation is located near an Indian trading post on the old Natchez Trace. It is not far from the site of a racial massacre at the end of Reconstruction.

It was placed into a neighborhood slated to grow rapidly in the 1970s after a Civil Rights law in 1968 made housing discrimination illegal. It turns out this place has a story, and every place is more interesting when you pay attention to the history of desire, fear, hope and aspiration that shaped it.

Another way to begin seeing your place again is to map it. Ask the ancient biblical question: Who is my neighbor? Then map the neighborhood.

Draw the places where people live, the sites where people work. Do not neglect to map in the creeks, woods and fields — because they matter also.

Look for the places where people gather informally. Chances are you will begin to notice things.

One of our members noticed a road she had been passing for decades. She had almost forgotten it existed, but it was literally carved into her neighborhood development.

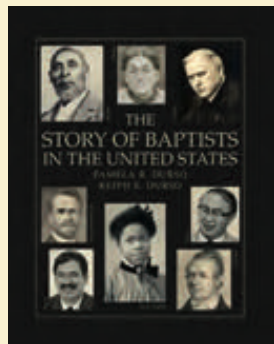
She decided to walk down it for the first time ever, and she met neighbors who invited her to sit on the porch and talk. The peaceable reign of Christ was very near that hidden place.

One biblical cue for those who want to see the places they inhabit as the places where God is pleased to be revealed is the word *abide*. The same word is also sometimes translated *remain* or *stay*.

The word means not just to stay, but to stay and grow. It means to stick around long enough to recognize the beauty, the challenges and the holiness intrinsic to the place you live, and then to join with what God is doing in that place. **BT**



—Stan Wilson is pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Clinton, Miss.



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Representing hope

San Quentin chaplain reflects on Charles Manson, capital punishment and life on death row

When Earl Smith became chaplain of California's San Quentin State Prison in 1983, he was the youngest chaplain ever hired by the state. While there, he played chess with Charles Manson, negotiated truces between rival gangs and witnessed a dozen executions.

In 2000, he was named National Correctional Chaplain of the Year, and he now serves as chaplain of the San Francisco 49ers and Golden State Warriors.

Smith recently talked about justice, America's correctional system and his new book, *"Death Row Chaplain: Unbelievable True Stories From America's Most Notorious Prison."* Some answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Describe what day-to-day life is like for death row inmates at San Quentin. Would you consider it humane?

A: Each day on death row is different, yet each day is the same. Your lunch is served with your breakfast. Most days are spent watching television, sleeping or reading. Exercise is an option on certain days.

Religious services are offered once a week on a rotating basis. The only area that actually has a chapel is East Block, which accommodates 24 inmates. Communication from cell to cell is done through yelling or an inmate mail system called a "kite" on a "fish line."

San Quentin has three areas housing condemned inmates; in only one of them are inmates allowed some opportunities to mingle during various parts of the day.

Q: Tell us about your relationship with Charles Manson. What was your assessment of his spiritual state?

A: After each conversation I had with Charles Manson, I went away in awe of his ability to capture a moment and claim it as his. Charles Manson was exactly what he sought to be.



Photo courtesy of Earl Smith

Charles wanted people to see him, hear his name and fear him.

The problem is that Charles is a little person who sees his height in terms of emotional and psychological dominance. Psychological warfare was his means of survival.

He once told me: "This is my world, and I decide when you do what you do. The trees, the stars, the grass, they all belong to me."

Charles was interested in the manipulation of people for the sole purpose of seeing if he could manipulate them.

Q: You witnessed 12 executions. Describe briefly what that feels like.

A: To see a man strapped into a chair or on a gurney is actually a small part of the execution process. After the condemned man dies, the process of the execution lingers.

The staff that walks the inmate into the chamber, the official witnesses, the victim's family members and the inmate's family members all are assembled in the same room. The administrative staff member assigned to the task of implementing the protocol has to disassociate themselves from the notion of death.

The focus is turned to a person who is asked if he has any last words.

People have asked me if lethal injection is more humane. My answer is capital punishment via hanging, gas, firing squad, electrocution, guillotine all get the same result: death.

Seeing an execution is seeing death. You can never forget what you see.

Q: Since humans are created in God's image with inherent dignity, I don't think humans should be able to legally execute other humans like this. What do you think?

A: Sin is sin, and he that is without sin should be required to cast the first stone. If there is no one available, then perhaps we should come up with an alternative.

God does not make mistakes, so the flaws witnessed in the process of the gruesome crimes which result in sentences of capital punishment are those of an infested society, not of a God who pronounced all creation "good."

A reference point for support for capital punishment is found in the mandate to support the laws of the land. I believe there are just and unjust laws.

Is capital punishment one such unjust law? I truly do not know.

What I know is that the only deterrent is to the person executed. Murders still take place on the day of an execution, so clearly the focus (on death and deterrence) has not presented a time of pause.

Q: How have your experiences on death row changed your thinking about the death penalty, if at all?

A: As a chaplain, my job is to represent hope. In the execution process, hope meets reality; you have to focus on the true hope of eternal life.

The word "closure" doesn't belong in the dialogue about capital punishment. Before I arrived at San Quentin, I was not sure what I thought about the death penalty.

I would listen to the play-by-play of an execution as a young boy. That experience left me thinking that when you do enough wrong, people will get tired of you and perhaps execute you.

After arriving at San Quentin and having men on my death row caseload be released into free society, my thought has never moved beyond what if one of those guys had been executed. The reality — that death is final and the system can be flawed — is where I arrived as a result of working there. **BT**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of articles by historian Bruce Gourley on the religious faith of U.S. presidents. Gourley is online editor and contributing writer for *Baptists Today* and executive director of the *Baptist History & Heritage Society*. His latest book, *Baptists and the American Civil War: Crucible of Faith and Freedom*, a compilation of articles from the recent series on *Baptists and the American Civil War*, is now available from *Nurturing Faith*.*

Religion and the American Presidents

John Adams (1797-1801)

Like his predecessor George Washington, Massachusetts native John Adams (1735-1826), was born during a period of national religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Whereas Washington, a Virginian, was baptized as an infant into the Anglican Church, the state church of the Southern colonies, Adams' infant baptism was into membership of the Congregational Church, the state church of many of the Northern colonies.

Church membership was compulsory in Massachusetts, mandated by colonial laws. The Great Awakening, however, eroded the theocratic underpinnings of the colonial era in the decades after Adams' birth, a major religious and political transition that impacted the religious beliefs of the second president.

Many smart and ambitious young men aspired to the establishment Christian ministry in the mid-18th century. Within the official state church, congregational pulpits were favored with rewards monetary and civil. Adams' father, a deacon, encouraged his son to pursue just such a career. Young Adams, however, opted for an alternative career that he deemed to be a more noble calling: the legal profession.

Adams' doubts regarding the ministry stemmed from his studies of religion. Establishment religion's historical opposition to freedom of conscience, expressed vividly in the persecution of dissenters, horrified the young man. His rejection of traditional religion grew even as his home church, the First Parish Church of Quincy, transitioned from Trinitarian Congregationalism to Anti-Trinitarian Unitarianism in the early 1750s. Intense theological debates involving the minister and parishioners often took place in the Adams' home, contributing to his distaste of "dogmatism and bigotry."

In correspondence in 1756 with his brother-in-law Richard Cranch, Adams, then a recent Harvard graduate, confessed his distaste of the prospect of a ministerial career. Non-conformist in sentiment, Adams sought the



"liberty to think for myself without molesting others or being molested myself."

When his father apparently continued to prod him toward the ministry, Adams lamented to Cranch: "The frightful engines of ecclesiastical councils, of diabolical malice, and Calvinistical good-nature never failed to terrify me exceedingly whenever I thought of preaching."

Although recoiling from a religious career, Adams found enough latitude in Unitarianism to remain involved in church. Throughout his life he retained religious sentiments in a broad, deistic sense, frequently attending church services, speaking often of morals and virtue, and typically referring to the deity with impersonal descriptors such as "Providence" or "Being" or "Creator."

Foremost a product of the Enlightenment, Adams placed reason and science above religion, as did most of America's founding fathers.

Completing his law studies and passing the bar in 1758, by 1770 John Adams was one of Boston's most successful lawyers as well as an emerging leader in the colonial protest against British taxation. A member of the First Continental Congress in 1774 and the Second Congress in 1775, by 1776 he was prominent in the movement for independence, his influence recognized in his congressional

appointment, alongside that of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, to pen the Declaration of Independence.

During the Revolutionary War years Adams served as a representative of America to European nations, while afterward he became America's first ambassador to Britain, a post he held from 1785 to 1788. Upon his return to the states Adams was elected Washington's vice president in 1789, then re-elected to the post in 1792.

Following Washington's resignation as president, the election of 1796 was the first to feature competing political parties. The Federalists (committed to nationalistic policies) selected Adams as their candidate, while the Republicans (suspicious of central authority and advocates of individual and states rights) chose Thomas Jefferson.

Religion played a role in the campaign as the Federalists labeled Thomas Jefferson, viewed by many as an atheist, as an enemy of religion and morality. Whether or not such charges affected the outcome of the election, Adams defeated Jefferson and assumed office in early 1797.

As a member of the Constitutional Convention and then as president, Adams followed Washington in politically signaling an understanding of religion as foundational to public morality. Both presidents occasionally deployed the soothing power of inclusive religious statements in the form of fast day proclamations and prayers, such statements likely penned by others.

Washington's statements stood starkly apart from his largely non-religious, or at least religiously ambivalent, persona. But when Adams in his inaugural address declared "decent respect for Christianity among the best recommendations for the public service," he spoke as one long engaged in sectarian religious practices.

On the other hand, while in government office Adams more often referenced religion

in non-public statements, either as a political actor or in an official capacity. Inevitably he dismissed religion as a factor in the founding and sustaining of the American nation.

In anticipation of forming a national government, Adams, hearkening to his long-held opposition to state churches, in 1785 declared “We should begin by setting conscience free.”

During the Constitutional Convention years of 1787 and 1788, Adams wrote of the secular nature of the nation’s founding principles, declaring that the new nation was the first “example of governments erected on the simple principles of nature.”

In the “formation” of the government, he noted, “[I]t will never be pretended that any persons employed in that service had interviews with the gods, or were in any degree under the influence of Heaven, more than those at work upon ships or houses, or laboring in merchandise or agriculture.” Rather, the government was contrived “merely by the use of reason and the senses.”

During his presidential years Adams returned to the theme of America and religion by putting his signature on the Treaty of Tripoli in 1797. “The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion,” the treaty with the

Muslim nation of Tripoli stated. “The United States is not a Christian nation any more than it is a Jewish or a Mohammedan nation.”

As president, Adams proved to be an independent and centrist thinker. Alarming the far right wing of his own party, Adams chose to pursue peace with revolutionary-era France even as many Federalists demanded war.

On the other hand, he was persuaded by Federalists to pass the Alien and Sedition Acts, the first allowing the government to expel any foreign resident suspected of being a threat to national security, the second barring publication of any material with the potential of inciting public hostility against the federal government.

While he came to regret signing the acts, in the end Adams negotiated a controversial but important peace treaty with France, the pinnacle of his presidency. The treaty in turn set the stage for the election of 1800, a bitterly contested election that he lost to Thomas Jefferson.

Returning to his home in Massachusetts, Adams spent many years trying to rebuild his image in the public eye. From 1810 until his death, Adams frequently turned to the subject of religion in letters, including to Jefferson, with whom he reconciled.

To Jefferson in 1813 he criticized “ancient Christianity” that had been “fraudulently

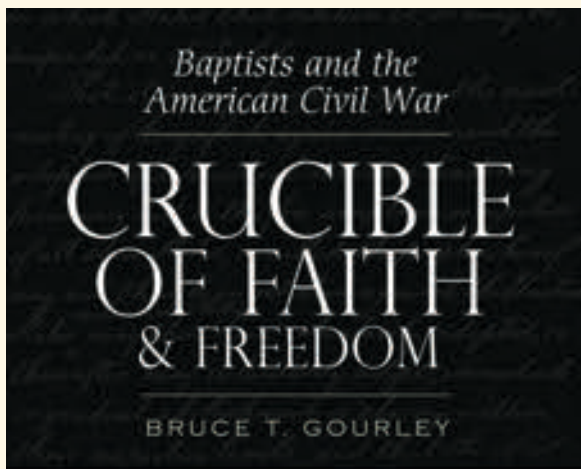
imposed upon the public.” The following year he lamented that religious dogma refused to tolerate “free inquiry.”

He spoke harshly against the Protestant concept of salvation by faith, condemned the Roman Catholic Church as a “monster,” yet also declared that a world without religion would be “Hell.” And in 1825, in one of his last letters to Jefferson, Adams excoriated lingering theocratic laws, including in Massachusetts, that mandated the punishment of individuals who spoke blasphemy against the Bible.

“The substance and essence of Christianity,” Adams concluded, “is eternal and unchangeable, and will bear examination forever, but it has been mixed with extraneous ingredients, which I think will not bear examination, and they ought to be separated. Adieu.”

John Adams died in 1826 on July 4, the same day as Thomas Jefferson passed away, and on the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence that both helped draft. Having rarely if ever penned the word “Christ,” Adams’ religious faith by then was unrecognizable as Christianity.

The divinity of Jesus, the Trinity and the truthfulness of the Bible had all been discarded. Yet at his death, Adams remained the most religious president of the United States to date. **BT**



A new release

The 150th anniversary of the American Civil War provides a grand opportunity to consider precisely what Baptists — North and South — were saying from their pulpits, in the press, and through official resolutions from that time. Bruce Gourley brings such perspectives to life by making good use of careful and significant research, creatively taking a chronological approach using primary sources.

He highlights the role of various kinds of Baptists, for example: Robert Smalls, Thomas Hill Watts, Basil Manly Sr., Gov. Joseph Brown, Gov. Sam Houston, Isaac Taylor Tichenor, Crawford H. Toy, and Frank and Jesse James — most of whom went on to great prominence in politics, religion or education.

Gourley’s firsthand accounts of how Baptists on both sides sought and claimed divine favor and righteousness provide lessons as plentiful as the statues and markers that dot the many battlefields where the devastation has given way to peaceful fields and quiet woodlands.



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Leader: Theologian John R. Franke
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John R. Franke, author of *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth*, will lead practical discussions, helpful to ministers and laity, on emerging theologies. Known for his contributions to the Emerging Church movement,

he insists that theology belongs in the church.

"From my perspective the primary purpose of theology is to equip the church to live into their missional calling to be the people of God in the place where they live," Franke told *Baptists Today*. "This is a complex task that requires careful thinking and reflective action."

REGISTRATION FEE of \$950 includes housing on Jekyll Island, delicious meals including local seafood, as well as all programming and tours. To reserve space, please send a deposit of \$200/person to *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318 or pay online at nurturingfaith.net Deposit is non-refundable after August 1. Balance is due August 15. Questions? Call (478) 301-5655.

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401 Gateway Ave.
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6:00 p.m. – Dinner / Presentations
Panel Discussions

"Who is on the Lord's side? How Baptists North and South, White and Black, Claimed Divine Favor"

—Bruce T. Gourley, Ph.D., Executive Director,
Baptist History and Heritage Society

"Legacy and Loss: How the Civil War Still Impacts American Society"

—Bobby Lovett, Ph.D., Retired Senior Professor, Tennessee State University

Dialogue — Facilitated by John D. Pierce,
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Freedom Rings!

Congregation recognized by news journal for faithful support, teamwork

COMMERCE, Ga. — *Baptists Today* Director David Hull presented a Freedom Bell to the First Baptist Church of Commerce June 3. The Northeast Georgia congregation is a faithful supporter of the news journal's expanding publishing ministry. "Teamwork is needed for ministry," said Hull, noting that congregations and specialized ministries such as *Baptists Today* have different roles — in the same way players on sports teams fill different positions.

"Because of the gifts from First Baptist, Commerce, you are a big part of this teamwork," he said appreciatively.

Hull, retired pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala., teaches leadership at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology and is a consultant with the Center for Healthy Churches. Currently, he preaches in the interim at First Baptist Church of

St. Petersburg, Fla. "Freedom is never free," Hull reminded the Commerce congregation. "Therefore, we are so grateful to people like you — churches and individuals — who step up and support *Baptists Today* so we can carry out this important ministry."

Hull is leading an effort to encourage 100 or more churches to include *Baptists Today* in their missions support of at least \$1,000 annually. The Commerce congregation makes generous monthly gifts to the autonomous publishing ministry.

Pastor Carlton Allen expressed appreciation for the news journal's insights and helpful resources.

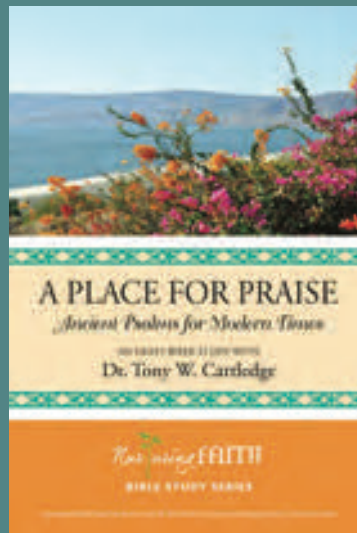
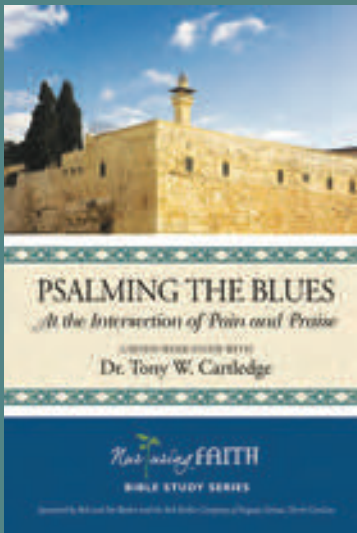


Pastor Carlton Allen of First Baptist Church of Commerce, Ga., receives a Freedom Bell, honoring his congregation's faithful support of *Baptists Today*, from director David Hull.

"We absolutely need *Baptists Today* to speak the truth and to help us know what is going on that impacts our church," he said.

To consider becoming a Freedom Church that shares in the unique mission of *Baptists Today*/Nurturing Faith, call (478) 301-5655 or email info@baptiststoday.org. **BT**

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“We are living through the death of Protestant privilege in the South. And it’s the best thing that could happen to us.”

Q&A *with* Bill Leonard

A conversation about Protestant privilege and permanent transitions

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — *Baptists Today* presented its annual Judson-Rice Award to Bill Leonard on April 24 during a dinner event at Wake Forest University. He is the James and Marilyn Dunn Professor of Baptist Studies and professor of church history at Wake Forest University Divinity School where he was founding dean.

The following conversation is adapted from an interview conducted by Editor John Pierce at the award dinner. The full interview can be viewed at baptiststoday.org

BT: Bill, will you describe a typical Sunday morning when you were 10 years old?

BL: Oh Lord, that’s so long ago. We lived in Decatur, Texas, the county seat of Wise County. I was 10 years old and we were about to move to Ft. Worth.

We were members of the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Texas, and my mother was the slowest get-ready-for-church-on-Sunday human being in the whole county. I was so gung ho about church that I would walk there.

I’m in the fourth grade, and I would walk from our house down on Hwy. 80 to the First Baptist Church. No one would ever let their kid do that anymore.

So I would walk to Sunday school, and then my mother made it in time for church. So that was the typical Sunday.

BT: When you harken back to your youthful days, what warms your heart and what scares you about the Christian assumptions at that time?

BL: That’s a great question, and that’s a course, not a question. I grew up in a community of

faith that nurtured me to Christianity. I am, in William James’ words, a once-born Christian that got a twice-born experience. So I was one and two born, but the nurturing of the communities of faith was extremely important.

And I’ll tell you a quick story that illustrates that: My parents separated when I was six — and then moved back together and we moved to Ft. Worth when I was 10. The deacons in the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Texas, used to have these father-son breakfasts.

And one of the deacons would call me up whenever they would have one and say, “We know your daddy is not here but I’ll be our daddy.” I’ve never forgotten that; that was a huge thing for me.

The second thing is all of the African Americans in Decatur lived literally on the other side of the tracks. And all of the facilities

— restrooms and drinking fountains and all of that — were marked with signs that said, “White” and “Colored,” and that was a horrible way to grow up, horrible. And the church did nothing about it, not my church.

Those are the two things: Churches are still nurturing persons to faith and that’s wonderful. But we just have to read the newspapers these days to know that the facilities aren’t Jim Crow facilities, but the racism won’t go away. And we’ve got to deal with that together.

BT: What does history teach us about change?

BL: That nobody pays any attention.

I can say it in a different way. I don’t think we recognize change until we have some history to evaluate it.

I’ll give you a classic example: The First Baptist Church [of Winston-Salem] on Fifth Street here just called Emily Hull McGee, a graduate of the Wake Forest University Divinity School, to be SENIOR pastor.

She preached her [trial] sermon; she went back to Louisville where she’s on staff at Highland Baptist. They said goodbye to her on Sunday morning. Sunday evening her water broke and she gave birth to Annabelle. And she’s now pastor [of First Baptist], and she’s on maternity leave.

That’s history. And none of us in this room, at least some of us at our age, would have imagined we’d live to see it, would we? And the Apostle Paul would not know what to do with it.

That’s history. And that’s where history takes us even when we don’t know it’s doing it.

BT: You have been both participant and observer in the shifting of Baptist life in America over the last 35 years or so. What is it like to balance those two roles simultaneously?

BL: I never expected to write and study much about the Baptists. I went to Boston University, and then to the Baptist seminary in Louisville where I was charged with teaching American religion.

Morgan Patterson and then Walter Shurden were my colleagues who did the Baptist part.

Then the Baptists went dysfunctional on us. And for self-protection, and to figure out and to offer alternative responses to what was increasingly becoming the Baptist norm in the South, I had to start reading and writing about that.

Then we had to end up doing labor management negotiations with the new crowd of trustees that came in. And so we threatened to

go to court, and it was nasty. Writing about it gave me enough distance to endure it.

I will always be grateful that *The Christian Century* let me be their press representative to the Southern Baptist Convention meetings. I would write articles that *The Christian Century* published.

They did pastoral care with me. They gave me an outlet for dealing with the struggles in a way that otherwise I wouldn’t have had. The history gave me some distance. And I would say also, in ways, my family gave me a historical opportunity.

I remember one particular [seminary] trustee meeting when it was really bad and my wife, Candace, said, “If they’re going to do whatever they’re going to do, they’re going to have to see us as a family.”

So she got Stephanie out of school and we went down and sat on the front row at the public part of the trustee meeting. And I knew I could get through it then because we were doing that as a family. That was a piece of history that seems funny now, strange — but in the heat of those moments it was a dramatic family experience to go through.

BT: Some good, even better things have emerged from Baptist losses that once seemed only bad. Does there seem to be some truth to that idea, which may have some biblical backing as well?

BL: I defer to the biblical specialists about that, but I will say two things:

One of the benefits of this — we say this now looking back — is I think we’ve been forced to be Baptist. African-American Baptists, Latino/Latina Baptists, Asian Baptists, Anglos, we’ve been forced to look at what it means and decide if we can still be that. And not take other persons’ definitions as our own, but explore that. That’s been good.

When I think about [Wake Forest divinity students] and seminarians from other schools that have grown out of this movement, I think the energy they bring to the church in general and to Baptist churches in particular is worth it all.

The other thing happening is we are living through the death of Protestant privilege in the South. And it’s the best thing that could happen to us.

It’s painful, but losing that privilege of expecting the culture to undergird us when we didn’t have to has been a huge crutch — and it’s turning the gospel loose in ways we ought to all celebrate.

BT: You have a really broad view of the world, especially for a Texan.

BL: James Dunn had to leave so you can get by with saying that.

BT: How much do our dialogue, politics and faith-related behavior suffer from isolation and narrow exposure to what is assumed to be the only sources of truth?

BL: That’s another course. I think that the changes in American culture these days ought to be made to order for Baptists at their best because we began as a believer’s church.

Persons had to own faith if they were going to claim membership in Christ’s church. That meant individuals had to choose to participate in Christian community; it’s a two-way street.

I think the culture is compelling us to define ourselves and look at that. Because there are always people or institutions — church and state — trying to coerce faith, Baptists had to be dissenters.

So believer’s church and uncoerced faith and religious liberty and dissent are all bound up — not in secular enlightenment ideas about “separation of church and state” — but they grow out of faith commitments in a sense that faith is uncoerced.

That’s happening to us, and we’re having to ask that again. And there are other Baptists who are offering alternative visions of what church and state separation and religious liberty mean, and that’s why we can’t keep silent.

BT: Historians are not widely known to be the life of the party. However, your insights are often bathed in humor. How is humor a helpful lens for seeing and interpreting the world in which we live?

BL: Oh, it takes the edge off. I get by with a lot of stuff, and people who’ve been around know that.

Frank Granger, Doug Dortch and Ronnie Brewer are three students here that I taught at Louisville shortly after the Magi came to Bethlehem. They know well that it was prickly there, and often in those classes — that were so theologically divided — the only way was to use humor to take the edge off.

People like James Dunn taught me to do that. Dunn was doing that before the Magi came. I could always see him do that with people, and it was so wonderfully disarming. I do think — and my father was like this — there’s a facet of being from Texas that does that. I’ve always said that Texans cuss funny.

“What’s worrisome is the churches that ignore the changes until it’s too late; it’s not too late for many congregations. But windows are closing...”

BT: A couple years ago I pulled my car off the road, grabbed my cell phone and called you because of a new sign that had been erected on Vineville Avenue. The Primitive Baptist church in Macon, Ga., the heart of the Bible belt, had a new sign that read “The Islamic Center of Macon.” Such change is not isolated. What are the implications of that kind of change for Baptist congregations?

BL: Well, it’s not just Baptists. Everybody in this country, all the churches, religious institutions are experiencing this. I call it a time of permanent transitions.

It’s partly the result of pluralism; a lot the result of pluralism. But it’s also the result of the changing nature of religious communities. We used to say, when I worked in the summer Appalachian Program in Berea, Ky., that there were Buddhists in Berea and if the Buddhists had discovered Berea they were everywhere.

And that’s what’s happened. Religious pluralism has found its way — not just into the big cities or up East, as they say, or out West — but into every community. Inter-marriage — multi-ethnic, multi-religion — has found its way into families in these communities.

Old ways of being the church or traditional ways of being the church have always been in flux. They are still, and that’s part of what I mean about losing cultural privilege. We are all thinking about this because it’s happening at every level.

I used to talk about these things and the African-American pastors would say, “That’s happening in white churches, not with us.” Now African-American pastors finish my sentences for me because their congregations are edgy; they’re having difficulty with Sunday school and the changing sociology.

But then, when I see what some of our younger pastors and staff folks and laity are doing in engaging in these signature ministries of churches, I think the transition is happening and we need to be aware of it and respond to it.

BT: I often say that a congregation’s ministry is greatly shaped by whether the church sees this growing religious pluralism as a threat or an opportunity. How much fear do you see within American Christianity today versus hopefulness, and what might we do about it?

BL: As a historian I think there’s a parallel — and that is what was happening on the American frontier. The American frontier was a seedbed for the “Up East” churches to try some new things because they saw that the culture was full of what we call now the “nones.”

Protestantism still had a foot in the door. But it was a brand new cultural situation.

We’re there. We used to talk about trends in American religious life. There aren’t any more trends; the trends have all become reality along these lines. And churches are finding ways to thrive.

What’s worrisome is the churches that ignore the changes until it’s too late; but it’s not too late for many congregations. But windows are closing — and I think it’s a good thing in that it often sobers up the congregations and they begin to decide how we’re going to do this.

And people realize that just having a contemporary worship service won’t do it. You got to have a whole new theology for permanent transition. When that happens, we all — whatever age and whatever generation — need to be able to talk about that and try to facilitate it. Not in some nature of one size fits all, but in each intentional community of faith deciding how to confront these changes.

BT: What are today’s students teaching you?

BL: Oh my, they’re wonderful; they really are. I have this two-semester church history class. They invigorate me and make me think of things I haven’t thought of before even though I’ve taught Intro to Church History for 40 years.

When we go through this material, they’re living through this. The kind of conversations we have make me think of things about this material about everybody from St. Augustine to Thomas Merton. It’s truly wonderful to have that happen.

I’ve been doing a seminar on American religious experience and I’m grading their term papers now. These are absolutely some of the most amazing papers across the spectrum of theological investigation. They’ve taught me — their research has taught me what I need to know about so many segments of religious experience.

BT: In your long and deep study of Baptist history, what have you discovered that you wish you hadn’t (or, really, wish it hadn’t happened) — and what have you discovered that you are so glad you did?

BL: Well, I started down that road with you already. One of the most terrible things that many Protestants in general and Baptists in particular did was they thought they could use the Bible to support chattel slavery.

Even when the war was over, they had so staked their biblical interpretation, their biblical hermeneutic, on the biblical support of slavery that they had to reinvent that and say things like, “Well it wasn’t that we were wrong about slavery; it was that we didn’t treat slaves as the way St. Paul told us to as Christians.” Because once that brick came out the whole thing could fall in.

Then you move to Jim Crow. It is historic [for Mel Williams, director emeritus of *Baptists Today*] to have been in the chapel when Martin Luther King Jr. preached at Wake Forest. The only other Southern Baptist-related school was, the year before that, at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Those are the only two places where [King] had voice.

So that racial blindness continued from slavery through Jim Crow and the civil rights movement — almost always with biblical support.

The Independent Baptists, by my calculations — J. Frank Norris, John R. Rice and that crowd — were holding on to segregation from a biblical perspective until the 1970s and ’80s, primarily on biblical opposition to racial inter-marriage as the last buttress of Jim Crow and their last effort with holding onto the Bible to promote their racism.

The best thing is, at their best and at their most articulate, Baptists really did — it would be too much to say invent — but opened the door to religious pluralism on the basis of the idea of a believer’s church.

That may be the singular most important contribution historically, then and now, of Baptist identity around believer’s church, uncoerced faith, freedom of conscience and then necessity of dissent. **BT**

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Personal problems

By John Pierce

Politicians and news media were frenzied following a deadly passenger train wreck in Philadelphia in mid-May. There were passionate calls for cooperation, spending and competency beyond the typical legislative process or news reporting.

Something needed to be done right now — we heard repeatedly and with great passion. Why?

Because we are all more consumed by those issues that impact us personally. The intensity was tied to the fact that the train was traveling from the political hub of Washington to the media hub of New York.

Had the train derailed between Raleigh and Charlotte or Memphis and New Orleans or Oklahoma City and Fort Worth, it would have been newsworthy but not as emotionally consuming for politicians and national media who live at one end or the other of the designated route.

This is an observation about human behavior, not a judgment on those rightly shaken by this disaster. Proximity and personal experience impact our reactions — and our perspectives.

Such is the case with social issues. Positions rarely — if ever — change due to debate.

Ask anyone who has changed his or her mind about immigration, homosexuality or any number of other issues and they will

mention a name, not a more-clearly stated position than the one they held earlier.

In the same way an earthquake in Nepal rattles us less than one in San Francisco, so a beloved grandchild, friend or church member's personal story reaches places within us that well-crafted arguments could not.

Proximity matters. That which impacts us personally will get more of our attention and compassion. Such is expected and understandable.

But what if we claim that everyone is created in the image of God? Then the challenge is to better grasp how those removed from us by distance and personal experience suffer as well and deserve our attention and best care. **BT**

Nicknames

By John Pierce

During a camping trip when we were teens, my best friend Dale peeled a bright orange, oval label from the package of meat we were about to grill and pressed it to his forehead. It simply read, "GROUND CHUCK."

Not only did the label stick; so did a nickname. To our circle of friends, he became forever "Chuck."

His West Point classmates, learning of his back-home nickname, referred to the albums he brought to the Academy as "Chucky music."

My good friend Marshall and several other former campus ministry colleagues shared a van ride from Georgia to Arkansas long ago. During the trip, one colleague accidentally called him "Herschel."

It was 1981 and that colleague worked at the University of Georgia. So major research is not needed to find the source of that slip-up that turned into a nickname.

Nicknames are typically unintentional.

They just happen, and then happen to stick.

Some nicknames are tied to attributes such as Smiley, Slim and Shorty. Others come from mispronunciations — perhaps by a younger child trying to speak a sibling's name.

Nicknames are everywhere.

At Atlanta's Turner Field, my friend Norman is better known as "Chocolate Papa" than his given name. And the guy in the right field stands, wearing a tacky feathered outfit, is Robby to a few but "The Chief" to the masses.

Baseball is notorious for nicknames for players — from "Cool Papa" to "Big Papi," from "Catfish" to "Mudcat,"

from "Preacher" to "Spaceman," from "The Big Unit" to "The Big Hurt," from "Crime Dog" to "Kung Fu Panda," from "Oil Can" to endless other slick names.

Some nicknames are given early in life and become the names by which these persons are almost always called. Such is the

case for my friends Scooter and Cooter.

Through the years I've tagged my daughters with various nicknames — usually some take on their own names or just an expression of affection. And, for full disclosure, some seminary buddies once called me "Hollywood" because of the sunglasses I wore back then.

Nicknames can be affirming or demeaning. In most cases, however, they are neither — they just happen, and then happen to stick.

Some scholars suggest that "Christian"

was first used in a derogatory way. It was a nickname meant to ridicule those who foolishly staked their lives on the Way of Christ. So they were derisively called "Christians," meaning, "little christs."

The Greek-rooted word "Christian" has gained pejorative meanings, for good and bad, over time. Most often it means simply "a follower of Christ."

How well that nickname fits depends on how well we follow. **BT**



Some nicknames are given early in life and become the names by which these persons are almost always called.

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Nonreligious voters set sights on 2016 campaigns

A few years ago, when atheist activists asked U.S. Sen. David Vitter, a Louisiana Republican, to tone down a Christian-oriented message to voters, they were told, “There aren’t any atheists in Louisiana.”

But according to a new Pew Research Center survey, not only are there atheists in Louisiana, there are agnostics and “nones” — people who say they have no religious affiliation — too.

The survey found that 2 percent of Louisianans are atheist, another 2 percent are agnostic, and 13 percent are unaffiliated “nones.” Those numbers are amplified nationally, where the religiously unaffiliated have grown to about 22 percent, or 56 million Americans, up 19 million people from 2007.

“It’s easy to ignore 2, 3 or 4 percent of the population,” said Kelly Damerow, interim director of Secular Coalition for America, who met with Vitter’s staff in April 2013. “But with this state-by-state breakdown we can now go into their offices and say, ‘Here’s your state.’ It’s hard to ignore almost 1 in 5 people.”

As the 2016 election approaches, atheist, humanist and other freethinking activists say their longtime goal of creating a cohesive and formidable secular voting bloc from the diverse and scattered category of the nonreligious has taken new life from the study — and could

“Jerry Falwell didn’t get along with Pentecostals, but they were able to convince their people that for political purposes they could get along. I can see a very similar thing happening with the Secular Coalition and other organizations that are trying to get conversations going with people not involved in organized religion.”

—POLITICAL SCIENTIST JOHN C. GREEN

carry them far if they use the data wisely.

“It is going to translate into a lot of political clout and social acceptance if we manage this correctly,” said David Silverman, president of American Atheists.

Silverman, Damerow and other atheist and humanist activists agree that the hurdles are steep: Nonbelievers tend to be nonjoiners.

“We don’t say, ‘Hey everybody, if you want to be an atheist you have to join American Atheists,’” said Silverman, “because they are going to tell you what do with that suggestion.”

John C. Green, director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, said that if atheists want a voting bloc, they should look to the evangelicals’ playbook.

In the 1970s, evangelicals were as diverse as the nonbelievers are now. Evangelicals disagreed on theology but found common ground in political issues such as abortion and marriage.

“Jerry Falwell didn’t get along with Pentecostals, but they were able to convince their people that for political purposes they could get along,” Green said. “I can see a very similar thing happening with the Secular Coalition and other organizations that are trying to get conversations going with people not involved in organized religion.”

But there is another hurdle — polls consistently show that Americans are least likely to vote for an atheist. David Guterman, co-author of the forthcoming *Political Religion and Religious Politics*, said that only coalition-building can combat that bias.

“If you start with atheism as the place to bring people to, I think that is the wrong path,” he said.

Ryan Cragun is even less optimistic. A nonbeliever and sociologist of religion at the University of Tampa, he said that even though the religiously unaffiliated are now second only to evangelicals in size, the membership rolls of major atheist and humanist organizations only total about 100,000.

“Yes, maybe 23 percent of the population is nonreligious, but there is maybe 1 million that you could reach through these groups,” he said. “Until they can say 15 million Americans will vote against you or your party, no one is going to take them seriously.” **BT**

The Vatican looks to reform its media operations

By Rosie Scammell
Religion News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican is dragging its media machine into the 21st century, promising to promote social media and streamline its fragmented services with the help of a former BBC executive.

Lord Christopher Patten, former chairman of the BBC Trust, outlined reform plans May 27, nearly a year after being appointed chief of the pope’s media committee.

Addressing journalists at St. Patrick’s church in central London, Patten highlighted “wasteful” duplications of media services at the Vatican and said modernization was imperative.

“It would be beyond bizarre to deny the

Vatican the sort of modern media operation that others — including existing national church organizations — take for granted,” he said.

The Vatican spends almost 70 million euros, or \$76 million, each year on its media services and employs 600 people. Despite being tasked with making budget cuts, Patten said the committee had decided job losses would “not be ethically appropriate.”

He instead foresaw the merging of the various communication tools, which include radio, television, a publishing house and underdeveloped online services.

“What is needed now is more visual, multimedia content, especially if one wishes to reach younger people,” Patten said, explaining the Vatican’s need to take an interactive approach. **BT**



‘Pro-choice’ label preferred by half of Americans

Despite Americans’ shifting opinions on a range of moral and ethical issues, abortion foes have been encouraged by numbers showing that opposition to abortion rights appeared to have resisted serious slip-page, and was even gaining traction.

But a Gallup poll released May 29 shows that may be changing: 50 percent of all Americans now identify as “pro-choice,” the first statistically significant lead over the “pro-life” label, which came in at 44 percent, since 2008.

The data suggest this could signal an end to the seesaw battle that has characterized opinions on abortion over the past few years.

“The pro-choice view is not as prevalent among Americans as it was in the mid-1990s, but the momentum for the pro-life position that began when Barack Obama took office has yielded to a pro-choice rebound,” Gallup’s Lydia Saad wrote in an analysis of the figures, which are from a survey conducted in early May.

“That rebound has essentially restored views to where they were in 2008; today’s views are also similar to those found in 2001,”

she said.

A Vox poll taken earlier this year also found that more Americans identified as “pro-choice” (32 percent) rather than “pro-life” (26 percent).

But it also found that 39 percent — a plurality — reject the labels, with 21 percent identifying as neither and 18 percent identifying as both.

Results from a May 26 Gallup survey on Americans’ shifting attitudes on a range of hot-button issues showed a uniformly leftward march since 2001, especially on gay and lesbian acceptance.

But those who viewed abortion as “morally acceptable” increased only 3 percent over that period, to 45 percent. An equal number said it was morally wrong.

The newly released data, however, suggest that if Americans continue to have moral qualms about abortion they are increasingly inclined to want to protect the legal right to abortion.

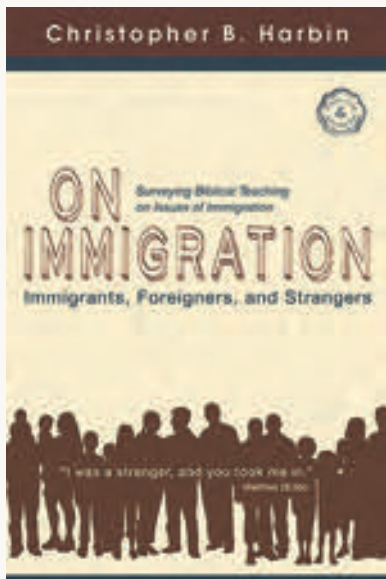
Some 42 percent of respondents said abortions should be legal “under any

circumstances” (29 percent) or in “most circumstances” (13 percent) while only 19 percent said that abortions should be illegal “in all circumstances.” The poll showed 36 percent said the procedure should be legal “in only a few circumstances.”

The shift comes as states have increasingly been restricting access to abortion, with a debate also growing over bills to ban any abortion past the 20-week mark of a pregnancy.

Yet it’s not clear that the shift to a “pro-choice” preference will herald a truce in the political battle over abortion that is sure to play a role in the 2016 presidential campaign: Democrats are still most likely to identify as “pro-choice” (68 percent) and Republicans as “pro-life” (31 percent).

Gallup noted in its analysis that it does not define the “pro-choice” and “pro-life” terms for respondents, but says that “their answers to a separate question about the legality of abortion indicate that those favoring the pro-choice label generally support broad abortion rights, while pro-life adherents mostly favor limited or no abortion rights.” **BT**



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