

Spring 2008

## Theology, News and Notes - Vol. 55, No. 02

Fuller Theological Seminary

D. Scott Cormode

Linda M. Wagener

Timothy A. Kelley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/tnn>

 Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fuller Theological Seminary; Cormode, D. Scott; Wagener, Linda M.; and Kelley, Timothy A., "Theology, News and Notes - Vol. 55, No. 02" (2008). *Theology News & Notes*. 163.  
<https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/tnn/163>

This Periodical is brought to you for free and open access by the Fuller Seminary Publications at Digital Commons @ Fuller. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theology News & Notes by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Fuller. For more information, please contact [archives@fuller.edu](mailto:archives@fuller.edu).

# THEOLOGY NEWS & NOTES



## How to Talk Politics Without Dividing the Congregation

About This Issue D. SCOTT CORMODE AND LINDA M. WAGENER **2**

Get People to See What the Scripture Says D. SCOTT CORMODE **4**

The Case for Principled Centrism TIMOTHY A. KELLY **6**

Peacemaking Ethics, Not Party Endorsements GLEN H. STASSEN **9**

Unity of the Body in the Divisive Age of Red and Blue ERIN DUFAULT-HUNTER **11**

Creating a New Framework for Evangelical Voters BARBARA WILLIAMS-SKINNER **14**

Getting Christians to Talk Together about Immigration Reform JUAN FRANCISCO MARTÍNEZ **17**

Using Case Studies to Introduce Controversial Issues C. DOUGLAS MCCONNELL **20**



## How To Talk Politics Without Dividing the Congregation

**Y**OU ARE GOING TO TALK about *politics*?" she asked incredulously, "from the pulpit?" Her eyes narrowed and her brow furrowed. "Which side are you going to take?" I assured my friend that my intention was not to take any side, but rather to frame the issue of immigration according to biblical ideas and Christian perspectives. "So whose side are you on?" she insisted, sure there was no way I could talk about immigration from a Southern California pulpit otherwise.

In a way she was right. When I was shaking hands at the door after the sermon, one of my favorite people in the church came to the door with Bible open and jaw set. "What about this passage, here," she said, pointing at Romans, "You didn't talk about *this*." From this saint's perspective (witnessed by her pro-Bush bumper sticker), I had had not supported the side of the angels. My friend's advice against preaching on politics looked for a moment like wisdom. Yet there was no hue and cry after the sermon, no uproar. In the end, the sermon stimulated conversation not controversy. But for some preachers, that is beside the point.

There *could* have been an uproar. Someone *could* have been offended. And, as one of my students said in class just this week, "My calling is to preach the gospel—to tell lost souls about the love of Christ. If anything gets in the way of that message, I have to prune it. I cannot afford to talk about anything controversial because it might get in the way of the gospel message."

Another student in the same class took the opposite approach. She said that she could not help but talk about politics because she was called to preach about the things that matter most to people. Or, as was said in an earlier meeting of the same class, "My preaching agenda requires me to preach about the things that keep people awake at night." And what people think about controversial issues like immigration are too heated not to preach about them.

So what is a preacher to do?

In the next few months, the presidential election will engage

Americans in heartfelt debates about important social issues. As Christians, we know that what we believe should affect how we think about these issues. Yet most pastors face a dilemma. On the one hand, no one wants to appear to take sides, lest they look like a shill for a particular candidate or position. On the other hand, no one wants to leave the impression that the Lord of All Life has no jurisdiction in the political realm.

The problem gets even stickier. Our congregations are divided. Some parishioners ardently support a position or candidate that the person in the pew next to them abhors. Taking sides on an issue, then, might mean pitting one congregant against another. No wonder it is tempting for the pulpit to remain silent on exactly the issues that most need interpretation. So the question is how to talk about politics without dividing the congregation?

The purpose of this issue is to provide different models for engaging social questions. The goal is to demonstrate different ways that people have taken up these issues in their congregations. The articles take a number of forms. Two are autobiographical, with authors describing their own lives and choices; others are more analytical, taking up the question of a particular issue. But each article shares a common desire to allow Christians to talk together about the issues that matter most in our political world.

In the first article, Scott Cormode describes his attempts to help a congregation think about a controversial issue. Careful not to take a stand on the issue, he focused instead on biblical words and phrases that most of his congregants had not seen as important to the debate. By removing himself from the debate and focusing on theological ideas, he gives his congregation space to make their own decisions.

Timothy Kelly is also careful not to participate directly as a partisan. He describes his work at the De Pree Leadership Center Public Policy Institute, where he is trying to create a safe, common ground where people in Pasadena can gather in order to work out their differences. He is particularly interested in creating a space for "principled centrism."

Glen Stassen takes an autobiographical approach by explaining how his father's experience of war shaped him. It prompted both Stassens to devote their labors to making room for peace. His honest and clear-eyed approach shows how past experience can become future action.

Erin Dufault-Hunter describes how Christians can be freed from the usual brand of politics as competition. She uses her work on bioethics to show how Christians, who are known in many places for taking some of the most uncompromising and un-graceful positions, can instead practice creative cooperation.

Every Christian has to make judgment calls, especially in the political realm. The hard part of these judgments come when we have to explain—even to ourselves—the rationale we use to arrive at those judgments. Barbara Williams-Skinner is a self-described evangelical who writes as a "politically active African American" and a "pro-life Democrat with ties to persons of diverse political backgrounds." She takes her faith seriously and believes that it should shape the way she acts in the political world. Her article is an attempt to explain her own reasoning—the theological rationale she uses to decide how she acts in the political world. Every Christian has to make similar judgments. And, whether you agree or disagree with her conclusions, her essay is a model for how Christian laypeople can think seriously about the logics that

lead us to make political judgments.

Juan Martínez takes up the question of immigration, but not as an abstract question. He describes congregations that pray for relatives who are "coming tonight," yearning for a life of hope. And he notes that other congregations pray about their fear regarding those same immigrants. Martínez asks what role the church can play in living out the biblical mandates to obey laws and to care for foreigners. He answers his own question by describing a process that builds not just toward hospitality but toward *shalom*.

In the final article, Doug McConnell demonstrates how to use a case study approach to encourage a congregation to do more than simply discuss an issue. He believes that discernment should lead to action. And, by describing in detail how one American congregation addressed the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, McConnell provides a framework for how Christians of good faith can translate that faith in action—even when they take up a potentially divisive issue.

There is a common theme in these articles. Each one believes that God's people should be at work in God's world to bring out the redemption and hope that is at the core of the gospel. Each article describes a role for Christian churches that transcends partisan politics and advocates for reconciliation and righteousness. ■

## THEOLOGY NEWS & NOTES

Vol. 55, No. 2

**President:**

Richard J. Mouw, PhD

**Editorial Board:**

James H. Morrison, ThM, Chair

David Bundy, ThM

D. Scott Cormode, PhD

Ronald J. Kernaghan, PhD

C. Douglas McConnell, PhD

Robert P. Meye, DTheol

William E. Pannell, DD

Richard V. Peace, PhD

Cecil M. Robeck Jr., PhD

Clayton J. Schmit, PhD

Linda M. Wagener, PhD

**Manager/Designer:** Randall Cole

**Editor:** Lauralee Farrer

**Mechanical Editor/**

**Proofreader:** Susan Carlson Wood

**Circulation:** Dottie Yelsik

**Send change of address to:**

Fuller Theological Seminary

Office of Publications

135 N. Oakland Avenue

Pasadena, CA 91182

**Internet address:**

[www.fuller.edu/news/pubs/tnn](http://www.fuller.edu/news/pubs/tnn)

Cover photo from iStockphoto

*Theology, News & Notes* (ISSN 1529-899X) is published for the alumni/ae and friends of Fuller Theological Seminary. It is published three times a year, in Winter, Spring, and Fall.

The editorial content of *Theology, News & Notes* reflects the opinions of the various authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the views of Fuller Theological Seminary. ©2008 by Fuller Theological Seminary. Produced in limited quantities for alumni/ae and friends.

### THE MINISTRY OF FULLER

Fuller Theological Seminary, embracing the Schools of Theology, Psychology, and Intercultural Studies, is an evangelical, multid denominational, international, and multiethnic community dedicated to the preparation of men and women for the manifold ministries of Christ and his Church. Under the authority of Scripture it seeks to fulfill its commitment to ministry through graduate education, professional development, and spiritual formation. In all of its activities, including instruction, nurture, worship, service, research, and publication, Fuller Theological Seminary strives for excellence in the service of Jesus Christ, under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father.



## One Basic Idea: Get People to See What the Scripture Says

**M**Y FAVORITE SERMONS ARE the ones that surprise me. You know what I mean. The preacher takes me down a familiar biblical path, pointing out scriptural terrain we all know well. And then it happens—a nuance I never noticed before, or an application I did not see coming. Something about the sermon gets my attention and makes me see the Scripture differently. I like to hear sermons that surprise me and I like to preach sermons that surprise people.

At the same time, my least favorite sermons can also be the ones that surprise me. Sometimes I want the Bible to confirm what I already know. Sometimes I don't want the preacher (or the Holy Spirit) to teach me something that challenges what I already know—especially if this new knowledge pushes me to reexamine my behavior. I don't

mind learning something. But sometimes I don't want to have to change how I act. It makes me uncomfortable.

I try to keep this in mind when I preach. I want people to learn something—even something that makes them uncomfortable. But I don't want to push them so fast that they tune me out. It's a delicate balance between pushing them enough to see them grow, but not pushing them so fast that they

ignore the sermon. For that reason, I used to avoid preaching on topics that had political implications. It didn't seem to be worth the grief. The people that agreed with me would leave church no different than when they came, and the folks who disagreed with me would too easily ignore the sermon.

But then the Holy Spirit (coming once again in the voice of my wife) challenged me. Do I believe that what we believe should influence how we vote? Of course. And do I believe that sermons should help people clarify their beliefs? Um, yes

. . . then shouldn't our sermons talk about politics? Well, okay. We can either assume that the beliefs that affect voting are so private that the preacher should never talk about them, or we are going to have to find a way to preach about faith and politics without alienating people.

So I decided to give it a try. Not long ago, I preached on a topic I knew was going to make many in my congregation uncomfortable. The passage had clear political implications. And I felt the dilemma. *How does one preach in such a way that congregants remain open to changing their minds?* I do not claim to have a definitive answer to that question. I can, however, explain what I intended to do, describe what I did, and then evaluate how effective the sermon was. My goal is not so much to hold my actions up as a model as it is to stimulate thinking about how to make similar attempts.

### What I Intended to Do

I think it is easier to preach on uncomfortable topics in an evangelical congregation than it is in other kinds of churches. In a liberal congregation, everyone is entitled to an opinion and the preacher's is just one voice among many. But in a conservative church, we have agreed on a standard. We all appeal to Scripture. In the evangelical churches I have known, we have all agreed that we should change our behavior to conform to Scripture. We may argue about what the Bible means (and, *boy*, can we argue), but we all come with a common commitment to obeying the voice of God as conveyed in Scripture.

So I began my preparation for this potentially uncomfortable sermon with one basic idea: to get people to see what Scripture says. I did not want to get into a debate about the implications of Scripture. I wanted to start by challenging an unquestioned assumption about Scripture itself.

The topic I chose was immigration reform—a particularly hot topic in my corner of Southern California. I did not want to debate particular immigration proposals or to mention particular candidates. I wanted to talk only about the Bible.

My goal was to introduce an Old Testament phrase that was not a part of the common lexicon of my congregation, but was absolutely central to the message of the prophets: “widows, orphans, and aliens in your midst.” I wanted them to see that Old Testament prophets repeatedly demanded that God's people protect the most vulnerable people in their society—summarized by “widows, orphans, and aliens in your midst.” The key, of course, would be how people came to understand the Hebrew word for “aliens.” I believed that if they came to understand the meaning of that word in its context, it would be a short step to connect that word to the aliens living in our midst. In other words, I knew that *if they heard the Bible speaking—rather than my voice—that they would be far more open to changing their minds.*

### What I Did

The sermon focused on Deuteronomy 26:1–13. The passage includes what is perhaps the earliest theological formulation, “My father was a wandering Aramean . . .” and ends with the commandment to set aside a tenth of the produce of the land for the Levites (which most people in my congregation remembered) and for the aliens, orphans, and widows of the land. “When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. Then say to the LORD your God, ‘I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the alien, the orphan, and the widow’” (Deut. 26:12, 13).

The sermon had two main points. First, the nation was a nation of immigrants: God told them to remember that their ancestors were exploited in Egypt and commanded them to treat aliens in their midst as they wished they had been treated in Egypt. Second, the sermon took the congregation on a word study of the Hebrew word *ger*, which is translated here as “alien” or “sojourner.” I preached with a much more scholarly style—quoting sources and explaining fine points from the commentaries—so that *the sermon was about what the word meant and not about my opinions or the inferences I draw from the word.* We talked about the context surrounding Deuteronomy's writing—about the wars and the refugees fleeing from other countries.

I then asked them to take out their pew Bibles and turn to Deuteronomy 24, attempting to let the text speak as much as possible. Verses 14 and 15 paint a picture of a day laborer who is easily exploited and who has no recourse—elders would side with their countrymen if charges were brought. Verses 17 and 18 go on, “Do not deprive the alien or the orphan of justice or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt.” In other words, you were aliens once and you should remember what it means to be an alien. This section of the sermon ended with a tour of passages in Deuteronomy with the theme, “Do not oppress the widow, the orphan, or the alien in your midst.”

By this time, I was fairly sure that most people in my middle-class, suburban congregation had heard at least something of what Deuteronomy was trying to tell them. I could guess that at least a bulk of them had a question—one that was prompted by the local political debates. So I asked it for them. “But what about illegal aliens?”

An alien in the Old Testament, I told them, is a foreigner who did not belong, who took menial, day-to-day work (if they could find it), and who was an economic burden on the community. Scripture does not distinguish between legal and illegal aliens because they were *all* illegal aliens—Abraham, Jacob's children in Egypt, the people Joshua led into Canaan, Ruth the Moabitess. None of them belonged.

The sermon ended without drawing present-day political implications. I told the congregation I would leave conclusions to them, but I emphasized three main points in Deuteronomy: *do not take advantage or exploit* widows, orphans, or aliens; *provide for* widows, orphans, and aliens (the book of Ruth turns on the willingness of a righteous Boaz to do just that); and, finally, *be like God*—“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the orphan and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt” (Deut. 10:17–19).

### How It Worked Out

My goal had been to get the people of my congregation to make the connection between the aliens of the Old Testament and the aliens of today—and perhaps to see that we, too, are a nation of immigrants. My assumption was that this congregation honors Scripture enough to feel the prick when their own views do not align with the Bible.

### Was It Successful?

There is, of course, no way to know what effect any sermon has, but there were signs suggesting that some people heard what they did not want to and had the integrity to consider it. As one woman came to shake hands at the door, she had her Bible open and was pointing at Romans: “But the Bible *also* says to obey the government's authorities.” Weeks later she said something that made me realize she was still chewing on it. And, in the end, that's what a preacher hopes to hear. ■

### SYNOPSIS

Cormode contends that, as evangelicals, an assumption of conforming to Scripture is a hopeful basis for addressing contentious issues. By appealing to Scripture—even when interpretations are under debate—we can find common ground.

D. Scott Cormode joined the faculty of Fuller in 2006 as the Hugh De Pree Associate Professor of Leadership Development. An ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), he served for the previous decade as George Butler Associate Professor of Church Administration and Finance at Claremont School of Theology. He founded the Academy of Religious Leadership and the *Journal of Religious Leadership*, for which he also acts as editor. His articles have appeared in *Christian Century*, *Theological Education*, and *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, and his most recent book is *Making Spiritual Sense: Theological Interpretation as Christian Leadership* (Abingdon Press, 2006).



## How to Engage Politics Without Taking Sides: The Case for Principled Centrism

**M**ANY POLITICALLY-ENGAGED Christians today proclaim loyalty to a given position on the political spectrum—be it liberal or conservative, Republican or Democratic. They may feel strongly about global warming, immigration reform, Iraq, abortion, healthcare coverage, gay marriage, or another current issue. This is an improvement from the “apolitical” era wherein many devout Christians believed that any political engagement was somehow inappropriate for a person of faith—as if religious beliefs and values should apply to other-worldly concerns, but have no relevance to the world of public discourse and public policy. This perspective was challenged and eventually displaced in the 1980s by the claim that people of faith could and should engage the political process. Since then America has witnessed

theologically driven engagement both from evangelical conservatives (e.g., James Dobson and Focus on the Family), and evangelical liberals (e.g., Jim Wallis and the Sojourners).

Such engagement has led at times to inept public judgments made in the name of Christianity (e.g., 9/11 being God’s judgment on certain sins), and some may wish we could return to the good old days when political considerations never troubled the thinking of a person of faith. But democracy

counts on the active participation of all citizens, so engagement is appropriate and necessary. The question is not whether people of faith should engage the political process, but how to do so with sophistication and credibility. This article presents the case for “principled centrism” as a means for achieving such engagement.

*Timothy A. Kelly is director of the De Pree Leadership Center Public Policy Institute (which addresses current issues with “principled centrism”), associate professor of psychology at Fuller’s School of Psychology, and a specialist in international mental health reform for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration—the primary federal mental health policy agency. Kelly is on California Senator Jack Scott’s Health Care Advisory Committee, on the Altadena Town Council, and on the Pasadena City Council’s Youth Development Committee. A licensed clinical psychologist, Kelly is writing a book for NYU Press on reforming America’s mental health care service delivery system.*

Unfortunately, today’s political arena is characterized by partisan polarization and the vilification of any who dare to disagree. Christians tend to follow this pattern as well, often mindlessly reiterating their leader’s positions rather than engaging in civil dialogue and discourse with people from all perspectives. The tell-tale sign is the tendency to malign those of the opposite opinion—to see the political realm very much in terms of “us versus them.”

I experienced this not too long ago at Fuller when I participated in a panel discussion on the topic of immigration reform during the height of national protests. Payton 101 (a large conference room) was filled to capacity, and the discussion became heated at times as panelists and students debated the pros and cons of granting full amnesty for illegal immigrants, whether or not to have open borders, and related issues regarding justice versus mercy. My view was that Congress would likely pass a compromise solution involving partial amnesty, and that this was perhaps a reasonable outcome given the weight of arguments on both sides of the issue. My wife, however, was in the audience and happened to hear the conversation of some passionately pro-full-amnesty students who were sitting right in front of her. What surprised her (and me as she recounted it later) was how viciously these students were referring to me among themselves. Clearly I was their “enemy” since I was not promoting full amnesty, and they were calculating how best to shoot me down via personal attack. Eventually they selected one of the group to go to the microphone and challenge me on my compassion—attempting to make me look heartless. The effort failed, but it surprised me that I was so easily cast as the villain in the eyes of these seminarians simply because I was articulating a position they disagreed with. They didn’t even know me, yet assumed all the worst because I was not in their camp. All this at a seminary that is known worldwide as a place for reasoned and informed theological debate on the issues of the day.

Why didn’t the seminarians take the time to dialogue

with me before casting me in the role of villain? I believe it is because we evangelicals have followed the general culture into the politics of polarization. We have bought into the notion that the only way to stand for our principles and values, the only way to passionately engage the issues of the day, is to stake out and defend our preferred liberal or conservative positions at all costs. It feels good to do so since it is both politically correct and emotionally satisfying. But is it the right thing to do? Wouldn’t it be better to find a way to hold on to one’s principles and values without vilifying the opposition? Wouldn’t that be more consistent with the biblical teachings we say we adhere to?

Pastors and other Christian leaders need to provide for the evangelical community by finding a new way to talk about political concerns—abandoning their preconceived and prepackaged political positions and promoting something new, something we may call principled centrism.

### Principled Centrism Defined

America is beginning to witness a backlash against the politics of polarization, coupled with a yearning for centrism. For example, a recent book by John Avalon titled *Independent Nation: How the Vital Center is Changing American Politics* claims that the most effective leaders are those who govern from the center (e.g., Teddy Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Rudi Giuliani, Bill Clinton, John McCain, Joe Lieberman). But the trouble with centrism, at least in the minds of many, is that it does not seem to stand for anything other than compromise. Thus people of passion and commitment tend to see centrism as a way of selling out. The assumption is that only truly committed liberals or conservatives can stand passionately for their principles. But suppose there is a way to promote core principles and values from the center? Suppose there is a way to be passionate about what we believe, engage public discourse, yet still welcome those with whom we disagree? This is the basic thesis of principled centrism—that it is possible to hold on to core principles and values (many of which are rooted in traditional Judaic-Christian ethics) and engage the issues of the day from the center. The corollary is that in doing so one can welcome rather than vilify the opposition.

Take, for example, the core value of human rights applied to imprisonment—the belief that every person has the right to be treated with dignity and with justice, even when charged with wrongdoing. Committed liberals may easily apply this concept to those imprisoned by the U.S. on Guantanamo Bay without trial. Committed conservatives may easily apply it to those imprisoned by China for their religious beliefs without trial. But human rights is not inher-

ently a liberal or conservative value—it belongs to the center. After all, from a Judaic-Christian perspective, human rights are grounded in the belief that every person is created in the image of God and thus deserves to be treated well. Principled centrism would hold that both scenarios are grievous and in need of reform based on a high valuing of human rights.

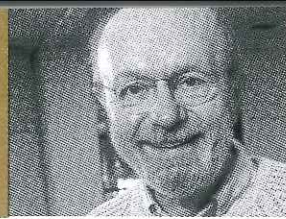
Or what about the tension between environmental concerns and productivity? Committed liberals may champion the cause of global warming and call for the U.S. to adhere to the Kyoto accord by reducing greenhouse gases on an emergency basis—regardless of economic impact. Committed conservatives may counter with the critical role of productivity, calling for technological innovation as the only response to global warming that will not threaten economic stability. But concern for the environment is not inherently liberal, and concern for productivity is not inherently conservative. From a Judaic-Christian perspective, environmental concern is grounded in the concept of stewardship—the notion that humankind is to be held responsible for taking good care of the earth and all it contains. Productivity is grounded in the concept of personal responsibility—the notion that mature people should work hard and create wealth for the benefit of family and community. Principled centrism would thus call for finding a solution at the intersection of these two concerns, since both come from shared core values.

Most, if not all, of the hot issues of the day can be re-framed in this manner. One needs to begin by analyzing the positions of committed liberals and conservatives in terms of the underlying principle or value that is assumed. Then re-frame it from the position of centrism, within the framework of relevant principles and values. Why should we pay attention only to those who yell the loudest, who are invariably on the extreme spectrum either left or right—as if they have a corner on the issues of the day? Why not blaze a trail of principled centrism that assumes average people can think for themselves, pick and choose what seems best from either party, and passionately engage the issues of the day from the center with civility?

Put another way, principled centrism is both an approach to political dialogue and an appeal to core values. The approach is one of moderation and civility—granting the valid point in opposing views. Relevant principles and values are identified and appealed to as the framework within which such dialogue can succeed.

### Principled Centrism Applied

As an example of principled centrism applied, consider the following which occurred during the latter months of 2007 leading up to New Year’s Day:



Every year Pasadena, California, hosts the New Year's Day Rose Parade, televised by the major networks, and seen by tens of millions throughout the world. This year—for the first time—China was invited to sponsor a float, in celebration of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. This led to an outcry from the Falun Gong and human rights organizations such as Reporters without Borders, who decried the status of human rights in China and called for the float to be cancelled. In response, the Mayor of Pasadena and others stood by the invitation and claimed that friendship with China was the best way to advance human rights concerns. I published an editorial article in the local paper addressing the topic from the position of principled centrism, titled "A Time for Principled Friendship," excerpted below:

EVERY day there are newspaper articles analyzing current events in China. . . . The focus of interest runs the gamut from global economic concerns to the fine points of Chinese opera. With the notable exception of Iraq, our eyes are fixed upon China more than any other nation on the planet. . . .

*The Economist* projects that China's economic output will match America's by 2020. How long then until China's economic resources, military might and cultural influences displace U.S. prominence? Even more importantly, is that good or bad? . . .

That all depends on what sort of nation China becomes. . . . Will she be a powerful but open and free society, a force for good in the world? Or will she wield her power autocratically, as a force to be contended with?

The answer clearly lies primarily with the Chinese people. It is up to them to chart the course of their destiny as a nation as they wrestle with challenges such as poverty, corruption, environmental issues and human rights concerns. China's President—Hu Jintao—seems to be leading the country in a positive direction, balancing the demands of the old power structure with the need to move forward. . . .

But there is another force that is also helping to shape the outcome of this drama—America. As the current sole superpower, the U.S. has an enormous ability to support or impede China's efforts to move forward. Based on congressional statements and media commentators, public opinion ranges from Sinophobia to blind support. . . .

Either extreme is a recipe for disaster. If the U.S. resists China at every turn as a feared competitor, we must not then be surprised if she becomes our enemy. Alternatively, if America believes we must leave our values behind to appease China, then we should not be surprised to find ourselves doing business with a nation that is tone deaf to Western concerns. What to do?

The U.S. should stand in the "principled center" of the political spectrum, and find ways to relate to China that are neither imperialistic nor naïve. It is not imperialistic to ask questions of a friend regarding human rights concerns in the hope that reasonable solutions can be found. And it is not naïve to welcome China's rising, even if all concerns have not yet been resolved. . . .

Amnesty International and others are concerned that inclusion of a China Olympics 2008 float in the New Year's Rose Parade may undermine efforts to improve human rights in China. Some argue that the float invitation should be withdrawn, and yet were that to be done it would humiliate the Chinese government and likely not improve conditions on the ground. Others argue it is inappropriate to even raise such concerns since they are none of our business, and yet basic human rights are intrinsic to Western civilization and relevant to international affairs. What to do?

A principled centrist approach would be to let the China float roll unimpeded, and at the same time seek reasonable means to express concern—such as a statement encouraging human rights progress. In this way, values are not ignored, yet the bilateral friendship is maintained. The float can celebrate the Olympics, which brings nations together in peace and pageantry; and the statement can provide notice that human rights are indeed of critical importance. The hope is for the two nations to learn from each other and eventually adopt shared values. . . .

May the U.S. have the wisdom to reach out in friendship, principles intact, to our rising neighbor across the Pacific. Sino-American collaboration can flourish, making it more likely both nations will learn from each other and grow—regardless of who is No. 1.

The main theme of the article is that there is a way to stand for principles, in this case human rights, without destroying something important, in this case relations with China. Principled centrism may thus be seen as a "third way" on the political spectrum, since it attempts to avoid the errors of both the far left and the far right. It does so by finding a way to move forward that is sensitive to both sides of the argument, that seeks common ground so as to be politically feasible, and that is firmly within the boundaries of any relevant core principles and values.

The response to my article was surprisingly positive both in the public sector and in the private sector. In the public sector, Pasadena's mayor passed it out to the city council members as providing a helpful framework for addressing the topic of the float, as they faced calls from many quarters to take various actions—pro and con. The city council ended

continued on page 23

## Proclaim Jesus' Way with Content: Peacemaking Ethics, Not Party Endorsements

**M**Y REPUBLICAN FATHER resigned from the governorship during his third term as governor of Minnesota in order to join the U.S. Navy during World War II. He became Chief of Staff for Admiral Halsey, and eventually was promoted to the rank of captain. He fought in furious battles against the Japanese Navy in the islands of the South Pacific. We received news that his ship had been torpedoed and sunk, and Dad had drowned. We wept the bitter tears that far too many families have wept. But, thank God, the news turned out to be wrong: Dad had survived. We regularly listened to the news of the war on the radio, praying for Dad's safety. I remember one night at dinner when we heard the news that the Japanese had surrendered. Prayers of thanksgiving!

As soon as the Japanese government *decided* to surrender—even before they signed—Dad entered Japan with only three other sailors in a single jeep and rushed from prisoner of War (POW) camp to POW camp, freeing prisoners so they would not die or be killed in the chaos, and sending them to hospital ships in Tokyo Bay. For the rest of his life as he traveled, veterans would come up to him with tears in their eyes, telling him he had saved their lives. He came home with pictures of thin and hungry prisoners and descriptions of the destruction and death in those fierce battles for islands like Okinawa, and the destruction and death in Japan. He said, "Glen, war is so horrible that we have got to do all we can to prevent World War III and nuclear war."

President Roosevelt appointed him a member of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations Charter Assembly in San Francisco in 1945. He devoted himself to resolving the complex disagreements among the many nations represented, including Russia, in order to achieve a successful U.N. charter. When that conference was finished, the reporters from the many nations took a vote on who had done the most for the success of the U.N. Charter Assembly: the ambassador from Australia and my father tied. Later, President Eisenhower gave Dad the job of negotiating with the Soviet Union about nuclear arms control. He began the U.S. Arms

Control and Disarmament Agency, which continued that work until it was recently disbanded.

So I grew up with a personal experience of a father who knew the evil of war and its human suffering, and became committed to doing his part to prevent another such war *in a bipartisan way*. Most Americans do not share my experience, unless a family member fought in one of the recent wars, because our wars have been fought in distant lands. As a nation, we are too unaware of the death and destruction war brings.

So the first thing I advocate for churches to do is tell of the suffering of war as often as the Bible does. Jesus warns about the destruction of war in Mark 13 and Matthew 24; he warns five times of the coming destruction of the temple (by Roman war in A.D. 70); and the prophets repeatedly warn of the destruction of war. And they call us to do the practices that make for peace. I have preached on Jeremiah 4. It reads like a description of destruction from nuclear war and calls for repentance from practices that lead to war.

In the 1950s, during the height of the Cold War and the McCarthy era, when anti-Russian fear and hatred were spreading, my pastor went to preach at a Moscow Baptist church and invited their pastor to preach in ours. His Christian witness impacted us: he supported peacemaking initiatives. I remember clearly one Sunday morning—it was one of those epiphanies when you remember exactly where you were sitting, and what vision came to you—when I received a vision of churches as actually following Jesus, actually making a witness for peacemaking, actually making a difference, as my pastor was doing. So, the second thing I

### SYNOPSIS

Stassen urges churches to employ the practices of just peacemaking to teach congregations about the Christian ethics of peace and war. By standing firmly in the way of Jesus, he says, we will not be blown about by the shifting winds of ideologies.

**Glen H. Stassen**, the Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics, has expertise in Christian ethics, just peacemaking, incarnational discipleship, the Sermon on the Mount, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Howard Yoder, and H. Richard Niebuhr. He is editor of *Peace Action: Past, Present, and Future* (Paradigms Press, 2007) and *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War* (Pilgrim, 1998/2004/2008), and author of *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (Jossey-Bass, 2006), and (with David P. Gushee) *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in a Contemporary Context* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), which won *Christianity Today's* award for best book of 2004 in theology or ethics.



advocate is that pastors and church members pray for peace, and do some deeds of peacemaking now and then.

My own talents were in nuclear physics, and I worked briefly doing research at the Naval Research Laboratory and then at Melpar Research Laboratory in the Washington, D.C. area. Working there, I could not ignore the huge threat from nuclear bombs as most do. As I sat at a Van de Graaf accelerator, I received a calling from God: we don't need better nuclear bombs; we need an ethic that prevents those bombs from going off and killing us all. I was a deeply committed Christian, as my father was. (He became president of the American Baptist Convention.) So I switched my work to teaching Christian ethics based on following Jesus in our lives, holistically—all of our lives, not just part. Some have urged us to vote based on ideological issues that Jesus does not mention. Jesus clearly calls his followers to be peacemakers, so peacemaking is one crucial criterion for deciding whom to vote for.

I believe in separation of church and party. My pastors do not tell me what party they vote for, and I don't tell my students. I want churches to teach their members specifically about Christian ethics on peace and war and to stand firmly for the way of Jesus, so we are not blown about by the shifting winds of ideology (Eph. 4:14). If Christians lack clear Christian ethics, we lack antibodies against infection by the war spirit when war is on the way. Without clear Christian ethics, our citizenship will be formed by partisan ideologies. So I urge that we teach church members *just war* theory, consistent nonviolence, and *just peacemaking* theory. We ought to teach all three and encourage members to discuss and discern prayerfully what kind of ethics they will be guided by, rather than forcing them into only one ethic. All three are described in one succinct chapter in *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy*, edited by Ron Sider and Diane Knippers (Baker, 2006), and in chapter 7 of *Kingdom Ethics* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), by David Gushee and me.

Just war theory was taught first by St. Augustine in the fourth century. It is based on commitments to the sanctity of human life and to justice and human rights. So we must have strong reasons of justice for overriding the presumption against killing people. A justifiable war must have a just cause—defending a neighbor or our own nation against unjust massacres. It must be last resort—there must be no way to prevent the massacres short of making war. There must be a reasonable hope of success in stopping the massacres—otherwise the killing of war will be carried out for no realistic reason. Those attacked must be the military whom we are defending against or their military suppliers—otherwise we are killing needlessly. Enemies have human rights and must not be attacked if they are not themselves

part of a military attack. (Terrorism intentionally targets civilians, and is always evil, no matter what ideological reasons are claimed for it.)

Consistent nonviolence is taught by discipleship-oriented groups, such as Christians in the first three centuries, Franciscans, Hussites, Waldensians, Anabaptists, Quakers, Brethren, the original Pentecostals, and many other Christians. It says that nonviolence takes the way of Jesus and the witness of the New Testament as authoritative. Killing enemies is wrong not only because it kills people, but also because it disobeys Jesus and distorts Christian witness. In the crusades, Christian soldiers with crosses on their breastplates and banners, marching to kill Muslims, made a perverse witness that turned Islam more militantly against Christian faith. And today, if war is made against Muslim nations by a nation that claims to be Christian, it stiffens resistance against the gospel and threatens the lives of Christians and Christian missionaries. Ronald Sider defines nonviolence as “an activist confrontation with evil that respects the personhood even of the ‘enemy.’ [It] refers to a vast variety of methods or strategies.” Pacifists like Martin Luther King Jr. are active in seeking ways to make peace.

Just peacemaking theory arose from several church denominations in the 1980s that said debating only between just war theory and consistent nonviolence narrows the discussion to whether it is *ever* right to fight a war. But Jesus taught peacemaking initiatives, and war is so destructive that we need an ethic of prevention. Therefore, the practices in just peacemaking ethics seek to follow teachings of Jesus, and to follow what history shows actually works to prevent war. These are not just “ideals.” They are practices that are actually preventing wars: Support nonviolent direct action. Use cooperative conflict resolution. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice; seek repentance and forgiveness. Promote democracy, human rights, and religious liberty. Foster just and sustainable economic development. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system, including the United Nations and regional organizations. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations, especially churches. (The struggle against terrorism demands these practices of peacemaking and justice by both Muslims and Christians. We need to correct the bitter injustices and heal the festering resentments that breed terrorists, as well as countering blatantly false propaganda and extremist education that fuel violence.)

Many churches have small groups with a mission. Each church should have at least one small group whose mission

continued on page 13

## Purple People: Unity of the Body in the Divisive Age of Red and Blue

### Freed from Politics as Usual

**A**FTER REFLECTING ON THE role of the church in secular society, a student of mine proposed a new website that would refuse to be drawn into the two political camps that dominate in our democracy—sometimes identified by the colors red and blue. He wanted to call it “purple politics,” and though the site wouldn't say anything about being overtly Christian, it would discuss issues and policy from a Christian perspective. It would direct people to various news sources, so that voters would be better informed about a spectrum of views. He quite rightly recognized what many evangelical Christians are rediscovering: we need to pursue justice and peace, but we cannot be too closely linked to the secular organizations or their politics without losing something of our soul. Evangelicals have been used by the right, as (Republican) David Kuo's recent book on his sojourn in the White House so poignantly reveals; we have been ignored or mocked by the left, as (Democrat) Jim Wallis has observed.<sup>1</sup>

On one level, the church can disengage, bow out of the democratic process and secular government, claiming (quite rightly) that the world's ways are not our ways and that earthly powers are subject to corruption. This is not our home; we are always exiles, awaiting the return of our true King. Such an approach has a strong and long history in my adopted denominational tradition, the Mennonites, but finds echoes in many other traditions. Alone, however, this emphasis remains unsatisfactory to many, including many Anabaptists. God provides secular systems like government for the ordering of our common life so that humanity might flourish (as is the emphasis of my denomination by birth, the Catholic Church).

In order to be faithful to her King and to her neighbors, the church must acknowledge both of these truths: First, secular politics is corrupt, corrupting, and penultimate; our primary loyalty is to kingdom of God and therefore we should never be surprised by the evil done by governments or by the

powerful. This first truth is the one that sets us free to embrace the second: We are commanded to serve this world because we know it will one day reflect the fullness of God's reign. Such service includes careful discernment of policies and legislation that profoundly affect the quality of peoples' lives; by doing so, we obey God's call to “seek the welfare [*shalom*] of the city” (Jer. 29:7).

### In Pursuit of Wisdom: Body Politics as Faithful Witness

Once this stance toward the secular realm is established, we can move to a second set of guidelines for becoming “purple people”: the body of Christ as the model for politics as *unusual*, i.e., politics as the humble pursuit of God's wisdom.

Given our current secular political climate, it is hard to imagine a more important role for the church than that of thoughtful, prayerful, and reflective engagement on policies in a way that underscores our interdependence. Paul spends a great deal of time in the NT discussing unity and practicing discernment, even as (or perhaps because) his ministry was marked by the deeply divisive and emotional negotiation of the inclusion of Gentile believers. I think we evangelicals are loathe to discuss unity too much, because we think that it implies a retreat or withdrawal from our convictions, resulting in a milk toast Christianity characterized by compromise. But Paul doesn't think so; while accused of many things, he's seldom characterized as wishy-washy. We hear echoes of Jesus' prayer in John 17 in his first letter to the Corinthians.

In it, Paul lays out the basis of our interdependence in his description of the body in chapter 12 as an organic whole, arguing that the most vulnerable and weak are not only

### SYNOPSIS

In a red/blue world, the church serves the secular world best by remembering her own unique take on politics, argues Dufault-Hunter. Good politics are characterized by Pauline humility, seeking unity and the collective good by fostering a robust and creative diversity.

**Erin Dufault-Hunter**, assistant professor of Christian ethics, joined the faculty of Fuller in 2006 after having served as adjunct assistant professor in ethics in the School of Theology since 2003. She has written on secularism, narrative theory, and the sociology of religion for many publications including *Christian Reflection* and *The InterVarsity Press Global Dictionary of Theology*. Dufault-Hunter's current research focuses on the issues of sexuality and the 21st-century family, and faithful grieving in bioethics. She is a member of the Bioethics Committee at Arcadia Methodist Hospital and serves on the board of directors at the Center for Anabaptist Leadership.

equals but worthy of “greater honor.” Amazingly, he claims, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). The extremity of his inclusion gives us pause—surely he doesn’t mean *each* person, for we all know people in church whom we are hard-pressed to acknowledge as having a positive contribution. Yet for Paul, as for Christ, our willingness to recognize our need for one another points to the One who called us together. He goes further in 1 Corinthians 14 discussing how to keep order and listen to the Spirit so that radical inclusivity doesn’t promote chaos or ineffectiveness.

But how can we be “one,” when we clearly disagree about matters close to our hearts and of tremendous moral consequence?

Here is an example of the seriousness of the problem: I am a member of a peace tradition that interprets the cross as prohibiting violence as a means of pursuing justice. Nonviolent resistance to evil is at the center of my faith in Jesus—a non-negotiable for me and for my community of faith. How, then, can I possibly teach at Fuller, which does not share, as a whole, my convictions about this? We disagree about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; we argue about the role of military chaplains. Pacifists remain in the minority.

Nevertheless, at its best, Fuller offers a microcosm of Paul’s wisdom of our need to listen humbly to one another despite our differences and to work across them for the common good. Despite my convictions, I must listen to the doubts of brothers and sisters about the wisdom of my pacifism. I have a dear friend here who is a military chaplain; by his friendship and his ministry, he checks my temptation to caricature and reminds me to pray for those with whom I disagree. He also—along with my students, colleagues, and readings of other Christian ethicists—reminds me that I am capable of being *wrong*. Likewise, I trust my presence influences others toward a more humble holding of their beliefs.

If we practice discernment tempered by an acknowledgment of our need for one another, we should never sit smugly in an intellectual and theological bubble. This is why Paul speaks in Corinthians about the role of the Spirit in discerning wisdom within the body: rather than relying on unchanging rules for righteous living, we must rely on the Spirit who dwells among us in our present age and guides us in our participation with Christ for the healing of the world.

#### **Freed from Rivalry for Creative Cooperation**

How do these discussions—a view of worldly politics on one hand and the practice of Christian politics on the other—affect us in pragmatic ways in election season? Being purple

people in a red/blue world prevents us from being distracted from our core identity. We might attach ourselves to the red or blue as a matter of strategy (one might argue that their party embodies more compassionate or wise policies as we understand them), but we cannot be fooled into thinking that the agenda of the Democratic or Republican party is somehow God’s. That is, bluntly, idolatry. We will always find ourselves at odds with persons within a party over something or other. For example, although I have marched beside so-called liberals against the recent wars, some of their views of abortion I find simplistic, foolish, or violent. This is an opportunity for evangelism and engagement, but it’s also tempting to be less than truthful about my faith and its implications because I want acceptance or power.

What about Paul’s radical body politics,<sup>2</sup> the willingness to listen to one another with respectful, expectant openness? Here is another example: In the circles in which I move, “big business” or “corporations” can become shorthand for evil capitalism run amok—the *enemy*. Yet I have had discussions with executives who struggle with their Christian commitments amidst the pursuit of biotechnical innovation. They develop drugs and therapies that help keep many of us alive—and able to protest corporate greed.

These Christian friends (with their gifts for business, money, technology, etc.) must willingly link their lives with my *other* friends (with their gifts of critical reflection, idealism, experience with the poor, etc.). How can we do so? By pursuing rather ordinary Christian politics—sharing our lives in small groups, pursuing missions here and abroad, singing God’s praises, studying Scripture, praying for one another in times of joy and distress, eating together, arguing over legislation, and doing the myriad things we Christians are meant to do. Boundaries between “us” and “them” thus blur, or perhaps they merely re-form as we recognize that our shared calling makes us family, and other affiliations are relativized by our bond in Christ. We become “new creation” that is unexpectedly imaginative—moving beyond party politics to possibilities that come from the hard labor of communal problem-solving.<sup>3</sup>

Secular politics and body politics always overlap for us. We seek the good of the city by discerning what policies encourage human flourishing. Simultaneously, we say to a world increasingly bereft of humility and mutual understanding that there is an alternative way of life and an everlasting reign, glimpsed through a community guided by the Spirit of the Living God. Our witness is not primarily about being “right” or persuading others about how they should vote. Rather, as we pursue wisdom through the vulnerable process of communal discernment, argue over the best ways

to seek *shalom*, and labor together in mission, we recall that we are ever-dependent on God, who alone is truly wise. By working out our salvation together, we testify to the truth of deeper politics, that of the kingdom of heaven.

If this seems unworkable or impossibly idealistic, recall the era of the Civil War, when differences were more divisive than the red/blue divide of today. Lincoln instinctively understood Paul’s teaching that unity is only possible if we take differences seriously enough to discuss and argue them. He also recognized that he needed the best of those who disagreed with—and even disrespected—him, both to check his own views and to sharpen them. So, contrary to most person’s (and church’s) sensibilities, Lincoln included in his cabinet men who ran against him for the presidency. In addition, his administration contained men of varying views on slavery. Lincoln’s White House was a jumble of personalities and perspectives. Like an extraordinary coach, he unexpectedly nurtured a “team of rivals” who worked for an interest greater than their own rather substantial egos.

Similarly, as we tackle issues in our own day—economic inequity, sexuality, violence, sustainable development, or health care—we must risk working with those with whom we disagree, be it in secular organizations or in cell groups at church. Much rivalry today is for the thrill of shrill confrontation, and it is easy work. We must instead imitate Lincoln who imitated Paul, recognizing that we need to toil alongside those who were or are our adversaries. He risked

*Stassen*, continued from page 10

is study and awareness of biblical teachings on peacemaking and what they might mean in our time. These groups have an inward journey of deepening prayer and study of practical peacemaking, and an outward journey of local service projects and advocacy. Last week, our church peacemaker group painted the kitchen of a home for elderly women. We also contacted our congressman’s office asking him to support opening up talks with Iran—as the U.S. government finally did successfully with North Korea after six years of refusing to, and got an agreement that they would cease their nuclear weapons developments. Rick Warren said: “I am not a politician. I am a pastor. But I do know that in any conflict—whether in a marriage, in business or between nations—as long as the parties keep talking, there is hope. My plea to everyone involved in this diplomatic process is to please, keep talking.” This fits Matthew 5:21–26.

In our church in Louisville, we organized a Sunday morn-

ing worship service to welcome veterans back home from the Vietnam War, and a churchwide lunch and dialogue afterwards. We stated clearly that it was not about whether the war was just or unjust; it was about welcoming the veterans back home. This was one of the most healing and gratitude-filled worship service I have ever experienced. We also helped our church to pray for peace; to remember, on Palm Sunday, that Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey not a warhorse, as a Messiah of peace, fulfilling Zechariah 9:9–10; and to have a service each Memorial Day weekend to pray that we not have another war to have to memorialize again. We made sure to involve a youth, a retired person, a veteran, and a member of the church who is respected for caring about peacemaking, so it would be broadly based.

In Christ, we are bound one to another, even to those whose views diverge from our own. Unlike others who might pursue secular politics as an end in itself or as a way of assuring their significance, we are already assured of our destiny because God has secured it by Christ’s work; complete *shalom* will one day come. Such knowledge frees us to address difficult issues in the present with humility, trusting that by God’s grace, good will come of our desire to be faithful to God and to neighbor. In a red and blue world, we testify to the freedom of the gospel by our character, practicing the politics of humble discernment and of shared mission. Even out of our rivalries, Christ can create both a church and a society that embody more closely the coming kingdom of God. ■

#### **ENDNOTES**

1. David Kuo’s book is *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (Basic Books, 2006), and Jim Wallis’s book is *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It* (Harper, 2005).
2. See John Howard Yoder’s text, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before a Watching World* (Herald Press, 1992), for a careful theological argument for what I am advocating.
3. See 2 Cor. 5:17. Richard Hays maintains that translations often obscure that the emphasis is not on individuals, but on new creation more broadly, as in a new community, a new people, or even a new world because of Christ.

ing worship service to welcome veterans back home from the Vietnam War, and a churchwide lunch and dialogue afterwards. We stated clearly that it was not about whether the war was just or unjust; it was about welcoming the veterans back home. This was one of the most healing and gratitude-filled worship service I have ever experienced. We also helped our church to pray for peace; to remember, on Palm Sunday, that Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey not a warhorse, as a Messiah of peace, fulfilling Zechariah 9:9–10; and to have a service each Memorial Day weekend to pray that we not have another war to have to memorialize again. We made sure to involve a youth, a retired person, a veteran, and a member of the church who is respected for caring about peacemaking, so it would be broadly based.

In sum, I don’t want churches to be partisan, but I do want them to be faithful to Jesus and Jesus’ way. If church members have no guidance on what peacemaking means, how are we to expect them to resist being blown about by the shifting winds of ideology? ■





## Why and How Would Jesus Vote? Creating a New Framework for Evangelical Voters

**A** DRAMATIC SHIFT HAS occurred, from the loyalty that evangelicals once had to the Republican Party since the 2004 presidential election, based on family values, to a broader range of social issues. Despite greater engagement of evangelicals as values voters, many still see politics as “too worldly” for those who are “heaven bound.” With both the Republican and Democratic Parties fielding candidates in 2008 who claim a strong faith in Jesus Christ, the need for a theological framework on why and how evangelicals should vote has never been greater.

As a politically active, African American, pro-life Democrat, and evangelical with close ties to persons of diverse political backgrounds, I feel that the 2008 presidential election confronts us with new choices—

including the possibility of new freedom to consider candidates on both sides of the political aisle based on a broader range of values issues.

Today’s presidential candidates are presenting themselves as “faith-friendly”—thereby helping conservative religious voters realize that God is neither a Democrat nor a Republican. If all the candidates are persons of faith to varying degrees, how should pastors

and other Christian leaders wisely counsel their members on which candidates to support? Even more important, how should evangelical voters frame issues they care about from a theological perspective? Given these changing realities in the 2008 election, evangelicals will need help more than ever in answering the questions why and how would Jesus vote?

### Why Would Jesus Vote?

To the question of *why* would Jesus vote: Jesus would vote

because God is sovereign over all creation (2 Chron. 29:11). As sovereign king, God’s Spirit reigns in the hearts of believers through whom God acts in human conditions. Dr. George Eldon Ladd, renowned theologian and Fuller Theological Seminary professor, stated it clearly: “the kingdom is God’s sovereign reign; but God’s reign expresses itself in different stages through redemptive history—God’s Kingdom is the realm of the Age to Come, popularly called heaven; then we shall realize the blessings of His Kingdom (reign) in the perfection of their fullness. But the Kingdom is here now. There is a realm of spiritual blessing into which we may enter today.”<sup>1</sup>

God established Israel as the people to demonstrate what total devotion to Yahweh as king should look like to an unbelieving world. But when Israel rebelled and yearned for an earthly king like other nations, God made a covenant with Israel’s greatest king, David, that his throne would last forever. This covenant, many biblical scholars believe, will be fully realized when, in the fullness of time, Christ will return and reign over earth as king and usher in God’s heavenly kingdom. When Jesus, “the Word” who “became flesh” showed up as God incarnate and “dwelt among” mortal humans (John 1:1, 14), he demonstrated what heaven on earth would look like. Tom Skinner put it best in saying that “the people of God are to be the live expression on earth of exactly what is going on in heaven, where Jesus is Lord and God is in control.”<sup>2</sup>

During his earthly ministry, Jesus lovingly taught his disciples to pray that the kingdom would come to earth the way it is in heaven (Matt. 6:9). Historically, and in our time, we have seen God act through flesh-and-blood humans to champion the causes of equality, freedom, democracy, and care for the earth and its rich resources. Champions of God’s love and righteousness, such as William Wilberforce, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and countless others, have participated in or dramatically impacted the political and public policy decision-making arena. Wilberforce believed

that slavery was the work of Satan, and, on that basis alone, had to be defeated. King Jr. dreamed of a world where every person would be judged by the content of their character rather than by skin color. He led the 1960s Civil Rights Movement based on his faith understanding. This movement was ignited by the courageous act of Rosa Park, who, in 1955, was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white American man because she believed in a God who created all people as equals.

This biblical and historical perspective stands in sharp contrast to evangelicals who believe that the earth is so messed up that they need to stay as far away as possible from sinners, especially those in the political realm, and wait for Christ’s return. Instead, Jesus is calling for a reproduction on the earth of the same love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion in human relationships and systems of government that exist in the heavenly realm where Jesus is Lord and God is in control.

Jesus would vote because, as Creator of heaven and earth, God called all he had made “very good” (Gen. 1:31), and voting for leaders of godly character and practice sustains and ensures the goodness of God in all human life. He would vote because every person is created as a bearer of dignity and divinity by the Author of Life who said, “let us make man in our image, in our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Therefore, “man” or mankind in the collective, has value and worth to God that must be reflected in a life of dignity, unburdened by human-conspired and sustained poverty, war, discrimination, and oppression (Gen. 1:26). For example, a compassionate immigration policy would include protection of the borders while valuing people of all backgrounds—including Latinos, Africans, and other persons of color seeking freedom and economic well-being in America.

Jesus would be deeply grieved by the reality that in America 40% of the 37 million poor citizens are children.<sup>3</sup> He would be equally perplexed by those who have placed their faith in him, but have missed the biblical call to couple “faith with works” (Jas. 2:17). God created humans and compelled them to “rule over” but not exploit the earth, acting as God’s representatives (Gen. 1:28). This stewardship responsibility includes insuring care for the “least of these” (Matt. 25:40) through systems of government whose authority comes from God (Romans 13:1, 2). In scores of verses, the Bible underlines God’s concern for the poor and oppressed—some going so far as to say that God views oppression of the poor as contempt for God himself (Prov. 14:3). Stewardship of the earth includes, as well, care for the environment and protection of the vulnerable, especially the elderly poor and the sick who lack access to quality medical care.

As God in the flesh, Jesus experienced all the trials of human persons yet remained sinless. With his feet planted on the earth, he modeled for three and one-half years in public life what total allegiance to God as king—not allegiance to a political party—should look like. In the flesh, Jesus would vote because he knows that “the earth is the Lord’s” (Ps. 24:1), and he is sovereign over all creation, nations, and rulers. Jesus would vote because all human authority is established by God (Rom. 13:1) for the good of all. In essence, God’s only agenda is to advance the value system of his heavenly kingdom on the earth “the way it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9) until Christ returns.

So we see Jesus, our model for kingdom values, overturning the moneychangers’ tables in the temple to protest an oppressive system because a core value of the kingdom is justice. Jesus would vote to ensure kingdom values of “caring for the least of these” (Matt. 25:45); to affirm the dignity and equality of women as equals before God (e.g. with the woman at the well, John 4:26); to call all believers to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and set at liberty all who are oppressed (Luke 4:18); and to reach out in love to people of every background and social condition.

Jesus would vote to demonstrate God’s value system of justice, mercy, brotherhood, and stewardship of the earth because, through Christ Jesus, all believers have become “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). He is seeking to establish men and women on earth whose love for him compels them to support leaders in public life of godly character who manifest God’s love, care, and value of all humans by ensuring the health and well-being of all people, regardless of race, culture, gender, age, education, or station in life.

### How Would Jesus Vote?

To the question of how would Jesus vote, we are guided by Jesus’ life and ministry. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, was born to a teenage mother, into a family of modest means. He was raised in the shadow of often brutal Roman rule and oppression. While singularly loyal to his eternal mission, he was clearly impacted by the world around him, reinforced in his quoting of the prophet Isaiah, “the spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me, because he has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, release of the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

Realizing that God is not a Democrat, Republican, or an Independent, Jesus, in his earthly role, would frame political issues beyond the religious talk of political candidates, parties, or established political leaders wedded only to favorite values issues. He would view all political issues according to

Barbara Williams-Skinner is president of Skinner Leadership Institute (SLI), founded in 1992 by her and her late husband, evangelist, author, and pro sports chaplain, Tom Skinner. Williams-Skinner ministers to groups as varied as congressional, business and civic leaders, college students, urban youth and people from diverse cultures. She is nationally recognized as a spiritual leader, life coach, teacher, lecturer, and mediator. Williams-Skinner has written numerous articles including “The Power of Love,” “Been There, Done That: Why African American Christians Resist Racial Reconciliation,” and a leadership training workbook, *Becoming An Effective 21st Century Leader*.



God's kingdom agenda: justice for the poor, peace, stewardship of the environment, racial healing, marriage and family, freedom, and protection of the nation's borders.

Jesus would vote because he would be keenly attuned to the interconnection between those who suffer and those who have the power or political influence to alleviate suffering. Martin Luther King Jr., while sitting in a Birmingham, Alabama, jail, profoundly captured this common human experience in a letter to clergy leaders when he said that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."<sup>4</sup>

With neither political party fully reflecting kingdom values, Jesus, no doubt, would be reminding evangelicals to put kingdom values above party values and to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18). These disciples would infiltrate political systems, parties, and policies with kingdom values until Jesus returns to reign forever.

**My Story**

As an African American, recovering agnostic, and Berkeley, California, 1960s radical activist, I became a follower of Jesus Christ in my thirties in 1978. Falling in love with this Jewish carpenter and his life of selfless love and service, it never occurred to me that I had the luxury of not voting as part of an attempt to reflect Christ's sacrificial love for all humans—even in an imperfect political system with flawed and imperfect political leaders and candidates. I grew up knowing well of the enslavement of African people in America, of centuries of legalized racial segregation, years of brutal lynching and countless acts of degradation, often with the church at the forefront of this dehumanization of some of God's children. I can personally attest to the lingering psychological damage of often subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—forms of continued discrimination. This historic and sociological perspective makes the hard-fought and hard-won African American right to vote (secured just 42 years ago through the 1965 Voting Rights Act) very precious to me.

A strong commitment to civic participation has been instilled in me by Scriptures on the sovereignty of God over the affairs of humans, God's establishment of all human authority, and Jesus' earthly examples of faith in action. With 100 million followers of Jesus Christ in America today, it is inconceivable to me that we should live in a nation gripped by fear, poverty, and bigotry too often sustained through public policies and the decisions of those elected to

public office. If following Christ means anything, it means that we have been given the same power that got Jesus up out of the grave to advocate—act, lead, work for, and vote for candidates who reflect all of our values, values that advance the kingdom of God on earth until Christ returns.

**A Framework for Evangelicals in the Political Square**

It is possible for evangelicals of good will to disagree on which candidates best reflect God's politics. It is even true that evangelicals who share in common a profound love for God can differ on the role of government and candidates who can best reflect that role through their leadership. We make decisions not only based on our scriptural understanding, but also based on our diverse backgrounds, socio-political upbringing, exposure, and experience. Yet there are some basic guidelines that might be taken into account by evangelicals seeking to manifest as close as possible the entirety of sacred Scripture through their civil engagement:

1. The day of voters electing candidates simply because they oppose abortion or vow protection of the unborn for nine months while in the womb, yet refuse to provide health care, quality education, housing, safe streets, a fair justice system, and a livable environment once the child is born, is hopefully over. Candidates should be evaluated based on their commitment to a government that values all of life—from the womb to the grave.
2. As the author of life, God is committed to protecting the lives even of those who have for any reason taken the lives of others. Candidates should be evaluated by their commitment not to protecting life as it is unborn, but to protecting even the lives of criminals who are incarcerated in states that support the death penalty for heinous crimes. God values all life that he alone has created.
3. Candidates should be evaluated and embraced by evangelicals not only for their opposition to gay marriage and abortion, but for their commitment to ending poverty, racial discrimination, pollution of the earth, global poverty, and war.
4. Every nation has the right to protect its citizens from external enemy attacks and from acts of terrorism, by maintaining a strong military. Candidates deserving the support of evangelicals should have a strong commitment to peacemaking, avoiding preemptive wars, ending the kind of global poverty that produces war and violence,

continued on page 19

## UNDOCUMENTED, ILLEGAL, OR UNREGULATED ALIENS? Getting Christians to Talk Together about Immigration Reform

**A**S A LATINO PASTOR I have often found myself faced with some version of the following situation: A person in church asks for prayer because a relative is "coming tonight." We all know that this means the person is crossing the border illegally. So what do we pray? Do we pray for safety? That the person not get caught? Do we pray for justice? If so, what is justice in this situation?

In another church a parishioner requests prayer because of fear related to day laborers near her house. There have been some problems and the person is worried about being harmed. She wants the church to pray that the problem will be solved so that there will be no more undocumented workers in her area and in the country. Do we pray for the effective closing of the border? For all undocumented workers to be deported? Do we pray for obedience to laws? If so, are the laws just?

The current national debate on immigration raises many questions about national identity, economic policy, foreign policy, cross-border relations, security, justice, and many other related issues. A failed national political process has left many people frustrated, causing some states and municipalities to attempt to address the issue on their own. A world being changed by globalization has many people unsure about the future. This has created an electoral season (presidential elections of 2008) in which the most radical and xenophobic voices seem to be defining the debate, even though most people in the country desire comprehensive immigration reform that addresses both legalization and security.

The current environment demonstrates the difficulties involved in addressing the issues. Some politicians are willing to make shrill statements, but few are offering concrete and workable solutions, no matter what the perspective. Nuance and complexity is lost in the midst of sound bites and talking points. It is also clear that many people on all sides of the debate have little solid information and are depending on hearsay, mass media comments, and common wisdom, all of which continue to repeat

incomplete or completely false information, making it appear "true" because of the times it has been repeated.

The debate is dividing evangelicals in many different ways. One of the many fissures is that between majority culture and Latino evangelicals, particularly since most of the undocumented are Latinos. Latino evangelicals minister among the undocumented and some of the undocumented are evangelicals. This creates a particularly complex situation for conversation because our approach to immigration reform tends to be framed by our very different experiences. Evangelicals may not be able to find a common response to the issue. But we do need to find ways to talk to each other about the issue of immigration reform, particularly as the issue becomes more divisive.

**Issues for an Evangelical Conversation**

Evangelicals may start from a similar theological framework, but we reflect much of the political diversity of the country. If we are to develop a conversation we need to recognize how our specific experiences frame our understanding of the issues related to immigration reform. All of us will appeal to Scripture in our search for a way forward. But our varied ethnic backgrounds have taught us to read Scripture differently and to appeal to different portions of Scripture in our attempt to address this issue.

There are two common biblical starting points when addressing the undocumented and immigration reform. On the one hand there are those who appeal to Romans 13:1-7 and talk about the importance of obeying laws. For this group of people the principal problem has to do with

**SYNOPSIS**

For Latino and majority culture evangelicals to talk to each other about immigration reform, Martínez claims we need to understand why our starting points are often so different. Once we understand the issues that separate us, we can establish a framework for evangelicals that allows conversations that work toward "shalom."

Juan Francisco Martínez is assistant dean for the Hispanic Church Studies Department and associate professor of Hispanic studies and pastoral leadership in the School of Theology. He has been a pastor and church planter of Latino churches in California and Texas. He is part of the steering committee of La Red, a network of 1200 Latino Protestant churches in southern California working together for a comprehensive and just immigration reform.

breaking the law. The undocumented are not respecting U.S. law and should, therefore, pay the consequences. They should not gain any benefits from their actions.

On the other side are those who begin by appealing to Old Testament texts about the treatment of foreigners (Exod. 19:33, 34; Deut. 10:18, 19; Jer. 22:3). Those who begin here argue that mercy and justice toward the undocumented need to be at the forefront of any discussion about immigration reform. If U.S. laws do not take into account the reality of the undocumented, then those laws must be changed.

Both sides of the debate can counter each other. Each can appeal to a different set of biblical texts to continue the discussion. But what is not addressed is *why* each appeals to this specific set of texts. What is it about our experience that causes us to tend to appeal to one scriptural tradition over another?

As a Latino, I recognize how my own experience has shaped how I read Scripture. I am a pastor's son raised in a farming community in central California where many of the people I grew up with were undocumented. I saw how farm owners complained about "wetbacks" while greatly benefitting from their labor—often taking advantage of them. The undocumented did work no one else wanted to do, and so were "encouraged" to come to the States. Even though I was born and raised in the U.S., I was questioned by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS, now Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE) many times because I am Latino. As an adult in Guatemala, I saw how U.S. foreign policy created the "push" factors that caused people to leave their countries of origin hoping for a better life in the U.S. or the opportunity of earning extra money that they could then invest in their own homeland.

I have been a pastor to the undocumented and have heard their testimonies; therefore, I begin from that reality when I think about the issue of immigration reform. But I also need to recognize that many U.S. evangelicals have had very different experiences which shape how they approach Scripture on this issue. Clearly the events of 9/11 have created a climate of fear and insecurity which draws people to biblical portions that focus on law, order, and stability. The rapidly changing global environment is also leaving many Christians in the U.S. unsure about the future. From this perspective the undocumented represent a weak flank that could be exploited by those who want to attack the U.S. If the undocumented are legalized this will only encourage others to want to follow them.

Not only are our experiences so different, we seldom

have the opportunity to interact in any significant way that will allow us to understand the perspective of the other. Latino and majority culture evangelicals inhabit very different worlds. If we interact at all it is usually in defined roles where each only sees a stereotype of the other. Talking together about this issue involves the willingness to meet together as evangelicals, recognizing each other as brothers and sisters in a difficult discussion.

#### Working Toward a Common Starting Point

How do we build spaces for conversation? Is there a place where majority culture evangelicals and Latino evangelicals can talk together about this issue? Is there room for including the undocumented in the conversation? Such an idea will probably raise fears on both sides, the undocumented will be afraid of being denounced and some members of majority culture will fear being identified with law breakers. Yet it is in the process of meeting and hearing each other that we can begin to find a way forward.

In "From Hospitality to Shalom" Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier provides a framework for the spiritual journey that is needed for evangelicals to talk together about immigration reform.<sup>1</sup> Conde-Frazier presents a model for multicultural living within the life of the church that is crucial if we are to effectively cross ethnic and cultural barriers. She suggests that the process must begin with hospitality.

As evangelicals we need to create situations where we can read the Bible together and listen to each other's stories. This first step will likely be the most difficult for most because it implies significant changes for most of us. Majority culture and Latino pastors can begin the process by agreeing to meet as equals struggling to understand this complex issue. Small group meetings among pastors in each other's churches can open the door to meetings between church leaders in each other's homes and even to meetings among small groups of church members. Other types of hospitality experiences can include crossing the border and interacting with those who minister among people who are trying to cross the border illegally. What does the situation look like from the other side?

This process needs to take us to a second step which Conde-Frazier describes as encounter. If we open ourselves to each other, we will begin to hear each other's stories, listening, questioning, challenging, and being challenged by the experience. This type of listening is difficult because it means being willing to analyze, deconstruct, and reconstruct our personal perspectives. But it is this process that takes us to the third stage, compassion.

As we listen to each other we will begin to understand

why the other feels so strongly about their position. As we "suffer with" the other we will want to walk alongside the other recognizing that there is more than one side to the discussion on immigration reform. If we begin struggling with the issues together we will likely arrive at the fourth stage, which is passion. When we arrive at passion we will want to find solutions that take into account the reality of the other.

The goal is *shalom*, a situation where we are together seeking God's peace, where we recognize that we are part of a global church, even as we struggle to understand the best way to address the issues of immigration reform. If we take this process seriously "we cannot believe that one perception is correct or that one group possesses the central vision, which everyone else must accept." (p. 206) As we share the table and listen to each other we will learn about the complexities of migration and its impact on the global church. We may not have reached a common political response, but we will have affirmed our commonality in

Williams-Skinner, continued from page 16

and to the kind of ongoing diplomacy that makes friends out of former enemies and respects our neighbors around the globe.

5. While America has a responsibility to protect its borders, a respectful dialogue among evangelicals on what biblically-based immigration reform should look like is needed now more than ever. Candidates deserving support of evangelicals should reflect in their immigration viewpoints respect for the dignity and humanity of those who are undocumented; the reality of employers who need workers from nations like Mexico; the biblical call to being kind even in the language we use about those who are strangers; and by using terms like "undocumented workers" rather than "illegal aliens." Evangelicals should support candidates who look honestly at discrimination in immigration between those from European countries versus those from Africa and nations primarily of people of color.

#### Conclusion

There has never been a greater need for evangelicals, whether Republican, Democrat, or Independent, to engage in honest dialogue on faith and politics. The goal of such a dialogue is not persuasion of persons whose views differ from our own to our views. The goal is for evangelicals from diverse view-

Jesus Christ and the need to find solutions that address all of our perspectives.

#### Conclusion

Immigration reform is currently a hot button topic, one which is easier to ignore or to address only through "sound bites" which allow me to disregard or demonize the other, while ignoring that the other is my sister or brother in Jesus Christ. Choosing to talk about immigration reform does not mean that we will necessarily arrive at a common conclusion. It does mean that we consider our unity in Christ as more important than any specific political or national perspective. So we continue to seek ways to talk to each other. ■

#### ENDNOTE

1. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "From Hospitality to Shalom," in *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*, ed. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve King, and Gary A. Parrett (Baker Academic, 2004), 167-210.

points and backgrounds to gain a broader understanding of how best to vote all of our values. To those evangelicals who believe that politics are too dirty for godly people to engage with, I simply issue this challenge: The Christ we serve, was, in his earthly ministry, an advocate for justice, equality, fairness, and freedom for all people. As God's representatives on earth, we are called to act—not just to pray, worship, and praise, but to advocate a government that reflects the kingdom of heaven on the earth, until Christ returns. Such a government, for evangelicals, can best be reflected by adopting biblically rooted values. Voting is one way to ensure that.

Even as evangelicals vote their values, they must continue to support those in leadership—even leaders with whom they disagree—so that there will be peace and a good, sustainable life for all of God's children in the land. ■

#### ENDNOTES

1. George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Popular Expositions on the Kingdom of God* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959, reprinted 1975), 22-23.
2. This quotation comes from Tom Skinner's sermon presented in December 1990 at Harvester Church, in Decatur, Georgia, entitled "The New Community of the Kingdom of God."
3. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements. Poverty and Health Statistics for 2006. U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, DC 20233.
4. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" in *Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (Harper & Row, 1986), 290.



## What about Caleb? Using Case Studies to Introduce Controversial Issues

**I**N THE MOMENTS BEFORE preaching, your eyes scan the congregation. Thankfully the faces are not of strangers, but of ones with whom you have journeyed. These are not just any people, these are your people. So how do you bring them into the deeper issues of our Christian responsibilities without turning one of their few sources of comfort and stability into another call for change? And even more pressing, how do you raise the issues in such a way as to avoid using your position of influence to achieve the outcomes you believe are the right choices? Can you invite your church family into deeper conversations about controversial issues resulting in actions that are commensurate with their significance as part of their growth in discipleship? Take for instance the overwhelming global tragedy of HIV/AIDS.

For many of us, the tragic consequences of the HIV pandemic are a long way from home. Even though AIDS awareness may stir churches to give in response to a World Vision fund-raising campaign, it isn't high on our mission agenda. And no wonder. Engaging the inevitable issues such as increased foreign aid as advocated by Bono at the 2006 U.S. National Prayer Breakfast, or challenging views of sexuality which discriminate against women and girls, or even advocating for the use of condoms,

avoids polarizing the congregation. One way to open the discussion is to use a case study like the following which poses an ethical dilemma without a readily identifiable solution.

"Do you love my Jesus?" asked the old man behind the gate. Peeking around from behind his legs was a little boy with an inquisitive look. After a moment to recover from such a unique greeting, Pastor Tim said, "Yes I love your Jesus!" With that the visitors secured their entry. The grandfather took them inside to see his son. Looking down at the withered body of a thirty-five-year-old quickly made sense of the term "slim" used by East Africans for HIV/AIDS. This gaunt figure was a graduate of the university who had been a promising accountant at a major firm in Kampala. His young wife and son remained behind, while he spent weekdays in the city. In the lonely nights he took comfort in city life and before long brought home the silent killer to his faithful wife. They struggled to hear him recount through tears the awful story of the death of his wife and the inevitability of his son Caleb becoming an orphan within a few days.

Amidst this tragic scene, Tim couldn't help wondering if the grandfather would live to see the boy in high school. After offering a prayer born more out of duty than faith in any divine intervention, the team rose to leave. This time the little boy stood in front at the gate to farewell his new friends. As they peered down at him a deep sense of his hopelessness overcame them. "Little Caleb," Tim said, "I love your grandfather's Jesus and I pray that you will too." The grandfather gave his new friends a knowing look and they were off to the hospital to visit others suffering the same fate. As a result of this visit a burning question has been seared on their consciences, "What about the child Caleb?"

The tragedy of the AIDS pandemic is a major issue facing all societies, regardless of geography. Perhaps the most pressing issue is the children orphaned in the loss of one or more parents, estimated to be 13 million AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa. Exacerbated by poverty, there is little hope of any sustainable response by local communities with-

out external intervention. The magnitude of the problem requires macro-level involvement from all sectors of society.

Adequate responses include financial support for the supply of medical assistance, imports due to loss of productivity, educational assistance, and practical help for families burdened by the unexpected addition of more children. In addition, the need for AIDS awareness as a prevention strategy requires a realistic appraisal of workable methods such as the ABC approach—an acronym standing for abstinence, be faithful, and condoms—which has been effective in Uganda. Churches in many cases can facilitate or block these efforts based on their acceptance of various perspectives combined with their engagement in direct assistance through networks of volunteers.

For example, the 2003 findings of the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) studied in six East and Southern African countries revealed that 82% of the FBO responses were community based, supporting 86% of all the orphans and vulnerable children in the study.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these groups are local congregations with minimal resources beyond willing volunteers, which counted for 92% of all volunteers from all organizations in the study. In real terms the study revealed that community-based FBOs supported 121,842 orphans and vulnerable children or 87% of the total responses.<sup>2</sup>

While this report points to the amazing strength of the response from Christian organizations, as some have suspected it also reveals the challenge of inaction when attitudes come from judgments based on inadequate theological interpretations. A leader of a major Christian non-profit observed that the cooperation from church leaders was minimal until several leading pastors contracted the disease.<sup>3</sup> A major obstacle was the prevalent attitude that AIDS is God's direct punishment; therefore, helping was opposing God.

Thankfully as prevention efforts to raise awareness have accelerated, in many cases led by Christian university groups like FOCUS in Uganda, and increasing numbers of church families were traumatized by the pandemic, churches are slowly turning their judgmental fears into compassionate responses. One final reflection from the FBO study is that while local congregations are making a significant impact, they lack funds to maintain their present efforts, let alone keep pace with the increased needs.<sup>4</sup>

Given this data, the response appears to be clear cut. Just find appropriate and trustworthy sources to handle the funds and dig deeper for more giving. What could be easier than sending a check? Obviously sharing our wealth is a critical response. However, as noted missiologist Jonathan Bonk writes, "Western Christians generally, including mission-

aries—whenever they either anticipate or discover that their way of life and its entitlements make them rich by the standards of those around them—[should] embrace the status of 'righteous rich' and learn to play its associated roles in ways that are both culturally appropriate and biblically disciplined."<sup>5</sup> This status of righteous rich requires a careful assessment of our relationship to the poor.

The problem is one of an accurate assessment of the local context. This is easier said than done. In their report Barrett, Johnson and Crossing track a very sobering trend, "Ecclesiastical crime," which this year is estimated to be 25 billion dollars.<sup>6</sup> That translates into "\$70 million in church funds embezzled every 24 hours."<sup>7</sup> This is such a sobering reality for anyone who believes in careful stewardship, it can lead to inaction. Thankfully, for most of us the logical move is toward partnership with mission agencies or development organizations. The result is that the annual income for global missions in 2008 is estimated to be \$23 billion.<sup>8</sup>

While this is encouraging, it is also important to note that among the North American Protestant groups, "One agency alone (out of 822 total) receives more than one-sixth of the total income given in the continent for overseas missions."<sup>9</sup> Even though the organization is highly reputable, it is nonetheless subject to the inevitable challenges facing any human organization. It is not hard to see why many missiologists are calling for more research to precede our action. To realistically engage in a culturally appropriate and biblically disciplined response requires participants to study the issues without rushing to judgment.

For the mission team led by Pastor Tim, the issues boiled down to the question they faced in the Ugandan village, "What about Caleb?" Like most mission trips, the team was given the opportunity to share their experiences with the congregation in a service shortly after they arrived home. Of course the congregation was moved by the testimonies, but in the absence of a call to action nothing came of it. A few weeks later the team gathered for dinner and a time of debriefing. Judy captured the feelings of all when she said, "I can't get the face of Caleb out of my mind." Another member asked, "Do you think we should try to adopt him?" "The political and cultural hurdles would be overwhelming," added Susan, the team's realist. "Surely there are other options, like setting up a trust fund in Kampala or sending living expenses and school fees," Judy responded.

After listening to his teammates, Pastor Tim realized that this was more than a short-term missions experience, it was a defining moment. "Like you, I have wrestled with the question too. It has dominated my prayers ever since that day in the village. For years I have supported missions trips,

### SYNOPSIS

McConnell asserts that a case study method of introducing controversial issues avoids the polarities so common in our society. Case studies establish ethical dilemmas by providing key elements of the problem that are not immediately reconcilable. The narrative invites exploration of the issues which encourages multiple responses.

all push us into a politically charged realm that requires careful navigation. In reality it creates the need for deeper theological reflection than many of us are prepared to tackle in our sermons or Christian education programs. It is wise to approach the subject from a careful analysis of the problem combined with an approach that fosters reflection and

C. Douglas McConnell (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is dean and associate professor of leadership. He served with his family for 15 years as a missionary in the South Pacific and 5 years as International Director of Pioneers. Prior to the assignment as director, he taught and chaired the Department of Missions/Intercultural Studies at Wheaton College Graduate School. His publications include (as editor) *Understanding God's Heart for Children* (World Vision Resources, 2007) and (as coauthor) *The Changing Face of World Mission* (Baker Academic, 2005).

## Choosing a Case Study

Ideally, a good case study presents the congregation with a challenge to enter into the ethical issues before jumping to conclusions. So the onus is on the writer to choose the case carefully. Experience shows that cases based on an actual situation or event are the best. Because it is important to clearly present the issues involved, the case must engage both the presenter and the congregation or class. Generally, cases based on real life situations introduce complexities that can enrich the exploration and thus avoid easy answers. It is in this process of discovery that one can avoid the single solution or polarization of opinion that so often characterizes our interaction on tough issues. So it is important to choose a case that raises critical issues that defy a single solution or approach. For the greatest impact, the case will center on an ethical dilemma.

In preparing the case, it is important to add only the details that are critical for the problem at hand. This requires careful selection based on facts gained from personal observation, interviews, and/or reading. Remember that the case must draw people into the issues, while simultaneously avoiding the solution. Complexity is the hallmark of a good case study. Therefore, when writing the case try to keep the characters to a minimum, allowing the hearers to identify with the issues and not just the person who embodies them. Often, as in the case "What About Caleb?" having a central character can also introduce an urgency that helps the interaction. Because case studies are purposely controversial, it is also important to protect the true identities of those involved by using pseudonyms and alternate locations.

A case study approach has great potential for serious theological reflection. A relevant case that embodies the issues, especially the tendency toward interpreting events through a single political viewpoint, can provide new perspectives that challenges our biases. In selecting the case,

both the theological reflection and the situation are important. One can begin with either, but in the end pushing the participants into the theological understanding is critical to the impact of the experience. For example, addressing the issues of justice in migration by selecting a case in which the characters are real people who exist in a complex global environment will invite people to move beyond their own circumstances and fears into the tough world of the migrant. The same can be true in challenging our understanding of evil through a case of human trafficking.

There are three main parts to a case study: 1) clearly stating the ethical dilemma in its social setting, 2) developing the relevant details of the case, and 3) restating the problem as a call to action. If the case is intended to provoke theological reflection, it must include sufficient detail to invite further reading or study beyond that which can be contained in the case itself. In this type of case, one must also provide a reading list with material accessible to the congregation. The goal is to encourage robust discussion and even debate to foster insights that are normally missed through narrowly defined problems that invite a single solution.

Just as a single illustration can greatly enhance the impact of a sermon, so a case study can bring to life a complex problem in a way that invites deeper insights and moves people toward a thoughtful response. In our capstone class in missiology, we have incorporated the case study approach to assess the ability of our students to integrate the core concepts from the masters programs. Now in our third year of this approach, the case study approach to deepen understanding and promote discussion is clearly a more didactic method than relying on lectures and reading alone. A good resource which includes case studies and the type of background information that enhances the experience is *Christian Mission: A Case Study Approach*, by Alan Neeley (Orbis, 1995).

robust dialogue, the case must allow for multiple responses. In the case above, the introduction of the commitment of local congregations, the generosity with scarce resources, the magnitude of the problem, and the need for widespread action all add to the complexity. As part of the dilemma the macro-level responses such as AIDS awareness, the ABC method, and the Bono campaign further raise the issues of a global response. However, if the dilemma is not anchored in a narrative that invites a response at the personal level it runs the risk of remaining in the abstract. In this case, Caleb draws people into the conversation because they can all identify with a vulnerable child. It further takes away the threat to personal convictions since it allows individual

participants to project their opinions on the situation while being held to a greater degree of objectivity due to the unfamiliar context.

Finally, bringing the scene back to the church mission team forces the congregation to deal with the implications. By ending the case with the unfinished statement of the pastor, the participants are invited to engage with the issues through planning a course of action. Whether in a sermon or a lesson in a class, it is essential to provoke discussion that will allow for rival opinions to be shared and tested in the context of dialogue. In the past eighteen years, I have used the case study approach in classrooms, workshops, and in sermons. It appears that the freedom that people feel once the pressure of taking sides is removed allows for deeper insights and more appreciation for exploring different approaches. ■

Kelly, continued from page 8

up taking action that maintained China relations (by letting the float roll), yet supported the need for improvements in human rights (by sending a letter to authorities in China, and by offering to host a human rights rally before the Rose Parade). Thus the concept of principled centrism seemed to provide a way forward for the city council that made sense to all parties.

From the private sector, one of the businesses supporting the float asked that I host meetings with all parties to encourage the kind of positive, productive dialogue my article called for. I did so, engaging both protesters (e.g., Falun Gong, Reporters without Borders) and supporters (e.g., business leaders funding the float, Chinese Consulate General). As a result, opposing parties began a dialogue that led to a reduction in personal attacks and a new openness to compromise solutions that could be acceptable to all parties. The trust and relationships formed during these meetings allowed all the parties involved to relate to each other in a more civil manner and to understand each other better.

Perhaps most significantly, I found that all parties heartily welcomed a voice in the public arena that was not there to promote a given agenda, but whose goal was simply to foster dialogue on common ground. They voiced strong support for the concept of principled centrism, which seemed to capture their desire to hold on to core values even while negotiating a compromise solution. Several noted that the Public Policy Institute provided a "safe place" for dialogue that was otherwise missing in the

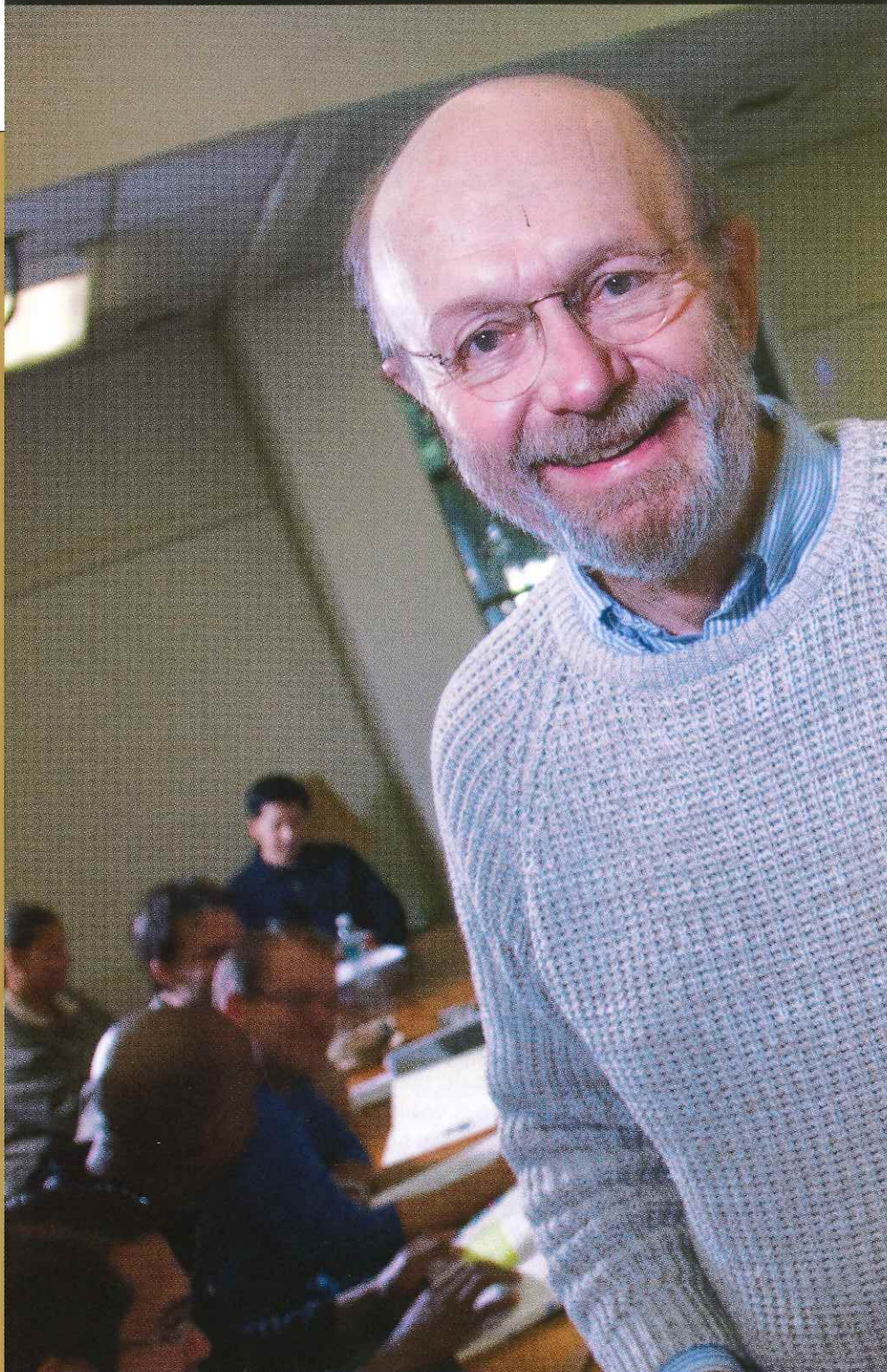
### ENDNOTES

1. G. Foster, ed., "Study of the Response of Faith-Based Organizations to Orphans and Vulnerable Children: Preliminary Summary Report available at <http://sara.aed.org/ovc-tc/materials.html>.
2. Ibid., 10.
3. Private conversation at Fuller Seminary on December 14, 2004.
4. Foster, "Study of the Response" 15.
5. J. Bonk, "Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem . . . Revisited," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31, no. 4, (2007): 173.
6. D. B. Barrett, T.M. Johnson, and P. F. Crossing, "Missiometrics 2008: Reality Checks for Christian World Communions." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 1, (2008): 30.
7. Ibid., 28.
8. Ibid., 30.
9. M. Jaffarian, "The Statistical State of the North American Protestant Missions Movement, from the Mission Handbook, 20th Edition," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 1, (2008): 37.

public arena, and voiced the desire to use this as a resource for other matters as well. It almost seemed as if this was what many had been waiting for—an excuse to be civil and reasonable, within an environment that recognized the importance of their dearly held beliefs and values.

It is this last point that I would like to stress for evangelicals in leadership who speak to the political issues of the day. The church can and should be a safe place for dialogue on *all* matters, including current issues such as the upcoming presidential election. But there is a fine line between raising the issues of the day in a fair manner for consideration and telling parishioners how to think. The church, an organization with religious authority, must not simply tell parishioners what positions to hold or which candidate/party to vote for. Instead of focusing on the candidates, focus on the underlying principles and values relevant to the race. Instead of promoting a given agenda from the left or the right, from one party or the other, why not take the perspective of principled centrism? Look carefully at the relevant underlying principles informing the opposing perspectives, and be open to a centrist position that will respect core biblical values while leaving room for people to meet in the middle—whether coming from a liberal or conservative or libertarian orientation. In this way perhaps the church can help lead the nation out of paralyzing partisan polarization. Instead of mirroring the divisive politically-correct status quo, perhaps we can demonstrate what it means to engage the issues of the day with passion, principle, civility and effectiveness—and demonstrate that it is possible for a person of faith to be politically engaged without just taking sides. ■

## FACES OF FULLER



### Glen Stassen

At the end of World War II, my dad rushed into Japan with three other sailors in a single jeep, freeing prisoners from one POW camp after another so they would not die in the chaos of the Japanese surrender. When he came home, he showed me pictures of suffering prisoners, of tragic destruction and death. "War is horrible," he said. "We have to do all we can to prevent it." He spent the rest of his life working for peace. My work developing the ten practices of just peacemaking stems from the challenge to follow in my father's footsteps.

*Glen H. Stassen is the Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics in the School of Theology, and an expert in issues of social justice and peacemaking. To find out more about studies in the School of Theology visit [www.fuller.edu/sot](http://www.fuller.edu/sot)*