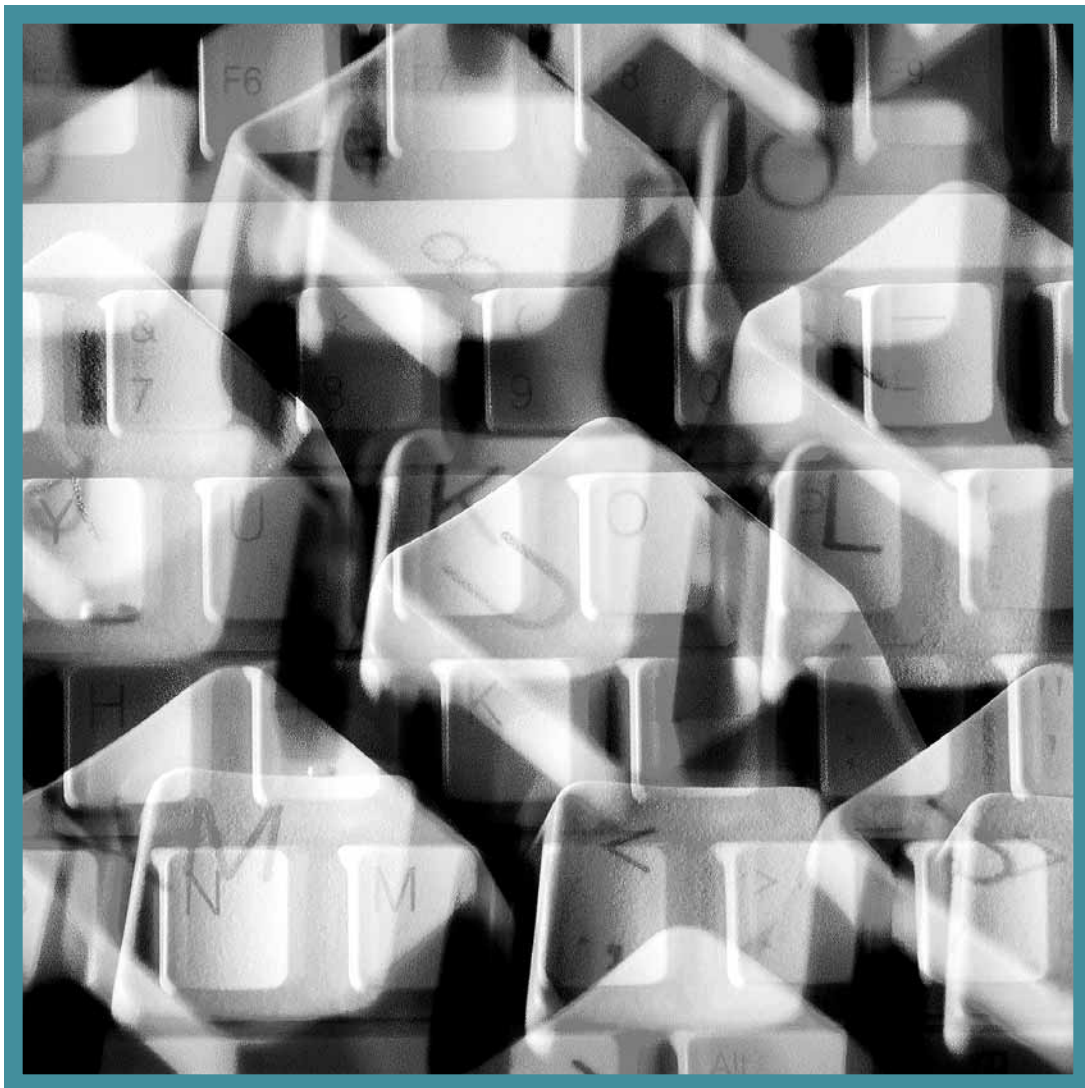


CRITERION

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LETTER FROM THE DEAN

On this tenth anniversary of the Marty Center it is utterly appropriate to celebrate the contributions of *Sightings*, the Marty Center's bi-weekly, on-line column, to the discussion of religion in public life. *Sightings* was birthed by the Public Religion Project, a Pew Foundation-sponsored and Martin Marty-directed endeavor housed at the Divinity School from 1995 to 1998.

The impetus to create *Sightings* came from the Project's goal of locating and highlighting evidences of religion in public life. What was initially conceived by the Foundation as an exercise in recognition has proven—as this collection richly documents—to be more an answer to the question of what, of many possible topics concerning religion in public life, merits concerted attention today.

In consequence, *Sightings* has become less the identifier, and more the clarifier, of religion in public life. Readers as often find in these columns useful perspective on the already known as they do the new discovery. To read this collection is to recognize the myriad, and very public, roles that religion has forged in the past ten years.

Sightings has evolved into a signature expression of the Divinity School's hopes for the Martin Marty Center when it was established in 1998. At that time the man most responsible for its creation, Dean W. Clark Gilpin, wrote that the Marty Center would aim “to bring advanced research in religion into active conversation with public groups drawn from faith communities, the professions, civil society, and other parts of higher education,” in the conviction that such dialogue would promote “fresh and revised perspectives on culture and the common good.”

With a virtual mailing list of just over 7,000 subscribers and numerous columns that have been appropriated in a variety of electronic and print venues, no single Marty Center product boasts a larger ongoing audience.

It is a great pleasure to salute here the many people whose expert labor has made *Sightings* work so well. First, its authors:

many of these are faculty and students at the Divinity School, but more than a few are not, and the range of viewpoints and also of expertise is remarkable. Pride of place among authors must go to Martin Marty himself, whose weekly contributions have provided not only the most sage and reliable ongoing commentary on religion in public life to be had, but both a continuity of sensibility and an ongoing exemplification of what *Sightings* can be at its best.

As Marty has often noted, *Sightings* has become what it is thanks to the extremely able ministrations of a series of editors hired from the student body of the University of Chicago Divinity School. R. Jonathan Moore, Jonathan Ebel, Elizabeth Hayes Alvarez, Jeremy Biles, and now Kristin Tobey have all brought marvelous energy, efficiency, and tact to the crucial roles of solicitation, exhortation, editorial acumen, and stewardship. Not the least of their duties has been to manage the impassioned correspondence from its readers that most *Sightings* columns engender (and that has resulted in more than one subsequent column, including several printed here). And as those editors have each noted, *Sightings* has also benefited from the editorial wisdom of the faculty colleagues who have served as Director of the Marty Center and as the *de facto* “court of last resort” on editorial policy: W. Clark Gilpin, Wendy Doniger, and now William Schweiker.

Thanks, as always, to Robin Winge, *Criterion*'s long-time designer, for her stylish and elegant work.

Richard A. Rosengarten
Dean

Celebrating Sightings

This special issue of *Criterion* collects thirty-four of the approximately 1,000 *Sightings* columns that have been published on-line since 1999. During this time *Sightings* has been administered under the aegis of the Martin Marty Center. Selecting such a small sample was far from easy; but it is our hope that what you have here represents the wide range and uniformly high quality of this unusual publication.

SEPTEMBER 22, 1999

Counting

Martin E. Marty

Counting may not be the most exciting thing we do, and reading about counting may not give receivers of *Sightings* much to develop into editorials, talk-show topics, or lecture and sermon illustrations. But keeping track of news everywhere goes with the job, and it informs our venture if now and then we report on statistical reckonings. To the point:

For exactly one month after the Fourth of July, we monitored and clipped—made confetti of, really—all stories

dealing explicitly with religion and religiously named groups and incidents in the very secular *New York Times*. This was done as background to a report for an executives' meeting in Toronto; they wanted a sense of happenings on the global scene. We don't usually do globes, either. But, here goes:

Kashmir, with Hindu-Muslim war, rated twelve stories, and China's pursuit of the Falun Gong spiritual movement garnered eleven full-length mentions. Tied with eight each were stories about the Serbian Orthodox Church wrestling with the current government, Iranian protests testing the Islamic fundamentalist government, and the Northern Ireland Protestant-Catholic crisis. Seven stories reported Israel's new leadership adjusting to life with ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties. There were three news stories about Algerian Muslims, two British and two South African news accounts, and one each from twenty-one other nations.

Clearly, religion is surging around our post-secular globe, and much of it is violent. Of course, it is conflict and not



... we must move beyond the myths that have framed so many of our national conversations about religion in public life.

stability or serenity that makes news, so the reporting is by definition a distortion, and when we get close to home, more sides of religion come out. *The New York Times* had fifty stories outside its Arts sections on religion in the United States. While numbers of these had to do with the World Church of the Creator and killings by a member, there were numerous stories with tender references to Catholic rites after the death of John F. Kennedy, Jr.

Let us just jumble together proper nouns from other stories to indicate scope: Woodlands United Methodist Church; the United Church of Christ; theologians comment on embryo research; the Reverend Jesse Jackson as spiritual adviser; Representative Gephardt bows to pressure and replaces a Muslim appointee with a Christian one; religion and millennial fears; House vote on religious freedom “trivializes religion” editorial; candidates Gore and Bush say more on “faith-based” welfare and historian Gertrude Himmelfarb editorializes in favor of it; witches; angels; alternative spirituality; prayer by victims of insurance fraud; and dozens more. There were also twenty-one “spirituality” and “religious” art stories. Yes, we are secular. And we are religious, too. ✕



OCTOBER 12, 2000

America's Mythical Religious Past

Catherine A. Brekus

On the first day of the course I teach on “Religion in Colonial America” at the University of Chicago Divinity School, I often ask students to tell me what they already know about early American religious history. Since many of them are new to the field, they know relatively little about religious leaders or worship practices, but almost all of them have strong assumptions about the past.

Influenced by the rhetoric of conservative religious activists and politicians, some describe America as a “Christian nation” where everyone shared a common set of values. Others claim that the colonies were a haven for religious liberty. Pointing to the stories of the Pilgrims and Puritans who fled to New England to escape religious persecution, they imagine a world where people of all faiths were allowed to worship freely.

Yet as students begin reading documents (whether church records, legal statutes, or personal religious narratives), they are surprised to discover that these two images of early America reflect popular national myth, not historical reality. These images say far more about our modern concerns than they do about the real people who lived and worshipped in the past.

First, although it is certainly true that most early Americans were Christian (with the notable exception of large numbers of Indians and African-born slaves), they disagreed about what constituted “true” Christianity. In the South, for example, Anglicans and Baptists clashed over infant baptism, and in New England, Puritans accused Quakers of being heretics because of their belief in immediate inspiration. (While the Puritans insisted that the Bible was God’s final revelation, the Quakers claimed that God continued to speak to

... something will be missing from public life when no one is wearing the clerical collar as a special identification, a scandal, a sign, as Egan did.

humans through the “inner light.”) In Maryland, originally founded by Roman Catholics, Protestants eventually seized power and forbade Catholics to vote, hold public office, or worship outside of private homes. Rather than describing themselves as part of a unified, Christian culture, early Americans emphasized the theological divisions that splintered them into competing denominations.

Second, despite the popular image of America’s deep commitment to religious liberty, few of the original thirteen colonies allowed people to worship freely. With the exception of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Rhode Island, every colony had an “established” church that was closely linked to the government. For example, all who lived in seventeenth-century Virginia, no matter what their personal beliefs, were legally required to attend the Anglican Church and pay assessments for ministers’ salaries. If people refused to pay their taxes, they were publicly whipped or imprisoned. As the colonies became more religiously plural in the eighteenth century, these harsh laws began to disappear, but it was not until 1791, with the passage of the Bill of Rights, that all Americans were guaranteed the right to worship (or not to worship) as they wished.

If my conversations with students are an accurate index of what the public knows about the past, then most people have forgotten the religious battles in early America. Yet at a time when politicians and activists search for a “usable past” that will justify their vision for the present and future, we must move beyond the myths that have framed so many of our national conversations about religion in public life. On one hand, conservatives who want America to return to its identity as a “Christian country” rarely acknowledge that religious diversity has been an enduring feature of American life. On the other hand, liberals who want politicians and activists to keep their religious beliefs “private” rarely mention the Baptists, Quakers, and other religious dissenters who once fought for the right to express their beliefs in public.

To be sure, history doesn’t offer any easy answers to our national debates about religion. But unless we wrestle with the legacy of our past, it will be harder to chart a path toward the future. ✕

MAY 29, 2001

Mourning a Monsignor

Martin E. Marty

Sighting religion in the public realm does not take one away from the organized church if one finds clerical leaders “out there” like the most public priest we have known, Chicago’s Monsignor John “Jack” Egan.

The best-known and most loved (and sometimes, by exactly the right people, the most hated) priest hereabouts, he was nationally known for his passion for justice, his compassion, and his friendliness. Years ago, those of us who straggled or cowered at the rear of the civil rights events knew he was always up front. Egan was booted out of town by then-Cardinal John Cody and brought back as a first move by his successor, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin. The moves in both directions, and his summons to Notre Dame by Father Theodore Hesburgh, are all tributes to the monsignor.

Passingly, he was for the ordination of women and the priesthood for married men, but he was also fiercely loyal to the church he considered both holy and broken. “I label myself a dissenter. Yet prayerful, responsible dissent has always played a role in the church.” In his pattern of loyalty, as in so many other expressions, he reminded one of Dorothy Day of blessed memory.

This is not a merely local story, since Egan had national influence. A related story also has a Chicago tagline and national implications. On May 19, the very day friend Egan died, Francis Cardinal George ordained only ten men to the priesthood. Remember, the Archdiocese of Chicago is as populated as all but five or six entire Protestant denominations in America. We noted that the majority of the new priests are from foreign lands, including one from a place called “Lutheranism.” As for these new “poor world” priests, more power to them and may their numbers increase, bringing new perspectives and gifts—we’ve seen some in action.

Where, however, are the people with names like “Egan?”

It is time to call off the war metaphor.

Or the Poles or Italians or Czechs who vastly, vastly outnumber Indonesians, Filipinos, and others from nations now supplying Chicago with priests? This is not the place for a Protestant to lobby or advise (“if they have not heard the voices of the Jack Egans, surely they will not hear the voices of outsiders”). Such advice in this context would be in bad taste and come with ill grace, since most non-Catholic denominations are having similar problems of undersupply in pastoral vocations.

One can celebrate the remarkable burst of activity by lay men and lay women in today’s not-yet-priestless Catholicism. But something will be missing from public life when no one is wearing the clerical collar as a special identification, a scandal, a sign, as Egan did. So our tears at the memorial were because we have lost Egan—but also, much more than that. ✕

SEPTEMBER 26, 2001

Pearl Harbor, Sarajevo, and the Events of September Eleventh

Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr.

As we grapple with the terrifying events of 11 September 2001, we are haunted by analogies from our past. But historical analogies require careful examination, for choosing among them influences the way we will think, speak, and act.

Commentators have compared the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon to Pearl Harbor, because both attacks came without warning. With Pearl Harbor as the primary analog, the attacks on New York and Washington were quickly termed “acts of war.” That is understandable, but dangerously imprecise. It cloaks massive illegality under the guise of rules of engagement—the very thing that terrorists deny by their outrageous transformation of civil aircraft into weapons of destruction.

The attacks on New York and Washington were also

unlike Pearl Harbor in that the destruction wrought by Japanese forces had an obvious and official governmental return address. As President Bush acknowledged in his address to Congress last week, the perpetrators of the recent attacks are a “collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations” and “there are thousands of these terrorists in more than sixty countries.” This is not the language of war, but of crime.

The analogy with Pearl Harbor limps badly and leads to policy judgments of dubious value. The recent atrocities have a much closer precedent in the events leading up to World War I. On June 28, 1914, Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was assassinated in Sarajevo. The Austrian investigation into the terrorist attack could not establish a firm connection with Serbia, the likeliest suspect in harboring, if not organizing the assassination. In the meantime, revulsion against the deed abated. When the Austrians decided to act against Serbia (without clear evidence or clear aims—just to “punish” Serbia), they did not have the kind of support that would have prevented the grievance from erupting into global conflict with devastating consequences for decades.

This is not the time to launch smart or dumb bombs in a war that cannot be won from the skies. The objective of locating a suspect is a just one. The killing of innocent men, women and children who live in their neighborhoods is not. It will not avenge our painful loss. It will recruit new members for the terrorists. This is not even the time to launch an invasion of infantry divisions in a war that the Russians can assure us will not go well for us, and will only rally impoverished Afghans around leaders under whom they chafe.

It is time to call off the war metaphor. We are dealing not with acts of war committed by a nation state, but with massive criminality that calls for an extraordinary effort to identify and locate the perpetrators, and to bring them to justice. Not infinite justice, but human justice—the only kind we are capable of—condign, focused, measured, and appropriate.

This is the time—as with any organized criminal activity—to follow the money and freeze the assets of known criminals. This is the time for making it much more difficult for thugs to hijack civil aircraft. This is the time to forge a new level of international cooperation in the investigation of this

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crime, including the expansion of our links to countries toward whom we have not “tilted” in the past, Pakistan and India among them.

All of these things can be done without the rhetoric or actions of war. To follow the rule of law under these most painful circumstances is to deny the lawless the power of their claim that might is right. Human Rights Watch put this point well: “There are people and governments in the world who believe that in the struggle against terrorism, ends always justify means. But that is also the logic of terrorism. Whatever the response to this outrage, it must not validate that logic. Rather, it must uphold the principles that came under attack [on September 11], respecting innocent life and international law. That is the way to deny the perpetrators of this crime their ultimate victory.”

The attacks on New York and Washington were on twin symbols of American economy, culture, and democratic governance. Americans correctly understand that this assault was aimed squarely at our institutions and at our national identity. But this assault was also on principles of respect for civilian life cherished for centuries by all civilized people. Remembering that will help keep our reply focused and proportionate to the evil at hand. It is profoundly American to make critical distinctions between the guilty and the innocent; between perpetrators and innocent civilians in their neighborhoods; and between those who commit atrocities and those who may simply share their religious beliefs, ethnicity or national origin.

These distinctions were hard won in American history. When we beg God to bless America, our prayer should be for greater awareness of these distinctions, which are divine blessings on all humankind. ✕



OCTOBER 3, 2001

An Extraordinary Discussion

Jean Bethke Elshtain

On Thursday, September 20, only hours before his speech before Congress, President George W. Bush spent over an hour talking and praying with a group of twenty some leaders of America’s diverse religious communities. I was surprised and honored to be included in the meeting—this despite the fact that I can by no means be described as a leader of a particular religious community. I would like to give readers of *Sightings* a sense of how the event unfolded.

My hunch is that someone on the White House staff decided that they needed a representative from one of America’s leading divinity schools, and chose me because I have in the past addressed the ethics of war and war-making. I did not know most of those included. I recognized Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, from media sightings. I greeted Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston by name because he was, in fact, the one person I had met in the past.

We gathered, as requested, at 12:15 p.m. at the northwest appointments gate of the White House. We cleared security, and were then ushered into the Eisenhower Executive Office Building across from the White House. There we gathered together, greeted one another, and shared expressions of peace and concern. I found it rather extraordinary that the single most ecumenical event I have ever attended had been put together by the White House. All Christian orientations were represented, as were members from the Orthodox, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim communities.

We discussed a proposed statement—put together by a member of our group, not by the White House—for around forty minutes. A few of us made proposals for addi-

... a President's role as "civic educator" has
never been more important.

tions and corrections. These were accepted and the statement was signed by all of us. We offered up our prayers for the bereaved. We lifted up those who "selflessly gave their lives in an attempt to rescue others." We expressed our gratitude that "the President has spoken out early and clearly to denounce acts of bigotry and racism directed against Arabs, Muslims, and others in our midst. To yield to hate is to give victory to the terrorists." We called the attacks of September 11 acts against all of humanity — over sixty other countries lost citizens in the attacks — and we argued that there was a "grave obligation to do all we can to protect innocent human life" because "the common good has been threatened by these attacks. . . ." We called for a response that was just and peaceful — understanding, as many of us do, that the claims of justice and of peace must guide any reaction.

After our deliberations concluded, we were ushered to the Roosevelt Room of the White House. Chairs were arranged in a circle. There was no table. When the President entered the room, he greeted people he knew by name and asked us to be seated. When he noticed that the chairs on either side of him were empty — people giving the President some room — he gestured and said, "Come on in here. I feel lonely down here." People scooted in. The President then offered twenty to twenty-five minutes of reflection on the situation, indicating the need to steer a careful course between calling for Americans to be attentive but doing so in a way that doesn't instill fear in hearts already bestirred and stunned by what had happened. He indicated that he would oppose anyone who singled out those of the Muslim faith or Arab background for acts of vigilantism and bigotry as Islam, he stated, is a "religion that preaches peace" and those who had hijacked Islam to murder nearly seven thousand people did not represent Islam.

The President discussed the terrible day, going over some of the events as he experienced them, doing what so many Americans are doing in trying to come to grips with what happened. He told us that it is clear the White House was a target; that it was an "old building made of plaster and brick" and that had it been struck it would have been demolished and many people killed, "including my wife." (He paused and choked up at that thought.) The overall sense the President conveyed was that of a man who is horrified,



saddened, clear about his Constitutional responsibility to protect the country and her citizens, determined to build an international coalition and not to go it alone, equally determined to respond in a way that is measured and not unlimited.

Following this gripping presentation, the President asked us to share concerns and thoughts. Some among the group lifted up particular Scriptural passages they found apt for our tragic circumstance. Others — the representatives of the Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim communities — brought their support and thanked the President for his words against bigotry.

Deciding this might be my only opportunity to offer advice to a President of the United States face-to-face, I indicated that I taught "political ethics," to which the President responded jocularly (as do most people when I tell them this), "Is there such a thing?" I replied that "I like to think so and I believe you are attempting to exemplify such in operation through this crisis." I then said that a President's role as "civic educator" has never been more important. That he must explain things to the American people; teach patience to an impatient people; the need to sacrifice to

. . . he must explain things to the American people;
teach patience to an impatient people . . .

a people unused to sacrifice. The President indicated he was aware of this important responsibility and it was clear that he had already given the civic education role some thought.

The entire meeting was unhurried, casual, thoughtful. As the President's aides began to gather in the room, it was clear the meeting—now well into its second hour—was about to end. One of our group asked, "Mr. President, what can we do for you?" He indicated that we could "pray for me, for our country, for my family." He believes in the efficacy of prayer and needs wisdom and guidance and grace, he said. A Greek Orthodox Archbishop was invited to lead us in prayer. We all joined hands in a prayer circle, including the president. It was a powerful and moving moment. As the prayer ended and we began to rise, one among us began, haltingly, to sing "God Bless America," a distinctly unchauvinistic song that Americans have turned to over the past few weeks. We all began to join in, including the President. He then mingled, shook hands, and thanked us as we left.

All of us were aware we had participated in an extraordinary event. People shared addresses and business cards. We departed the White House to face a bank of cameras—always set up on the lawn. It began to rain softly. I stood next to my Sikh colleague and found myself gently patting him on the shoulder. I said, "I hope you don't mind my doing that." He said, "No, of course not. Please. I find it reassuring, very reassuring."

As I got into a taxi for the long ride to Baltimore—Washington International Airport, I realized that I had no desire to "spin" the event; to analyze it to bits; to engage in some sort of tight exegesis. Sometimes events just stand. They are what they are. If the President had simply wanted a public relations event, he would have done a quick photo-op (preferably the prayer circle scene, no doubt); cameras would have been whirring; we would have had a few well-timed and choreographed minutes. None of that happened. It was clear that the President wanted counsel; that he sought prayer; that he also hoped to reassure us that he understood the issues involved.

It was an afternoon I will not soon forget. I am grateful that I was able to join a group of my fellow citizens and members of our diverse religious communities for an extraordinary discussion with the President of the United States. ✕

FEBRUARY 7, 2002

Of Patriots and Saints

Jonathan Ebel

Those who watched Sunday's Super Bowl were treated to a seemingly miraculous game. After appearing to fall apart in the game's final two minutes, the New England Patriots, fourteen-point underdogs, defeated the St. Louis Rams on a last-second field goal. For once in a great many years the game helped viewers forget the halftime kitsch and the much anticipated, strangely uncreative array of commercials.

Woven into this year's tapestry of sport, show, and commercialism was an unusual attention to religion. Not since Sandy Koufax refused to pitch a World Series game on Yom Kippur, or Cassius Clay accepted Islam has the faith of athletes received as much coverage in the sports media. The reasons for the attention are many, but prominent among them is the role that Christianity plays in the lives of so many of the St. Louis Rams, and their readiness to talk so openly about their faith.

In the week before the Super Bowl the *Chicago Tribune* ran two stories, Melissa Isaacson's "Keeping the Faith" and Rick Morrissey's "Preaching Has Its Place, but It's Not Here," sparked by the public Christianity of the St. Louis Rams. ESPN Radio host Dan Patrick, usually given to standard sports talk-radio material, put his spin on the topic when he invited an agnostic player to talk about the dynamics of a religious locker room from a non-religious perspective. To their credit, these journalists and many more across the country waded into unfamiliar waters. They treated what they found there with varying degrees of success.

Rick Morrissey, lead writer of the *Chicago Tribune's* venerable "In the Wake of the News" column, handled the topic most clumsily, complaining in column length that St.

What lessons on religion can we learn from the words and experiences of the spectacularly wealthy, super-athletic who dominate our television screens every weekend?

Louis Rams quarterback Kurt Warner, the National Football League's Most Valuable Player, talks about God too much and is unjustifiably disappointed when his message doesn't make its way into the sports page. "Many devout Christian athletes complain that whenever they refer to their religious beliefs during media interviews, their testimony often is edited out by heathen sportswriters wearing stained golf shirts." Morrissey continues, "There is a reason for this separation of church and sport: When people open up their sports section in the morning, they don't do it to read Warner's views on being born again." If Morrissey has in mind the notoriously hard to "church" 18–24 demographic, then he is probably right. But if, as he should hope, his readership extends beyond the sports-bar set, Morrissey might find quite a few more readers who, for many reasons—some surely not to Kurt Warner's liking—take an interest in the role religion plays in the life of a successful team.

According to fellow *Tribune* columnist Melissa Isaacson, one such interested party, the New Orleans Saints football team, hired a "voodoo priestess to cast a spell on the Rams" before a playoff game last year. The Saints won the game, and Warner arrived in New Orleans this year with passages of scripture to "counteract any sorcery." St. Louis lost again.

ESPN Radio personality Dan Patrick devoted a segment of his program to discussing religion and professional football with New York Giants offensive lineman Glen Parker, an agnostic. His experiences were, generally, that prayer and openly religious acts including the attribution of victory to God did as much harm to the team as they did good. When a quarterback says that we won and he played well because God wanted him to, the lineman said, it makes all of us wonder what, exactly, we contributed to the effort.

What lessons on religion can we learn from the words and experiences of the spectacularly wealthy, super-athletic who dominate our television screens every weekend? Do we need Eugene Robinson, formerly of the Atlanta Falcons, to show us that the Christian citizen by day might solicit a prostitute by night? Do we need defensive great and ordained minister Reggie White to show us that religious authority doesn't always come with clarity of thought on matters of race? Do we need players uncomfortable with public expressions of faith to demonstrate to us that religion

can be an alienating influence? For that matter, ought we to ask Kurt Warner (who said, according to Isaacson, "I'm not saying He's picking sides . . . but I think He wants me to be successful because I'm going to glorify His name.") and his Christian teammates where God was as Adam Vinatieri's field goal sailed through the up-rights Sunday night?

The answer to each of these questions is "No." We shouldn't turn to Warner for theology any more than we turn to Augustine or Tillich for play-by-play. But given the extent to which athletes have come to dominate public consciousness, we do well to look closely at how religion functions among them. Their problems and triumphs, and religious sensitivities, may be more publicized than ours, but they are certainly in the same ballpark. ✕

MARCH 14, 2002

"The Women" Are Everywhere

Amy Hollywood

In "Where are the Women?" (*The Nation*, October 22, 2001), Katha Pollitt called attention to the plight of Afghan women under the then ruling Taliban. After describing the harshest of the measures against women under the Taliban (legally women could not work, go to school, or leave their houses without a male escort and they were denied almost any form of health care), Pollitt compares "the Taliban's crazier requirements" for women to "the obsessive particularity of the Nazis' statutes against Jews" in the years preceding and during World War II.

Pollitt goes on to decry the widespread "notion that the plight of Afghan women is a matter of culture and tradition, and not for Westerners to judge."

While the 'appeal-to-the-Nazis' is a much overused and sensationalistic rhetorical strategy, I can understand the

We can only begin to contend with and critique the religious subordination of women
when we understand the complexity of religious traditions . . .

sense of urgency that leads Pollitt to deploy it in this case. I share her concern for the plight of Afghan women and her continued worry about the fate of women in Afghanistan after the Taliban's fall (see "After the Taliban," *The Nation*, December 17, 2001). (For a more historically informed and nuanced view of the situation in Afghanistan, however, see Charles Hirschkind's and Saba Mahmood's "Feminism, the Taliban, and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency," in *Anthropology Quarterly*, Volume 75, no. 2, Spring 2002) What concerns me here—and led to my first ever, albeit unpublished, letter to the editor—is the way in which Pollitt goes on to conflate the Taliban with "religious fanaticism" and religious fanaticism with the teachings of every "major religion." According to Pollitt, "the connections between religious fanaticism and the suppression of women are plain to see (and not just applicable to Islam)." "Show me," she challenges, "a major religion in which the inferiority of women, and God's wish to place them and their dangerous polluting sexuality under male control, is not a central original theme."

For Pollitt, religion is a static site of beliefs and practices oppressive to women. She shows no recognition of or concern for the fact that religion might do other things crucial for some people's—among them women's—flourishing, nor does she acknowledge that religious traditions are complex, changing, and contested (both from within and without). Most crucially, Pollitt's ignorance of the complexity of religious traditions leads her to play directly into the hands of the Taliban and other modern religious movements that make misogyny central to their belief and practice. Feminist scholars of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, to name only the religions about which I have some knowledge,

demonstrate the complexity of women's positions within these traditions. There is no single view about women or women's sexuality within the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Koran, or the sacred scriptures of India (and the Koran may well come off the best here, as Azizah al-Hibri argues in a recent exchange with Susan Moller Okin). To suggest that there are monolithic conceptions of women or women's sexuality at the core of these traditions implicitly legitimates narrow and distorting misogynist readings and misreadings of their central texts and practices.

Of course I don't deny the extraordinarily patriarchal cast of much religious history; yet the subordination of women occurs in different ways and to different degrees within these complex traditions and is often accompanied by substantial goods. We can only begin to contend with and critique the religious subordination of women when we understand the complexity of religious traditions, recognize the emancipatory and egalitarian countercurrents that often exist within them, and, finally, accept that religions may satisfy desires and aspirations unmet by Western secular political ideologies.

Pollitt consistently provides sophisticated and informed feminist analyses of contemporary politics. The same attention and care must be given to religion if Western feminists hope meaningfully to ally themselves with women internationally, for many women throughout the world (as in the West) are struggling to achieve equality and fulfillment within existing religious traditions. When Pollitt claims that these traditions are necessarily and irrevocably harmful to women, she renders her conception of feminism immediately unpalatable to a substantial number of women who otherwise share her concern for women's physical, psychological, and



The crisis in the church is not and never was about pedophilia.

spiritual well-being. Religious women's values may not be—in fact, at times probably won't be—couched in the same terms or even be the same as Pollitt's (or, for that matter, my own), shaped as Pollitt and I both are by modern Western liberalism and socialism (themselves deeply indebted to the Christian tradition).

Yet it's a mistake for Western women to assume from the outset the superiority of purportedly secular Western values. Rather we have to search for points of agreement between ourselves and women from different traditions, argue for the validity of our particular views, and—perhaps most importantly—allow these views to be questioned and challenged by the deeply cherished values of women different from ourselves. Only then can a truly international women's movement flourish. ✕

MAY 30, 2002

Of Troubled Hearts

Christopher Beem

Do not let your hearts be troubled.” I recently heard my parish priest read Jesus’ words from the Gospel, and apply them to the ongoing crisis in the Catholic Church. I found that I was not persuaded. Of course, I accept the idea that ultimately and fundamentally, Christ is in charge of his church. But I worried that an overeager search for quietude is a recipe for quietism—that is, inaction in the face of grave problems.

I felt the same uneasiness as I listened to the American Cardinals report on their meeting at the Vatican. Church leaders were so eager to move beyond this scandal, so eager to restore untroubled hearts to the American laity, that they passed over the really hard questions.

The crisis in the church is not and never was about pedophilia. Any profession that deals with children will

attract some few who would prey upon them. The crisis rather is about a leadership that routinely placed the welfare of the institution—the preservation of appearances, finances, and the status quo—ahead of the welfare of children.

Commentators repeatedly noted the extraordinary nature of the Vatican meeting. And indeed, the meeting was an extraordinary opportunity to address this far more scandalous sin. And yet at the end of it, we were told that we should find it extraordinary that the Pope declared pedophilia a sin and a crime. I already knew that. Indeed, I know that aiding and abetting a crime is also a crime. In an extraordinary meeting, church leaders would have asked why they acted like criminals.

I believe these men when they say that they love our children. But the fact remains that our children are not their children. The responsibilities, burdens, joys and sorrows of parenthood are not theirs. The more I think about it, the more I believe this to be the heart of the matter. Cardinal Law is not a parent. If it were otherwise—if he were a father—I cannot believe he would have treated children with such chronic and wonton callousness.

Those who are parents—lay men and women—bring an insight to the Christian pilgrimage that the church leadership does not have. And the current crisis demonstrates with appalling clarity that they desperately need that insight. I am not an authority on Canon Law, so I will simply ask the question: Can the Pope appoint someone who is not a priest, or who is not a man, to the position of Cardinal or Bishop? That is, can he appoint a mother or father to genuine church leadership? Perhaps he cannot. But the more operative issue, of course, is that he will not. The



Jesus was born a Jew. The manger was a Jewish manger.

extraordinary opportunity came and went. And it is all too likely that neither he, nor his successor, nor the American church leadership, will ever summon the courage to ask this question. But until they do, the current crisis may be weathered but it will not have passed. Indeed, until they do, I am unable to avoid the sad conclusion that the leadership of the Catholic Church is incorrigible and that my heart will and should remain deeply troubled. ✕

DECEMBER 19, 2002

A Letter from Jerusalem: Christmas 2002

Ithamar Gruenwald

Christmas this year cannot be like any Christmas in previous years. In the year that has passed, the Church of the Nativity was turned—for a while—into a beleaguered fortress. Arab Palestinians forced their way into the Church, and Israeli troops and armour forced them out. War makes horrible things happen. Whether it is the Palestinian police or the Israeli army, midnight mass is conducted with guns protecting the Holy Host.

The war that now plagues the Holy Land leaves no one indifferent. Christmas this year is therefore a moment that generates serious meditation. International terrorism has forced the world into a new situation, one in which thoughts lose their needed consistency. May God help and direct those who, under the circumstances, have to think twice or thrice before taking action.

Christmas 2002 is a time to look beyond the Christmas tree, the lights, and the other decorations and festivities. It is a time for a new resolve and a clear determination to celebrate birth and condemn everything that marks the reverse of a birth event.

In a wider historical context, Christmas brings up reflections on the role the Jewish setting had in shaping the events

connected with the rise of Christianity. Jesus was born a Jew. The manger was a Jewish manger. Christians believe that a light was shining in Bethlehem, a divine light, which had yet made no theological divisions. A light utterly removed from the dark night of human compassion as experienced in the events of 2001 and 2002.

When, however, a parting of the ways came into effect, we, the Jews, were pushed aside, condemned, and damned. Can we, then, rejoice with our Christian friends at Christmas time? In his memoir, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, Gershom Scholem tells that in his family they used to celebrate Christmas, with a Christmas tree and everything. I heard the same story from my father who emigrated in 1933 from Berlin to, then, Palestine. This is how Jewish people in Germany understood and enacted their emancipation from a status of ethnic minority. In their eyes, this opened the door to a positive assimilation, or, in more modern terms, to civil acculturation. Scholem even tells that at one point his mother put the picture of Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, under the Christmas tree—a remarkable mode of messianic transposition. Scholem remarks, though, that since then he always left home at Christmas time.

What are we to do, here in Jerusalem, on this day? I can speak for myself. This is a moment for me to share a few thoughts with friends, known and unknown. From a global village, we have moved into a new kind of global war. To protect our own house, we have to protect the house of a close-by or distant neighbour. I find myself meditating on what differences and alienation can cause. Thus, differences that have separated us, Jews and Christians, in the past should be allowed to dissolve; at least, let's give joint efforts their chance. Whether this concerns our environment, our social structure, or the acuteness of our sense of justice, we have a lot to do together. Perhaps it will simply be our ability to notice the hand that is stretched out to us and respond, with consideration, to the needs that the gesture expresses. It will certainly be reflected in our sincerity and prayers for peace. We have a lot to do together.

It is a Jewish custom to greet friends on the days that mark Jewish holidays and festivals with the words “Chag Same'ach,” a happy holiday. In Christian terms, this will equal “Merry Christmas.” ✕

Why, he asked, send these killers prematurely
to a better place?

JANUARY 20, 2003

Ryan's Commute

Martin E. Marty

When former Illinois Governor George Ryan commuted the death sentences of 167 inmates on Illinois's Death Row earlier this month, he prompted a new round of intense theological and moral debate. *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist John O'Sullivan weighed in from the furiously-opposed-to-commutation side (January 14), ignoring religious voices and shooting down the arguments of the "academic, media and political elites." O'Sullivan makes clear that the "elites" have to be wrong because "70 percent of [the American people] endorse capital punishment."

As O'Sullivan paints it, this is "the latest skirmish in the ongoing culture war" between "the people" and those "elites," including Ryan's approving Northwestern University audience with their "obscene" applause. By overlooking the religious perspective, O'Sullivan missed hearing the emphatic anti-death penalty voices of Pope John Paul II, the Catholic bishops, and leaders of many other-than-Roman-Catholic church bodies who, thus, also had to be wrong, if not evil.

Had he monitored the whole religious front, O'Sullivan could also have found some pro-capital punishment elites, especially among "evangelicals" or the "Christian right"—often the politically best-connected of American religious leaders. From many of them, he would have heard enthusiastic support for capital punishment. Why? They usually quote some biblical passage or invoke ancient precedents, in or out of context, to justify the killing. In doing so, they counteract their own views of conversion, repentance, and eternal destiny.

Ryan pointed out this apparent contradiction in his side comments. Aware that many of the executed were born again or otherwise converted, he wondered why any believers in heaven and the death penalty would see execution as preferable to life in prison. He'd been to many funerals where the preacher professed that the dead were now in a better place, in bliss. Why, he asked, send these killers prematurely to a better place? Prison has to be less blissful.

And there's a flip side to Ryan's observation that's equally hard to resolve from an evangelical perspective: execution of the not-yet-born-again prisoners. By choosing to execute them, the time needed to come to repentance is prematurely cut off; the opportunities for the evil ones to repent are taken away.

I remain puzzled even after the back-and-forth I had with prison minister Charles Colson after he announced his conversion to the pro-capital punishment camp some seasons ago. When such an aborting of conversion-possibilities is pointed out to these evangelizers, they either ignore the issue or respond in predestinarian terms: if God had it in mind and plan for sinners to be saved, they say, God would have acted to save before the executioner killed.

Those who are so sure of what God had in mind might, one would think, be cautious about being the agents of such cutting-short and thus such sending of sinners to eternal punishment. We'll monitor future responses. ✕



The interesting questions that arise from these events are not “why is there still faith?” but “what is going on in religion? why Mary?”

SEPTEMBER 7, 2003

Milton, Mass Mary

Elizabeth Hayes Alvarez

Recently, an image of the Virgin Mary appeared in the window of a Massachusetts hospital prompting 25,000 visitors. The hospital took no official position as to the authenticity of the apparition, but tried its best to accommodate the pilgrims who were regularly gathering in its parking lot. The Boston archdiocese was contacted for help. Cameramen and news reporters soon followed.

Eventually, the majority of the media-consuming public glimpsed the sight of what appeared to be the Madonna, head bowed and set in frosted glass. But other than etchings in glass, what do we see in scenes such as these? In our rational and cynical culture, how do we explain the attraction, as observers and participants, to miracles and the supernatural?

The church and the media are in similar binds when they seek to address these happenings. The church has historically taken a wait-and-see approach, loathe to dismiss the possibility of the supernatural or quash the faith of the people, yet prudent in wanting to protect (or control depending on your viewpoint) theology and worship. The media also strives to respect rather than dismiss “folk” religious expression but, as serious news, generally feels compelled to add an alternate explanation. This can border on the ridiculous as when a recent Associated Press account included commentary by Joe Nickell, a senior research fellow at the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, providing a parenthetical non-miraculous explanation (mineral deposits) in their coverage of the hospital appearance. What’s needed, instead of squeamishness over the existence of faith, is thoughtful reporting on religion.

The interesting questions that arise from these events are not “why is there still faith?” but “what is going on in

religion? why Mary?” Since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which downplayed and clarified the role of the saints while formally incorporating a detailed Mariology into the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, at least thirty Marian apparition claims have made news in the U.S.

Within the Roman Catholic Church, teaching on Mary continues to be expanded and veneration encouraged. The current pope’s devotion is well known. During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II has declared the “Marian Year” (1987); issued the encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, delivered, from 1995 through 1997, seventy Wednesday catecheses on Mary; and declared the “Year of the Rosary,” from October 2002 to October 2003. Pope John Paul II has recently instituted a new set of mysteries, the Luminous Mysteries, to contemplate in the rosary prayer through which, he explains, the face of Christ is contemplated in the “school of Mary.”

On a “folk” level, interest in the Holy Mother abounds. The internet overflows with sites and webbrings devoted to her. Conservatives and liberals alike claim her as their own, putting forth wildly differing accounts of her role in faith and her intentions for mankind. She has been reclaimed as a traditionally Christian, but newly understood, female locus of devotion by the “not religious, but spiritual” folk, while at the same time serving as the standard-bearer for conservatives in the pro-life movement (complete with a pro-life rosary).

Apparition sites like the one in Milton, Massachusetts abound throughout the world, drawing thousands of pilgrims each year. And new ones crop up all the time. There was even a follow-up story that said people were now claiming to see the image of the cross on the hospital’s chimney stacks.

Somehow that story never grabbed hold (or we had already moved on). But despite our ability to see what is or isn’t there, we recognize that faith in America continues to flourish in parking lots as well as parishes — with or without a permit. ✕

The bottom line: the book should come coded
for “black light” . . .

SEPTEMBER 24, 2003

Cracking *The Da Vinci Code*

Margaret M. Mitchell

Besieged by requests for my reaction to *The Da Vinci Code*, I finally decided to sit down and read it over the weekend. It was a quick romp, largely fun to read, if rather predictable and preachy. This is a good airplane book, a novelistic thriller that presents a rummage sale of accurate historical nuggets alongside falsehoods and misleading statements.

The bottom line: the book should come coded for “black light,” like the pen used by the character Saunière to record his dying words, so that readers could scan pages to see which “facts” are trustworthy and which patently not, and (if a black light could do this!) highlight the gray areas where complex issues are misrepresented and distorted.

Patently Inaccurate — In his own lifetime Jesus “inspired millions to better lives” (p.231); there were “more than eighty gospels” (p.231; the number 80 is factual-sounding, but has no basis); “the earliest Christian records” were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (including gospels) and Nag

Hammadi texts (pp.234, 245); the Nag Hammadi texts “speak of Christ’s ministry in very human terms” (p.234); the marriage of Mary Magdalene and Jesus is “a matter of historical record” (p.244); Constantine invented the divinity of Jesus and excluded all gospels but the four canonical ones; Constantine made Christianity “the official religion” of the Roman Empire (p.232); Constantine coined the term “heretic” (p.234); “Rome’s official religion was sun worship” (p.232). There are more.

Gray Areas — “The vestiges of pagan religion in Christian symbology are undeniable” (p.232), but that does not mean “Nothing in Christianity is original.” The relationship between early Christianity and the world around it, the ways in which it was culturally embedded in that world, sometimes unreflectively, sometimes reflexively, sometimes in deliberate accommodation, sometimes in deliberate cooptation, are far more complicated than the simplistic myth of Constantine’s Stalinesque program of cultural totalitarianism. Further, Constantine’s religious life — whether, when, how and by what definition he was Christian and/or “pagan” — is a much debated issue because the literary and non-literary sources (such as coins) are not consistent. That Constantine the emperor had “political” motives (p.234) is hardly news to anyone! The question is how religion and politics (which cannot be separated in the ancient world) were interrelated in him. He is as hard to figure out on this score as Henry VIII, Osama Bin Laden, Tammy Faye Baker



A “black light” edition of *The Da Vinci Code* would, however, be unnecessary if readers would simply take the book as fiction.

and George W. Bush. Brown has turned one of history’s most fascinating figures into a cartoon-ish villain.

“Paganism” is treated throughout *The Da Vinci Code* as though it were a unified phenomenon, which it was not (“pagan” just being the Christian term for “non-Christian”). The religions of the Mediterranean world were multiple and diverse, and cannot all be boiled down to “sun-worshippers” (p.232). Nor did all “pagans” frequently, eagerly, and with mystical intent participate in the *hieros gamos* (ritual sex acts). “The Church” is also used throughout the book as though it had a clear, uniform and unitary referent. For early Christian history this is precisely what we do not have, but a much more complex, varied and localized phenomenon. Brown presumes “the Church” is “the Holy Roman Catholic Church” which he thinks had tremendous power always and everywhere, but ecclesiastical history is a lot messier.

Brown propagates the full-dress conspiracy theory for Vatican suppression of women. Feminist scholars and others have been debating different models of the “patriarchalization” of Christianity for decades. Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza’s landmark work, *In Memory of Her* (1983), argued that while Jesus and Paul (on his better days) were actually pretty much pro-women, it was the next generations (the authors of letters in Paul’s name like 1 and 2 Timothy and others) who betrayed their feminist agenda and sold out to the Aristotelian, patriarchal vision of Greco-Roman society. Others (unfortunately) sought to blame the misogyny on the Jewish roots of Christianity. More recently it has been argued that the picture is more mixed, even for Jesus and Paul. That is, they may have been more liberal than many of their contemporaries about women, but they were not all-out radicals, though they had ideas (such as Gal 3:28) that were even more revolutionary than they realized (in both senses of the term). Alas, no simple story here. And while obsessing over Mary Magdalene, *The Da Vinci Code* ignores completely the rise and incredible durability and power of the other Mary, the mother of Jesus, and devotion to her which follows many patterns of “goddess” veneration (she even gets the Athena’s Parthenon dedicated to her in the sixth century).

This list is just a sample. A “black light” edition of *The Da Vinci Code* would, however, be unnecessary if readers would

simply take the book as fiction. But there is an obstacle: the first page of the book reads, under the bold print headline “Fact”: “all descriptions of . . . documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.” ✕

OCTOBER 23, 2003

Twilight of the Icons

Jeremy Biles

Among contemporary America’s many media spectacles, professional wrestling is perhaps the most spectacular. Indeed, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), the most prominent “all-star” wrestling outlet, can hardly be matched for its sheer grandiloquence. Its larger-than-life heroes and villains, bedecked in costumes of seemingly infinite variety and unsurpassable pomp, engage in battles whose outcomes, if often predictable, are only achieved by way of a stunning parade of power and might.

Dealing and enduring exaggerated violence, participating in flamboyant feats of strength, engaging in melodramas of deific proportions, and embodying personas whose features are nothing but glorious dimensions of Justice or Infamy, the characters of the WWE exceed the sphere of the strictly mortal. The WWE is inhabited solely by “superstars”—men and women transfigured.

Observations along these lines led French critic Roland Barthes, in the 1950s, to cite grandiloquence and transmutation as essential features of pro wrestling. Comparing the grappling matches “hidden in the most squalid of Parisian halls” to “the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bull-fights,” he suggests that wrestling partakes of “a light without shadow,” which “generates an emotion without reserve.” And what was true of French wrestling then is all the more true of

Frequently called an American icon, Hogan has been transfigured into an icon of America . . .

American wrestling now. Today's WWE abundantly affirms Barthes's conclusion that "wrestling holds the power of transmutation which is common to the Spectacle and to Religious Worship."

No single wrestler more patently manifests this religious and glorious aspect of wrestling than Hulk Hogan. Since the early 1980s, Hogan has been the very embodiment of grandiloquence. Entering the arena to blaring strains of rock music, the six foot-seven inch, 275-pound Hogan parades to the "squared circle" amidst the impassioned chants of worshipful fans who typically bow to Hogan in exaggerated reverence, or wave hand-made signs proclaiming that "Hogan is God." Once in the ring, Hogan shakes off his red feather boa and, in a calculated display of maniacal strength, tears the t-shirt from his bronze torso. Upon defeating his opponent, Hogan never fails to engage in his hallmark "pose down," in which his sweat-soaked, and often blood-drenched, body is displayed in all its muscular, embattled glory. At the age of fifty, Hogan still rouses fans and delivers a dependable shot of excitement.

Hogan, one of wrestling's perennial heroes, is nonetheless among its most flagrant rule-breakers. Fans who normally decry rule-breaking adopt the logic that Hogan's transgressions are permissible by virtue of the fact that it is Hogan committing them. Sacrosanct, the apotheosis of Justice, Hogan can do no wrong, even when doing wrong.

Hogan's seemingly eternal power to fascinate has often been coupled with the trappings of patriotism. His now legendary victory over the (apparently Iranian) Iron Sheik for the championship title in 1984 saw Hogan waving an American flag to zealous chants of "USA!"

And recently "banished" from the WWE, Hogan returned, transfigured, under the guise of Mr. America, a hero wearing a blue mask emblazoned with a white star and bearing the familiar prop of an American flag (which doubles as a weapon). Before his appearance in this patriotic incarnation, Mr. America was billed by the WWE as the embodiment of American "fighting spirit" and "justice." A video montage heralding the advent of the hero-god included clips of American bombers and tanks cruising over foreign terrain. Footage of a blooming mushroom cloud concluded the series of images. Frequently called an American icon,

Hogan has been transfigured into an icon of America—an America defined by its justified violence and violent justice.

The unassailable goodness of Hogan, whose rule-breaking serves justice, finds its counterpart in the notion, exploited by the WWE, that American violence is good because it is America committing it. And if the aging face of an "immortal" icon is hidden behind the mask of patriotism, it may be because it would belie this "ageless" truth about America. The real, and troubling, truth that Mr. America's grandiloquence brings to light is this: the combination of Spectacle and Religious Worship may issue in a dangerous emotion—patriotism without reserve. ✕

JANUARY 19, 2004

Remembering Martin Luther King

Martin E. Marty

Our house has always remembered Martin Luther and Martin Luther King. Our children sometimes confused the two. Son John's teacher once advised me to confront our six-year-old about his fibbing. "He claimed to have spent a week in a dormitory with Martin Luther"—whose name had come up in a Lutheran Sunday School class. I confronted John who, in all innocence, insisted he told the truth: we had spent a week with him (when I duoded with King at Hampton Institute) in the summer of 1962.

Between sessions, the civil rights leader played with our five boys, hoisting them to a low-lying tree branch and catching them as they jumped.

Needless to say, we spent time telling our little Lutherans about the other Martin Luther. But King always remained vivid to them, as he does to millions of Americans and world-citizens who have at best a vague knowledge of

King . . . was a virtuoso with two sets of texts, neither of which he imposed and both of which he used to persuade.

who Martin Luther was.

I begin so informally because King often gets elevated to iconic status, fit into remote niches, described as so full of *gravitas* that he could not unbend. He could unbend. But I must move on from the fond recall to the less familial, less personalized, and weightier theme for this week.

We argue much these days about how the religious and the civil orders do or should interact. Some think God and the public are served by sculptures and plaques and imposed prayer in public places. Here is my take on how King instead related the two orders. Sociologist Michael Hill, citing Max Weber, showed the difference between the charismatic religious leader, who typically says of a text "It is written, but I say unto you," and the religious virtuoso, who says "It is written, and I insist." "The religious virtuoso follows what he takes to be a pure and rigorous interpretation of normative obligations which already exist in a religious tradition." In American culture, biblical texts were in that tradition.

King, in this sense, was a virtuoso with two sets of texts, neither of which he imposed and both of which he used to persuade. In one pocket were civil texts, especially the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. King would figuratively wave them and say that since 100 percent of the population was committed to these, he "insisted" that they be responded to by and realized among all citizens. In the other were biblical texts, as befit the pocket of an African-American preacher. He would cite Isaiah or Micah or John the Baptist or Jesus and say, in effect, since 80 percent of you profess to be responsive to these texts, I insist that you try to help realize the justice of which they speak.

For at least a moment in 1965, enough people in the White House, the Congress, the Court, the legislatures, and the general public responded and more civil rights were realized. King was religious and he put religion to work when he wanted to reach the conscience of the public. Civil law came into the picture not for the imposition of religion but the assurance of rights.

At our house each year we remember King's use of texts and his persuasive and courageous achievements. We also fondly recall and celebrate the important then-young man who, in 1962, had time for the five little boys on the tree branch. ✕



APRIL 15, 2004

Tru-Envy?

Jon Pahl

I saw the first dandelion in my lawn yesterday, and today two advertisements for lawn care companies arrived in my mail-box. Call it a coincidence, but for many in America, such a conjunction of signs would be the trigger of a largely unconscious religious crisis.

Lawn care is big business in America. Estimates of the amount spent on professional lawn care services vary, but a recent Harris Survey put the total at \$28.9 billion in 2002, which calculates to roughly \$1,200 per household, spread over the 24.7 million households who use such services.

And that doesn't take into account the products consumers purchase for do-it-yourself devotion to the righteous icon of the American lawn. According to a 2002 article by Craig Wilson in *USA Today*, there are roughly 30 million acres of these little shrines to uniformity across the U.S. Their care demands 300 million gallons of gas per year, 70

Can there be a connection between the way we treat dandelions and the way we treat our neighbors?

million pounds of pesticides, and roughly one billion hours in labor.

All in all, something must be motivating so many in America to devote themselves to a blessed rage for order that may have bad implications for our public life together.

Most notably—pesticides and herbicides kill things. Take dandelions, for example. The impact of lawn care chemicals on humans and domestic animals is open to debate, but most children find dandelions pretty, and they are (in fact) a food source. What happens to make adults want to kill them?

Virginia Scott Jenkins, in her wonderfully researched *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession*, traces the desire to kill weeds historically. She notes that the current rage for a chemically-dependent lawn emerged after World War II, and argues that “American front lawns are a symbol of man’s control of, or superiority over, his environment.”

Such a symbol is, by the definition of a lawn, a public one. Is it also religious? One of the ads I received was on four-by-ten inch card stock. It featured a long picture of a green hedge with a man staring over it with the words “TRU envy” next to him. On the flip-side of the card, it encouraged me to call the company “now for a greener lawn. Your neighbors will notice.” Then, in smaller print, it continued: “You can enjoy a lawn your neighbors will envy.”

Now, call me old-fashioned, but I thought envy was a sin. And I’m supposed to inspire it in my neighbors? I suppose a way to put the best construction on this ad would be to say that it appeals to my pride: that in the eyes of my neighbors I will appear noble, good, and pure for the greenness and uniformity of my lawn.

Or maybe the ad appeals to my fear and shame: that my neighbors won’t love me if I grow a motley lawn. And isn’t that a dangerous facet of many religions? Believers have their identity defined for them over and against some other, who is defined as a threat and to whom they must demonstrate their superiority—even to the point of sacrifice and killing—to display that their faith is real and true.

Even more pointedly, isn’t that the way much of public religion works in America? We seem somehow uncertain of our salvation, so we seek enemies to conquer and control, and we seem driven constantly to display our power for

others to see. Can there be a connection between the way we treat dandelions and the way we treat our neighbors? The way we treat the poor and sick and suffering of the world?

Honestly, I hope not. And the structures are in place for people to make wiser spiritual choices: to devote ourselves to places of grace that are not constructed for us by corporate products. That is the beauty of the lively experiment that is protected by the First Amendment.

But, at present, that \$28.9 billion we’re spending seems to be leading us directly into the temptation to kill things with poison, to try to control the uncontrollable, and to desire to be the envy of our neighbors. Not much seems “tru” about that. ✕

SEPTEMBER 9, 2004

Supreme Court Theology

Brian Britt

College religion courses come in many varieties, with no consistency in labeling. “Theology” at one school may be called “religious studies” at another, and at still others missionaries are trained under the rubric of “intercultural studies.” While many church-affiliated colleges minimize their denominational identity, the study of theology flourishes at some state universities, and non-denominational Christian colleges, according to a recent *New York Times* article, have grown 67 percent in the last ten years.

These conflicting trends reveal unresolved tensions about religion and higher education in American life. Is the study of religion a kind of religious practice? Is a major in religion, or any other subject, really just a form of job training? With its 7–2 decision in February to uphold a Washington state law denying scholarships to theology and ministry students (*Locke v. Davey*), the Supreme Court has calmed the nerves

. . . the Supreme Court . . . has reinforced the confusion
between religious study and practice . . .

of People for the American Way and others worried about government support for “faith-based” institutions, but it has also codified two major confusions in the law of church and state.

In the case, Joshua Davey was denied a state scholarship available to all undergraduate majors *except* “theology” majors. While Davey’s major in pastoral ministries was undoubtedly designed to prepare for a career in the church, the statute in question applies to “theology” without defining the term, a problem overlooked even by the dissenting opinion of Justices Scalia and Thomas. In fact, Davey’s college study led him to Harvard Law School, where he is currently enrolled.

The first confusion here is the idea that the boundaries of church and state are crossed only by “theology” majors. Davey attended Northwest College, a fully-accredited evangelical institution affiliated with the Assemblies of God. Northwest offers many religiously-based undergraduate majors. Students who major in intercultural studies at Northwest, for example, take courses on “Intercultural Ministries” and “Multicultural Evangelism.” The entire curriculum is permeated by the religious identity of the college. As Chief Justice Rehnquist admits, the vague state law must be read along with the state constitution, which prohibits state funding of degrees that are “devotional in nature or designed to induce religious faith,” a standard that could apply to all degrees at Northwest.

The second, related confusion is the implication that all theology majors are studying to prepare for the ministry. Even the two dissenting opinions blur theology and ministry, claiming that “Today’s holding is limited to training the clergy.” Most departments of theology and religious studies belong to the humanities and liberal arts, beside English, history, and philosophy. Religion students are famously impractical people, but at schools like Williams College or Virginia Tech (where I teach) those who go on to the ministry are a minority. Most theology and religion faculty belong to the American Academy of Religion, an organization of over 9,000 members whose primary mission is to promote “reflection upon and understanding of religious traditions, issues, questions, and values,” not the training of church leaders.

With provisions in thirty-seven states strictly preventing

the use of state funding for religious purposes, legal scholars attribute laws like Washington’s to the legacy of the anti-Catholic Blaine amendments of the nineteenth century. And at least fourteen states specifically bar theology students from receiving state aid. The Washington law (“[n]o aid shall be awarded to any student who is pursuing a degree in theology”) does not dispute the educational validity of theology majors, which are offered at accredited and mostly tax-exempt institutions, but takes exception to what these majors might go on to do. It seems likely that the Supreme Court case will have implications for all of these state laws, though *Locke v. Davey* leaves the meaning of “theology” totally unclear.

An even greater misunderstanding lies in the popular notion, reinforced by the majority and minority in this case, that all undergraduate majors match directly to specific careers. Despite pleas from professional and graduate schools for broadly-educated students, and a rapidly-growing rate of career changes in the workforce, many students are advised by parents and faculty to make a one-to-one link between the major and the career beyond it.

By upholding the law withholding scholarships from theology students, the Supreme Court has done more than assuage civil libertarians; it has reinforced the confusion between religious study and practice and perpetuated the caricature of higher education as vocational training. ✕



What does one do if he or she becomes convinced that the “just war”
criteria did not and do not “fit” this war?

JANUARY 3, 2005

Greeley's War

Martin E. Marty

Andrew Greeley, sociologist, novelist, columnist, and priest, asked in the Christmas Eve edition of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, “Why?” He was referring to the Iraq war in the decades ahead. His language about the adventure was incautious: It’s a “cockamamie and criminally immoral war . . . planned before the Sept. 11 attack in which Iraq was not involved . . . It has nothing to do with the war on terror . . . [It is the product of] hallucinations by men and women [who write] long memos — . . . intellectuals with pointy heads.”

Greeley would support the troops in “the best way possible: Bring them home, get them out of a war for which the planning was inadequate, the training nonexistent, the goal obscure, and the equipment . . . inferior. They are brave men and women . . . [but] sitting ducks for fanatics. Those who die are the victims of the big lie. . . . They are not the war criminals. The ‘Vulcans,’ as the . . . foreign policy team calls itself, are the criminals, and they ought to face indictment In fact, the war . . . has become a quagmire [T]here is no possibility of victory.”

Theology from this papist (supporter of Pope John Paul II): “One of the criteria for a just war is that there be a reasonable chance of victory. Where is that reasonable chance? Each extra day of the war makes it more unjust, more criminal. The guilty people are [also] those who in the November election endorsed the war. They are also responsible for the Iraqi deaths We celebrate ‘peace on Earth to men of good will.’ Americans must face the fact that they can no longer claim to be men and women of good will [By the way, there is no] serious reason to

believe that Sen. John Kerry would have had the courage to end the war.”

Being the moderate Swiss half of the Irish-Swiss duo “Born Feb. 5, 1928,”* I would have used more temperate language, but believe Greeley raises a point we must face in 2005, the first year of the next decade of this war. What does one do if he or she becomes convinced that the “just war” criteria did not and do not “fit” this war? When the majority of the population finally came to call the Vietnam War immoral, I was counseling, among others, Lutheran “selective conscientious objectors,” that is, not pure pacifists, but objectors to a particular war.

Martin Luther asked, at treatise length, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved.” His main answer in short: Yes. But: “Suppose my lord were wrong in going to war.’ I reply: ‘If you know for sure that he is wrong, then you should fear God rather than men, Acts 4 [5:29], and you should neither fight nor serve, for you cannot have a good conscience before God.’” Luther did say, give your “lord” the benefit of the doubt; “you ought not to weaken certain obedience for the sake of an uncertain justice.” But otherwise, “it is better for God to call you loyal and honorable than for the world to call you loyal and honorable.”



... humanity's interrelatedness is not simply a political and economic reality,
but represents a profoundly moral and theological imperative.

Greeley is not putting the onus on the troops, whom he applauds and for whom he has sympathy. He questions the citizens who support the venture. He is not the only questioner, and the hawkish Luther is not the only adviser on the morality of war. Still, in 2010, will we look back and ask whether we would not have done better at least to have given such voices a hearing earlier on? ✕

Editor's Note: Martin Marty and Andrew Greeley were both born on February 5, 1928.

MARCH 31, 2005

The World House

Robert M. Franklin

As war rages in Iraq and as President Bush advocates a budget that many fear will further neglect the nation's poor, the writings and ministry of Martin Luther King, Jr., are as relevant as ever. In particular, the urgent message of his largely ignored "final testament" merits revisiting. Indeed, I hope it will become the basis for careful study and discussion in the months to come, especially as many religious individuals and organizations continue thinking about how to respond to ongoing strife.

King's testament is found in the closing chapter of his last book, *Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community?* published in 1968, the year of his assassination. It is titled "The World House."

King opens with the story of a deceased novelist whose papers include suggestions for future stories. One of the most prominently highlighted ideas is the following: "a widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together." King elaborates on this metaphor, suggesting that it communicates "the great new problem of humankind. We have inherited a large house, a great world

house in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace." In other words, "whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

King was at pains to communicate that humanity's interrelatedness is not simply a political and economic reality, but represents a profoundly moral and theological imperative. And as such, people are obligated to exercise prudent stewardship over both the world's resources and our own status as responsible citizens and moral agents residing in what has become the world's only superpower. King's testament demands to be taken seriously by professors and students of religion, America's houses of worship, and the citizenry at large.

Let me mention three areas where, if we are to follow King's example and thought, we could flex greater moral muscle. First, King would urge us to practice our commitment to eradicating racism and its many subtle manifestations. Each of us should engage in a critical "diversity inventory" of the religious and secular organizations to which we belong and provide financial support. Are these organizations doing all they can to reverse the legacy of white-skin preference by including ethnic-racial minorities? If not, we should exercise our voices and votes.

Second, King pleads for the tolerance and understanding of others' religions. The xenophobia of the past is now a renewed danger. To the extent that we can, we should be resources for communities that need assistance in viewing other religious traditions as manifestations of a good and generous God who is capable of loving all of God's creatures, even when some of us falter in doing so.

Third, the relatively affluent folks among us should demonstrate courageous moral stewardship by identifying with our poor neighbors and doing all we can to advance policies and programs that accelerate their transition to self sufficiency, while condemning politicians that reward the rich at the expense of the poorest.

One group of religious progressives is out to live up to these demands. The Clergy Leadership Network is jointly

The line [between church and state] has always been messy,
the wall has always had breaches . . .



sponsoring a national witness against the war to be held at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 2005, the thirty-eighth anniversary of Dr. King's historic sermon against the Vietnam War ("Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence"). The list of fifty organizational sponsors includes The Tikkun Community, Protestants for the Common Good, the National Council of Churches, Drive Democracy, and the Sikh World Council–America Region. They will focus on alternatives to war and, in the spirit of King, expand the agenda to address poverty, racism, sexism, and other forms of social oppression. The group will also attempt to build a national movement for peace and justice inspired by King's concept of the "Beloved Community." The effort aims to gather one million signatures and launch a national bus tour on April 4th. Following music from a youth choir, speakers on the evening roster will include many old and new activist voices, among them Riverside senior minister Dr. James Forbes, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Dr. Susannah Heschel, and Imam Feisal Rauf.

Their hope is that these efforts and others like them will echo and reinvigorate King's message of interrelatedness, finding receptive ears within the corridors of power in this nation and throughout the world house. ✕

MAY 16, 2005

Collisions and Doubts

Martin E. Marty

Where to draw "the line of separation between the rights of religion and the Civil authority" (James Madison)? Or, less felicitously, where to maintain or breach "the wall of separation between church and state" (Thomas Jefferson)? When to make use of the line? Those questions are older than 1787, and today more than ever there are "collisions and doubts," as Madison called them.

The line has always been messy, the wall has always had breaches, and this will always be so, as long as a dynamic republic shall last. Two newspapers on May 12 offered new examples of this fact.

In a *Chicago Tribune* op-ed, David McGrath, an expert on English literature and Native American affairs, complained about a 198-foot tall crucifix towering at the junction of I-57 and I-70 ("The Art of Jamming Beliefs Down Our Throats"). It stands "as close to the highway" as the state will permit, its glistening surface serving to "shout and bully with its message of Christian morals." McGrath welcomes civil controversy but finds this uncivil. And a photo of the cross suggests that it may be just this; it is overbearing, triumphalist, and more. What would Jesus do? He'd probably call such use of his cross "tacky." But where it is, is perfectly legal. If it is even as close as one inch from the legal boundary, all we can do is put on our dark glasses, glower with McGrath, and take refuge in more chaste visions of the cross and expressions of piety. Why? Because the cross is on private land. On public land it would be claiming privilege for faith over non-faith, one faith over others. Where it is, "any number can play" on equal terms.

Most misplacements of the Ten Commandments and crosses occur on courthouse lawns or classroom walls. Are these about religion? Since religion can be expressed on

Billy Graham . . . has served as America's unofficial
preacher at large for over six decades.

most private lawns and on church, home, and store walls, aren't these courthouse and classroom placements saying something political and primeval? "We belong, and you don't! We set the terms and you are marginal, unpatriotic, or wrong!" Such forms of "shouting and bullying" may be detrimental to faith and civic life.

As for the "when": *The New York Times* and then the Associated Press (on May 14) ran stories about Air Force Academy personnel, programs, and privileges, as well as pressures against most religions that do not focus on the "born-again" experience and orthodoxy. Details remain controversial, but charges are that anti-Semitism and anti-other religion mark some of the teaching on the premises of the Academy (the wrong "where") and during classroom and other teaching and publicizing time (the wrong "when"). Air Force Academy Chaplain Melina Morton—who has to be trusted, because she's a fellow Lutheran—says, "I realize this is the end of my Air Force career" because she protested and pointed to wrongs. In fairness, we have to hear more from Major General Charles Baldwin, Air Force chief of chaplains, who said the higher-ups merely sent Morton to Japan, far from Colorado Springs, and changed her duties, assigning her to serve there in her final chaplaincy days.

The Pentagon is looking into more than fifty recent complaints of religious intolerance at the Academy, and is assessing a report by Yale Divinity School professor Kristen Leslie. Leslie quoted an Air Force chaplain during basic training who warned that "those [cadets] who are not born again will burn in the fires of hell." Off premises and off time he can say that. On premises? Wrong. ✕



JULY 7, 2005

Billy Graham's Final Crusade

James L. Evans

Two weekends ago, Billy Graham preached what has been predicted to be his final American evangelistic campaign—perhaps his last campaign ever. If this proves to be true, his career will have concluded where it began, in New York. His first nationally recognized crusade was held at Madison Square Garden in 1957. In 2005, however, Madison Square Garden was far too small to accommodate crowds that approached 90,000 on the evening of the event, which was held at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, in Queens.

Billy Graham, now 86, has served as America's unofficial preacher at large for over six decades. His life and ministry have tracked alongside some of our country's most dramatic moments. And in more than a few instances, Graham was a player in the drama.

He rose to national prominence during the height of the Cold War, preaching vigorously against the evils of "godless communism." In fact, it was his staunch anti-communist message that brought him to the attention of newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst. Impressed with Graham's message, Hearst ordered his editors to "puff Graham." That puff ignited the preacher's national identity.

Apart from communism, however, Graham was reluctant to speak directly to social issues. For instance, the 1957 crusade at Madison Square Garden took place the year after the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had gained a national reputation for his leadership, and the civil rights movement was building momentum. Rather than address the issue of segregation directly, Graham invited Dr. King to lead in prayer during one of the services. Some

. . . in a time of shrill and divisive religious rhetoric, Graham's simple message of faith rings with refreshing authenticity.

Christian leaders criticized Graham for what they saw as his failure to use his own national reputation to help advance the cause of civil rights. But sympathetic historians argue that Graham's willingness to reach out to Dr. King sent a clear signal of support, and Graham was reported to have said that a Christian racist is an oxymoron.

During the Vietnam era, Graham did not speak out against the war. In fact, there is reason to believe he was in favor of the conflict. One reason for his support, at least initially, was related to his strong anti-communist sentiments. Vietnam was sold as a war against communism, and Graham considered communism to be the antithesis of Christianity.

But critics also point out that during this time Graham gained unprecedented access to the Johnson, and later the Nixon, White House. These close connections may have affected Graham's willingness to criticize administration policies. The experience of Watergate, however, and the revelations of Nixon's corruption were sobering epiphanies for Graham. Indeed, during the early days of the rise of the Moral Majority—the early flagship venture of the Religious Right—Graham warned of the dangers of linking faith's reputation to political parties.

But politics has always had a way of finding Graham. During the first night of this most recent crusade, Graham was introduced by former President Bill Clinton. Senator Hillary Clinton was also present on the platform. After the introduction, Graham quipped that he always thought that Bill Clinton should have been an evangelist. After citing the many gifts that would allow Clinton to become a successful evangelist, Graham then said, "And Hillary could stay home and run the country."

Several conservative Christian leaders took serious offense at this remark, accusing Graham of endorsing Senator Clinton for a presidential run in 2008. That was not the only time Graham ran afoul of members from his conservative base. In an interview just prior to this most recent evangelistic campaign, Graham said he would not preach about any of the political issues important to evangelical conservatives, including abortion, homosexuality, and stem cell research. "I'm just going to preach the gospel and am not going to get off on these hot-button issues," Graham told *The New York Times*. "If I get on these other subjects,

it divides the audience."

This desire for unity has been an important theme for Graham. Three years ago, taped conversations emerged with Graham and Nixon engaging in anti-Semitic banter in the White House. After the revelation, Graham quickly met with Jewish leaders and apologized to the Jewish community. In preparation for the present evangelistic campaign, Graham again met with Jewish leaders and pledged anew his opposition to all forms of prejudice.

For the most part, Graham has traveled a middle course between liberal and conservative evangelicals, with a focus on changing people by means of a unifying message rather than changing laws to reflect evangelical social concerns. Over the years, this middle course has brought criticism from all sides. But in a time of shrill and divisive religious rhetoric, Graham's simple message of faith rings with refreshing authenticity. ✕

OCTOBER 27, 2005

Black Theology and Womanist Theology in Conversation

Dwight N. Hopkins

Black theology originated when African American male pastors and ecclesial administrators began reflecting on the black church's role in providing religious understandings of the major developments in America during the 1960s and '70s. Womanist theology, created twenty years later out of black and feminist theologies, emerged with black Christian women embracing the positive relation between their faith and their creative, God-given female and African American identities.

Black and womanist theologies maintain their ties to the black church; they share similar theoretical methodologies,

. . . black male scholars are reinterpreting the gospel message itself
as focusing on the plight of, and prospects for, women.



developing doctrines on the basis of the Christian experiences of people in churches. Each claims liberation and survival for marginalized communities as essential to ministry, the message of Jesus, and ecclesial mission. Each now proclaims inclusive gender leadership. And as religious movements, black and womanist disciplines have found voices within the academy.

Next week, black theology and womanist theology will be in conversation for the first time on a national platform, at the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. The twenty-two speakers at “Black Theology and Womanist Theology in Dialogue: Which Way Forward for the Church and the Academy?” comprise an equal number of men and women. Half of the speakers are pastors and half are professors, with Protestants and Catholics lecturing along with African American gay and lesbian speakers.

An innovative format will foster in-depth debate: Male speakers will reflect on subjects typically associated with womanists, while women will engage themes usually linked to black theology. Topics under discussion include liberation, survival and quality of life, patriarchy in the family, human sexuality, black males as an endangered species, Jesus the Man, Christ as a Woman, global missions, and the future of black theology-womanist theology dialogue in church and academy.

An important principle underlies this conference: All

parties—black and womanist academics as well as female and male clergy—agree that the discipline of theology entails critical reflection on the message and witness of the church. Theology tests whether or not the church is faithful to what it has been called to believe, say, and do. And the church provides the religious community for whose benefit academics develop theology. Mutual accountability thus obtains: Theology serves the church, while the church opens itself for ongoing theological inspection.

Before now, a conference of this sort has been impossible, as African American women required the space and time to develop their own voices, apart from the dominating and agenda-setting tendencies of earlier male scholars. And previously there did not exist a sufficient number of black women professors to offset some of the earlier, often arrogant, positions of men. In the last ten years, however, womanist scholars and black male theologians, each in their separate gatherings, have spoken of the need for a venue for critical and collaborative dialogue.

Womanist theologians and ethicists have edited volumes calling for African American female thinkers to develop a methodology that starts with the religious beliefs and practices of women, while also embracing the entire constituency of the church (i.e., men and boys, as well). Varieties of womanists’ syllabi in various academic institutions cite the same concern. Womanist methodology seeks to be inclusive of the entire community.

Similarly, while the first generation of black theologians wrote as if African American women were invisible in the church and academy or, worse, simply spoke for women, today’s black (male) theologians express concern and a yearning for interaction with womanists. A growing cohort of second- and third-generation black male theologians is recognizing that partnerships with black female religious scholars and pastors are crucial for church vitality and empowering theological curricula. Black theologians realize that what it means to be a male theological scholar or church pastor hinges on perceiving one’s own humanity as tied to the humanity of African American women thinkers and preachers.

In fact, black male scholars are reinterpreting the gospel message itself as focusing on the plight of, and prospects

The differences came in on the question of what public institutions
should do to privilege and promote religion . . .

for, women. Next week's conference affirms a sacred vision that had formerly been rejected: the right of women to reflect critically on their own unique and independent relation to God.

Men's and women's beliefs and theological rationales continue to evolve. With increased openness and a growing desire to forge dialogue and collaboration, the time has come for a conference facilitating conversation between two vital and important movements in contemporary theology. ✕

OCTOBER 31, 2005

Multiple Choices from the Founders

Martin E. Marty

The "Founding Fathers," or "Founders," are getting worked over in public affairs, and especially in religious matters, more than ever before. With courts wrestling with issues of church and state, educators fighting over ways to treat faith and faiths in public institutions, and communities battling over the place of religious symbols on "everybody's spaces" like courthouse lawns and walls, we often find citations from figures like Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison, and so many others. These figures were writing in the context of their own times and are easily misrepresented out of that context, but we can still draw some signals from their works.

Fortunately, a new collection of snippets from their writings is available in *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations*, edited by James H. Hutson. I first came across Hutson during the bicentennials of the Declaration and the Constitution, about which he had so many sane things to say. He is chief of the Manuscript Division at the Library of

Congress, and a scholar friendly to religion—one who shows little bias in his writings and in this current work. Thus, since the Founders differed so much from each other, Hutson offers some conflicting and contradictory comments by these leaders.

I used his book while preparing a lecture on Founders' types. First, let it be noted that this whole cast of characters was concerned with "virtue" and "morality" in the young republic, and all were favorable to the influences of religion on these. The differences came in on the question of what public institutions should do to privilege and promote religion and its practice.

Type one was John Jay, author of *Federalist Paper No. 2*, who spoke of "the privilege and interest of our Christian nation." He thought citizens of such a nation should elect only Christian rulers and not vote for the infidels, the ungodly. He was nearly alone, and his view, popular as it is in some circles today, did not win out among Constitutionalsists in his day. He wanted uniformity in faith.

Type two was Thomas Jefferson, who thought that legal privileging and promotion was harmful to church and state. "Truth can stand by itself. Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity Is uniformity attainable? Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity."

Type three found its voice in James Madison, who had most influence on the Constitution. He famously wrote that "in matters of Religion, no man's [sic] right is abridged by the institution of Civil Society and that Religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance," while the Civil Magistrate was not a "competent Judge of Religious Truth" or a good user of it "as an engine of Civil policy." Christians ought to be most concerned, since the Christian religion was never to show "dependence on the powers of this world." Privilege Christianity, and you have "pride and indolence," ignorance, servility, superstition, bigotry, and persecution.

It's our choice which direction to go in, which type to favor. ✕

... it is important to ask what is at stake (and for whom) when it is urged that Buddhism is uniquely compatible (if not coextensive) with science.

NOVEMBER 3, 2005

Buddhists on the Brain

Dan Arnold

To regular readers of mainstream news weeklies like *Time* and *Newsweek*, stories on the latest interface between Buddhism and neuroscience are familiar; every few months there is at least a brief notice on, say, a study of MRI data from Tibetan Buddhist meditators, or on the Dalai Lama's addressing cognitive scientists at MIT. These dispatches from the frontiers of science and "spirituality" are common enough that some readers might have been taken aback by the note of controversy sounded in a recent *New York Times* piece on the subject (Benedict Carey, "Scientists Bridle at Lecture Plan for Dalai Lama," October 19, 2005).

Not all members of the Society for Neuroscience, it seems, are enthusiastic about the Dalai Lama's scheduled address at next month's annual meeting; more than 500 brain researchers have signed a petition calling for the talk's cancellation. To complicate matters, eyebrows have been raised by the fact that many of the signatories are Chinese (or of Chinese descent), possibly raising the sensitive political issue of China's occupation of Tibet. There is, however, no shortage of scientists willing to go on record as questioning the scientific merit of studies in this vein; one scientist, dismayed by creeping credulity, worried about this professional organization's looking increasingly like the "Flat Earth Society."

The *Times*' coverage of this flap chiefly concerned debates internal to the scientific community — debates, for example, about whether scientific objectivity is compromised by the fact that some scholars engaged in this research are themselves practitioners of Buddhist meditation, and about

what kind of phenomena are suitable for properly scientific study. One signatory to the petition (Dr. Zvani Rossetti of Italy's University of Cagliari) rightly noted that "neuroscience more than other disciplines is the science at the interface between modern philosophy and science" — whence he concluded that "no opportunity should be given to anybody to use neuroscience for supporting transcendent views of the world."

The latter remark is not only something of a *non sequitur*, but a little strange since chief among the philosophical questions at stake here is what kind of relation (if any) there is between studies of the brain and the phenomena of the mind — and such questions at least arguably involve



The religious dynamics that once contributed to separation
can help restore a devastated city.

recourse to something like “transcendent views of the world” (depending, of course, on what that means).

But the controversy in question should take into account some of the contestation internal to the Buddhist side of the story: There is a history behind the peculiarly high-profile relations that various Buddhist traditions have to science. This history dates at least to the late nineteenth century, when Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka—reacting against Christian missionaries, and encouraged by sympathetic Westerners from the Theosophical Society—developed what many modern scholars have come to call “Protestant Buddhism”: Buddhist movements that sought (among other things) to detach the “pure” or “original” Buddhist doctrine from the forms of life and practice that an English-educated Buddhist of the late nineteenth century might find it disadvantageous to have to defend before Christian missionaries.

Buddhists like Anagarika Dharmapala (an emissary to the 1893 World Parliament of Religions) in this way advanced the idea that it is Buddhism (and not Christianity) that is most compatible with the deliverances of science. I would urge that this idea—which reflects perhaps the chief apologetic strategy of “Protestant Buddhism”—lives on in a statement that you have all likely heard or even uttered: “Buddhism isn’t a religion, it’s a philosophy (or way of life, etc.).”

This commonplace statement advances the idea of the peculiarly rational and empiricist character of Buddhist thought (specifically as contra the unscientific “faith” that presumably defines “religion”)—and hence the unique extent of Buddhism’s supposed amenability to scientific explanation. The contemporary version of the same idea would have it that Buddhism isn’t a religion, it is (to use the title of one recent book in this vein) “mind science.”

While certain trajectories of Buddhist thought might indeed be suggestively comparable with the philosophical projects of cognitive science, it is important to ask what is at stake (and for whom) when it is urged that Buddhism is uniquely compatible (if not coextensive) with science. In particular, we should ask which tradition’s authority is meant to be advanced by such claims—a question that becomes all the more complex when it is further asked why either of these traditions should be thought to benefit from the borrowed authority of the other. ✕

DECEMBER 22, 2005

The Future of New Orleans

James B. Bennett

Religious institutions will play an important role in New Orleans’ move from recovery to rebuilding, as a recent *New York Times* article describing the reopening of the St. Joan of Arc parish school reminds us. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, national and regional religious agencies provided crucial assistance to both evacuees and those stranded in the city (their success all the more noteworthy in light of the horrifying inadequacy of federal efforts).

While these agencies will continue to provide significant resources, local churches will be an increasingly determinant factor in shaping New Orleans’ recovery. That influence will extend to the crux of the social divisions that outsiders learned about when Katrina exposed them for the nation and the world to see.

Churches and schools, and the relationships between them, have long been part of the complex racial and residential patterns in New Orleans. When New Orleans briefly experimented with interracial public schools during Reconstruction, racially exclusive parochial schools were a common retreat for white parents trying to keep their children out of an integrated environment. Soon, the interracial public schools disbanded, and the city’s black communities were left with few educational options for their children.

Thirty-five years later, the school featured in the *Times* article was opened. In a city where racially mixed parishes had been the norm for nearly two centuries, St. Joan of Arc (originally named St. Dominic’s) would become the city’s second parish created exclusively for black Catholics. In 1909, the then-integrated congregation had completed

. . . religious institutions will once again make choices that
shape New Orleans for the century to come.



a magnificent new church at a nearby but more prominent location. On the Sunday before the move, however, the parish priest announced that only the white members would relocate; the black members would remain behind to form a new separate black parish in the old building.

As was typical, a school also opened. Church leaders hoped that black families who would otherwise reject segregated congregations might compromise to secure an education for their children. At St. Joan of Arc, the hand-me-down building was destroyed by a hurricane in 1916, while the new white church a few blocks away escaped unscathed.

Over the next few decades a pattern emerged, as numerous separate black Catholic churches and schools opened throughout the city, leading to a thoroughly segregated

Christian population. (Most Protestants had separated decades earlier). In some cases, the separate facilities opened in predominantly black neighborhoods; other times the reliance on buildings cast off by white congregations led to a black religious presence in mixed or even predominantly white neighborhoods—but not for long: residential patterns followed religious ones, creating increasingly homogeneous communities in a city long characterized by its racially mixed neighborhoods.

In this context, parish schools played an increasingly important role in expanding the limited educational options for black children, even though these classrooms could not overcome the pervasive segregation in religious and public institutions alike. At the same time, religiously affiliated colleges (the predecessors to the now heavily damaged Dillard and Xavier Universities), offered the best opportunities for higher education, training nearly all of the region's black professionals, including teachers, doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists.

And now a new opportunity arises. The religious dynamics that once contributed to separation can help restore a devastated city. With the future of most of the city's public schools still unknown, religious institutions that a century earlier had reinforced divisions may now present a key reason for families to return and create a renewed sense of communality. The determination of parish schools like St. Joan of Arc will be an important element in the effort of Mayor Ray Nagin and his recently appointed commission to "bring back New Orleans."

The city's racial dynamics have changed considerably in the century since St. Joan of Arc opened. Hispanic and Vietnamese immigrants, among many others, have swelled church ranks alongside longstanding communities of African Americans and Creoles of Color. As churches and the Archdiocese continue the cutbacks already under way, they face difficult decisions as to which churches and schools will remain, which will close, and which resources might be consolidated or relocated.

The lessons of the past are instructive; religious institutions will once again make choices that shape New Orleans for the century to come. May they choose wisely. ✕

A new generation of American Muslims, born and educated in the United States,
is questioning Islamic apologetics and literalism . . .

JANUARY 19, 2006

The Changing Faces of Islam

Malika Zeghal

Since September 11, 2001, the issue of the connection between Islam and violence has been raised repeatedly. An adequate response lies not in positing some allegedly “violent” nature of Islam, nor is it even about Islam as such, but rather about how Muslim individuals interpret Islam and relate these interpretations to their political perspectives. These representations of Islam are diverse, and in constant evolution and interaction with other religious, cultural, and political influences.

While the traditional Orientalist paradigm, in convergence with the “clash of civilizations” thesis as well as some contemporary political Islamist doctrines, views Islam as a phenomenon with fixed features that produces a homogeneous, anti-democratic, and anti-pluralistic political culture, it is obvious that today, in the Muslim world and in the West, many public interpretations and manifestations of Islam contradict this notion. Islamist political parties in Algeria, Morocco, and Jordan have participated in relatively open electoral competitive processes that remain fragile, but show these groups’ abilities to coexist in peaceful political competition.

These instances are elements in a vast and diverse array of practices and interpretations of Islam that must be considered—along with the question of violence—to understand Islam today. Violence emerged in tight relation to Islam in the 1970s, giving rise to a pervasive dichotomy opposing “violent” to “non-violent” Islam. This dichotomy is partly the result of a colonial enterprise in which those in power in Muslim nations and in the West have co-opted, disciplined, and praised the “good” Muslims and vilified the

“bad” ones. But beyond politics, violence has also recently provoked important intellectual transformations.

In the very country where the September 11 disaster occurred, some Muslim intellectuals resist the categories of “good” and “bad” Muslims, while at the same time radically redefining, through their practices or their theologies, the meanings of Islam. A new generation of American Muslims, born and educated in the United States, is questioning Islamic apologetics and literalism in order to grant more complexity, context, and historicity to their religious experiences and theologies. They contest the “West vs. Islam” divide, and thus the clash of civilizations thesis. They argue that violence used by Muslims is the result of mistaken interpretations of Islam. Muslims, they believe, must work from their own rich heritage to condemn and dissolve violence, while avoiding apologetics. They must also rewrite the gender logic, starting from the Qur’an: In their practices, women should be the equals of men, standing in the same room in prayer, and even leading men in prayer.

Very different figures characterize this trend. Asma Gull Hassan—a pro-Bush, media-savvy graduate of New York University’s law school, and “self-proclaimed Muslim feminist cowgirl”—writes, “I do not think the Qur’an and



Religion looms large in Dylan's worldview.

God are asking me to wear hijab. I could be wrong, but I believe modesty comes from the inside-out, not the outside-in."

Also in the U.S., Islamic studies scholar Omid Safi, political scientist Muktedar Khan, poet Mohja Kahf, and novelist Asra Nomani are among a diverse, intellectual, and often caustic group of new voices that have reverberated on a global scale since September 11. Amina Wadud, a female African American Muslim professor of Islamic studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, publicly implemented her theological reform by leading, as an imam, a gender-mixed prayer in New York this past March.

Beyond North America, both self-proclaimed and institutionalized Muslim authorities have sought to discuss, accept, or confront these new practices, making new national and transnational spaces for debate on race, ethnicity, and gender. Religious freedom, doubt, transgression, and even sexual satire are some of the themes with which "progressive Muslims" deal, as one sees from the Muslim Wakeup website (www.muslimwakeup.com)! Islam is defined as an individually and freely (re)discovered "repertoire," where certainty and righteousness are often mocked. The Muslim repertoire is thus expanded along the lines and languages of Western liberalism, but not without internal and external conflicts and differences.

Progressive local and national U.S. organizations have tentatively emerged, trying—with difficulty—to institutionalize these diverse trends into an organized movement. But the very nature of a trend that claims religious freedom, complexity, and diversity contradicts the possibility of a unified institutionalization, as made clear by the recent defections from the Progressive Muslim Union.

In some sense, such difficulties do not matter; what is new, unique, and consequential here is that these interpretations of Islam are publicly exposed, and not defined from outside Islam but from within it. Before September 11, these voices remained implicit, silent, or isolated. They felt that conservative immigrant mosques and organizations were too hegemonic to let them offer their own definitions of Islam and mobilize a new audience. The violence of September 11 propelled these voices into the public arena. It remains to be seen if they can truly find their place in America and beyond. ✕

AUGUST 10, 2006

Religion in *Modern Times*

M. Cooper Harriss

While it may not constitute as momentous a cultural event as it would have thirty years ago, Bob Dylan will release *Modern Times*, a new album of ten original songs, on August 29. Early reports and "leaked" online audio fragments indicate that *Modern Times* recalls Dylan's two recent and highly acclaimed efforts, *Time Out of Mind* (1997) and *Love and Theft* (2001), completing what one record executive calls a "trilogy" of albums on which the aging master (now sixty-five years old) utilizes various genres of American popular song—blues, tin-pan alley, torch ballad, rockabilly, etc.—to ruminate upon the exigencies and absurdities of, well, "modern times."

Religion looms large in Dylan's worldview. It always has—most explicitly in his turn to evangelical Christianity in the late 1970s that yielded another "trilogy" of albums: *Slow Train Coming* (1979), *Saved* (1980), and *Shot of Love* (1981). But scholars and/or practitioners of religion (especially Judaism and Christianity) should find the rest of Dylan's career no less interesting in this regard. Through biblical allusion (among scores of examples, "All Along the Watchtower" essentially paraphrases Isaiah 21: 5-9), eschatological orientation ("The Times They Are a-Changin'"), and apocalyptic imagery ("A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall," "Desolation Row," and "Angelina"), Dylan has channeled American religious idioms through his words and music to manifest what critic Greil Marcus calls "the old, weird America." In recent years, Dylan in concert has performed hymns by Fanny Crosby; in 2000 one could expect to hear "Rock of Ages" as

. . . Dylan appears to remain interested in the historical weddedness of religion and violence in the American popular imagination.



well as “My Back Pages.” As Dylan told *The New York Times* in 1997, “Those old songs are my lexicon and my prayer-book . . . All my beliefs come out of those old songs . . . I believe in Hank Williams singing ‘I Saw the Light.’”

What, then, shall be the religious orientation of *Modern Times*? Writer Seth Rogovoy, who attended a secretive, invitation-only “preview” of the album in New York City, reports: “There are poetic references to prophecy; there is much talk of religion and the moral (or immoral) state of humankind; . . . there are references to violence, vengeance, and murder, including many phrased in the first person. Perhaps . . . Dylan has vengeance and murder on his mind at a time when the world is seemingly obsessed with both.” Thematically Dylan appears to remain interested in the historical weddedness of religion and violence in the American popular imagination. For a songwriter who has engaged “topical” themes in the past (including civil rights and the

Cuban Missile Crisis) there has been no dearth of potential source-material in the form of natural and human-made disaster since the release of his last album on September 11, 2001.

But Dylan’s method has always been more expansive. As the songwriter himself has noted, he has avoided “finger-pointing” songs in “protest” of current events for more than forty years. Rogovoy rightly links *Modern Times* to the current state of domestic and world affairs—the title certainly seems to indicate such a move at first blush—but one wonders if something more is not afoot in Dylan’s reliance upon “traditional” sources in an album with such a title. “Modern” not only characterizes the flashing lights of up-to-the-minute Internet “news.” According to the OED, it also concerns “the current age or period.” In this way, “modern” signifies the now of any moment in time, but simultaneously relates to a broader historical context that spans generations. Dylan appropriates this double meaning, giving his “modern” album of 2006 the same title as Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 film, *Modern Times*. Furthermore, as recent newspaper headlines make clear, many contemporary expressions of religious violence worldwide relate to older, “traditional” grievances.

Dylan’s aphoristic definition of “modern times” as “the New Dark Ages” in the liner notes to his 1993 album of traditional songs, *World Gone Wrong*, also conflates “old” and “new,” past and present, insisting with Qohelet that there is “no new thing under the sun,” or with T. S. Eliot that the most arresting quality of the past is frequently its “presence.” Such notions resonate even more profoundly when one recognizes that the songs slated for *Modern Times* include “Rollin’ and Tumblin’” and “The Levee’s Gonna Break”—two of at least seven titles that allude to specific phrases from the blues and other American vernacular musical traditions often imbued with religious motifs.

The explicit religious significances of this album remain to be seen. In these weeks before the album’s release, one can only speculate as to how closely these “modern times” will hew to Dylan’s response when asked in a 1995 interview if he still saw a “slow train coming”—the eschatological metaphor he employed for his first gospel album of the same title. His response: “It’s picked up quite a bit of speed. In fact, it’s going like a freight train now.” ✕

The practice of sanctuary embodies compassion for the human condition . . .

AUGUST 31, 2006

Sanctuary or Spectacle?

Cynthia Gano Lindner

Two weeks ago, Elvira Arellano and her seven-year-old son sought sanctuary in the Adalberto United Methodist Church of Humboldt Park, Chicago, instead of reporting to the Department of Homeland Security for deportation. Arellano, a 31-year-old Mexican woman, was working as a cleaning woman at O'Hare airport in 2002 when she was arrested during the immigration sweep that followed the September 11 attacks; it was discovered then that she had been deported previously and had re-entered the country illegally.

Fighting to stay in the U.S. with her son—himself a U.S. citizen—who was receiving medical treatment, Arellano was granted three stays of deportation beginning in 2003.

Though initially sympathetic to the mother's concern for her child, some supporters find Arellano's continued claims against deportation harder to justify. "It is an unfortunate truth that scores of people are in the same situation as Elvira and her family," Illinois senator Dick Durbin said in a statement recently. "We cannot fix the injustices of this system with private bills. Only comprehensive immigration reform can permanently remedy this situation." Though the debate around immigration has become increasingly polarized of late, there is widespread agreement with the sense of Sen. Durbin's statement: U.S. immigration policies and procedures have failed U.S. citizens and immigrants, legal and illegal alike; reform is necessary. But such reform will not come easily or quickly—and so what of the current reality of the countless parents and children who find themselves caught in the punishing gears of immigration's badly broken machinery?

Taking up residence in the church was her last resort, Arellano asserts, since she does not intend to return to Mexico. She and her supporters invoke a tradition attributed to the early Greeks which allowed a fugitive to seek sanctuary from prosecution by installing himself in a temple or designated sacred space, affording the lawbreaker a limited reprieve from the punishment meted out by an often imperfect justice system and time to consider his next move. Historically, while a fugitive resided in sanctuary, the community was responsible for his or her nourishment and safety; otherwise, the individual was not to be hindered or harassed.

This practice received elaborate codification in medieval England. In more recent times, it has been employed as a strategy of direct peaceful action—most notably during the 1980s, when dozens of U.S. congregations sheltered Central Americans fleeing war in their homelands. There is no legal protection for the practice of sanctuary in American law; several ministers were convicted for their participation in the Central American sanctuary movement, though their actions did secure new lives for hundreds of refugees and ultimately led to revised U.S. policies concerning Central American immigration.

From its ancient beginnings, the appeal of a "time out" for lawbreakers has consistently relied on a twofold sensibility which exceeds any single religious tradition, but which resonates with much classical religious anthropology. The practice of sanctuary embodies compassion for the human condition, which transcends citizenship or legal status,



Perhaps it is time to visit the practice of sanctuary again,
at least in our imaginations . . .

while maintaining skepticism about the adequacy of human applications of justice. This dual perspective is surprisingly relevant to our culture's current situation, suggesting that while we, as human beings, must rely on the human community to ensure even our most basic needs, one of those needs may well be for protection against the community's own life and institutions, which, unrestrained, can threaten our humanity.

In the relentless local media coverage of the Arellano case these past two weeks, there has been very little talk about the meaning or utility of sanctuary as either a religious or a deeply human practice. The storefront church has become a stage for political rhetoric and spectacle, including candlelight vigils by the family's supporters and staged television sound bites by activists who oppose broader immigration laws. These appeals are most often made on behalf of the "rights" of the speaker's own constituencies; religious language is invoked to enlist God's imprimatur for "our side." Rather than observing sanctuary's mandates of space and time for human healing and human decision-making to occur, partisan interests and institutions have continued their machinations.

Occasionally, though, the relentless media eye is startled by a glimpse of the human at the heart of this issue—the sadly serious face of the bewildered child, an early report that Arellano had been suffering from the flu, a more recent one revealing that she has moved upstairs to get a bit more distance from the din of the demonstrations on the street. As a human being caught between the rock of broken immigration law and the hard place of making a sustainable life for herself and her son, Arellano is entitled to sanctuary—compassion, respect, and noninterference—as she chooses her next course of action. Instead, her bid for safety threatens to become yet another spectacle in the noisy public theater that has replaced serious dialogue about renewing social policy for a plural America.

We would do well as a community and a culture to insist on that respectful space not only for Arellano, but for all of us. Perhaps it is time to visit the practice of sanctuary again, at least in our imaginations—to revive our richer theological and humanist sensibilities about the complexity of human existence, the fragility of human life, and the provi-

sional nature of human decision-making, and to extend to one another the possibility of time and space—free of noise, threat, or manipulation—in which to choose to do the right thing. ✕

SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

Allah's Trailblazer

R. Jonathan Moore

Minnesota's fifth congressional district is about to make some history. This past week, Keith Ellison defeated three challengers to receive the Democrat-Farmer-Labor Party's nomination for the U.S. House of Representatives. Given the district's Democratic leanings, Ellison is virtually assured a spot in the 110th Congress.

Ellison will become the first African American to represent Minnesota in Washington. That might be enough history for one district, which includes Minneapolis and some suburbs, and is around 70 percent white. But in Ellison, Fifth District voters will also be sending to Congress the nation's very first Muslim representative.

During the primary campaign, the 43-year-old Ellison, a college convert to Islam, had to respond to charges of associating with Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. While in law school, writing as "Keith Hakim," Ellison contributed school newspaper columns defending Farrakhan against charges of anti-Semitism and criticizing affirmative action as a "sneaky" substitute for reparations. And in the mid-1990s, Ellison helped organize Minnesota's delegation to Farrakhan's Million Man March.

However, Ellison has denied ever belonging to the Nation of Islam, and he has directly renounced anti-Semitism in public and in letters to Jewish community organizations. Though some Jewish leaders remain unconvinced, a Minneapolis Jewish newspaper endorsed him in the primary,

“I’m a Muslim. I’m proud to be a Muslim” “But I’m
not running as a Muslim candidate.”

and several high-profile Jewish Democrats have supported him publicly and financially.

So far, for most Democrats, what matters has not been Ellison’s religion but his political similarity to former senator Paul Wellstone (who died in 2002). Ellison has marked himself as a passionate progressive by calling for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, for strong support of labor, and for universal health care. The charismatic candidate even adopted Wellstone’s familiar green for his campaign posters.

In winning the backing of longtime Wellstone advocates Sam and Sylvia Kaplan, the particularities of his faith mattered less than the commonality of their politics. “What came through to us,” said Sylvia, “was he believes in social justice and the common good, which is a Jewish tradition.”

At a recent campaign stop, Ellison again addressed the religion issue. “I’m a Muslim. I’m proud to be a Muslim,” he said. “But I’m not running as a Muslim candidate.” Although he has not hesitated to greet the burgeoning Somali population in Minnesota with a heartfelt “Salaam Alaikum,” he would rather talk about Iraq and health care than about religion.

Not surprisingly, Ellison’s opponents don’t plan to forgive his partial flirtation with black separatism. Republican Alan Fine has signaled that he’ll be painting his competitor with a broad brush in coming weeks. “The voters of the Fifth District have a clear choice,” he said recently. They can vote Republican, or “they can choose to elect an extremist candidate who has associated himself with the likes of Louis Farrakhan, Khalid Abdul Muhammed [who once called Jews “the bloodsuckers of the black nation”], Kwame Ture [Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael], Sharif Willis [former Vice Lords gang leader] and others.”

The chairman of the state Republican Party, Ron Carey, has made a similar argument: “By supporting Louis Farrakhan . . . Ellison has become a national embarrassment for his radical views.” And when terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in Iraq, one blogger recommended that “condolences should be sent to Ellison HQ.”

In spite of—or perhaps because of—his opponents’ guilt-by-association strategy, Ellison will soon belong to the congressional class of 2006. So it’s worth asking, what difference might a Muslim representative make?

Ellison may serve as much more than a role model for American Muslims. A spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations has said that Ellison’s election would “be a tremendous assertion of the fact that we’re Americans and we’re just as interested in public service as anyone else, and here’s the proof—we have somebody in Congress.” In other words, Ellison may not only show American Muslims who they can become; he might also show suspicious fellow citizens who their Muslim neighbors already are.

Ellison has tried to downplay the political significance of his faith. “The focus on my religion doesn’t bother me, but I feel that it’s a distraction from what we need to be talking about,” he says. “My faith informs me. My faith helps me to remember to be gentle, kind, considerate, fair, respectful. But I don’t make my faith something that other people have to deal with.”

Other people, however, have made and will continue to make his faith something that he must deal with. News of Ellison’s primary victory was picked up by media outlets from as far away as Somalia and Qatar, and his American profile will only grow as November nears. *E Pluribus Unum?* Another test awaits. ✕



... in political contexts the term “the New Christian Right”
should be used in place of “Evangelicals” . . .



NOVEMBER 13, 2006

Watch Your Language

Martin E. Marty

With regard to the recent election—was it a seismic or glacial change?—I want to make one observation or suggestion. It's in the “watch your language” category. Ever since my article “The New Christian Right” appeared in the *Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook* 1981, I've quietly argued that in political contexts the term “the New Christian Right” should be used in place of “Evangelicals,” which is what the public media have chosen to use—and which they regularly misuse.

The “Christian Right,” then as now, I wrote, spoke only for “a minority of evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal Protestantism,” and included some “Roman Catholics, who shared some of the New Christian Right's viewpoint,” especially against abortion. That “minority,” of course, has since grown.

If these together do not make up all of “evangelicalism,” many evangelicals also are not fully at home on the political

right. That was clear back when many took up the “it's the economy, stupid” theme in the Clinton years. Columnist Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout, in their important little book *The Truth About Conservative Christians*, provide ample sociological data to show that class, region, party, and self-interest also go into the mix of “evangelical” voting patterns, and only a minority of evangelicals is hard-Right. Reviewing the 2004 elections, they wrote that religion remained the story “because it suits both the interests that want to further the influence of their brand of religion . . . and those who want to raise money to stop them.” Each spooks out the other, most media, as well as many of us in the public.

The 2006 election was a partial de-spooker. Many in the Christian Right showed their frustration before, during, and after the election, feeling that their candidates and party did not deliver. On Greeley lines, we can read more declarations of independence from the Christian Right by many evangelicals, especially as they now put energies into other issues that they find religiously important (e.g., the environment, immigration policies, etc.). In 2004, had a couple tens of thousands of Ohioans voted differently, commentators would likely have said that the Right had met its limits and would fade. Instead, reporters had only asked voters in exit polls whether they had voted their values. Many said “yes.” But who wouldn't, and who didn't, vote their values? That question was a blunt instrument. Now we shall look to John Green, Greeley and Hout, and Chris Smith, among others, to sharpen the tools of measurement and focus our lenses. My take: The Christian Right took shape in the 1980s with the motives of the “politics of resentment,” its members having long felt, and been, disdained. In the years of the Reagan charm, they found it easy to gain power, so they moved to the “politics of will-to-power,” still voicing resentment. Many sounded as if they should and maybe could “win it all” and “run the show.”

They have now begun to learn what mainline Protestants and mainline evangelicals, Catholics, Jews, and humanists know: No one is simply going to “run the show” in the American pluralist mix, as we watch shifting powers face off against other shifting powers, which is what happened again last Tuesday. ✕

... the public responsibility of the theologian entails appraisal of the role of religious ideas in the formation of ideological assumptions.

FEBRUARY 8, 2007

On the Migration of Religious Ideas

W. Clark Gilpin

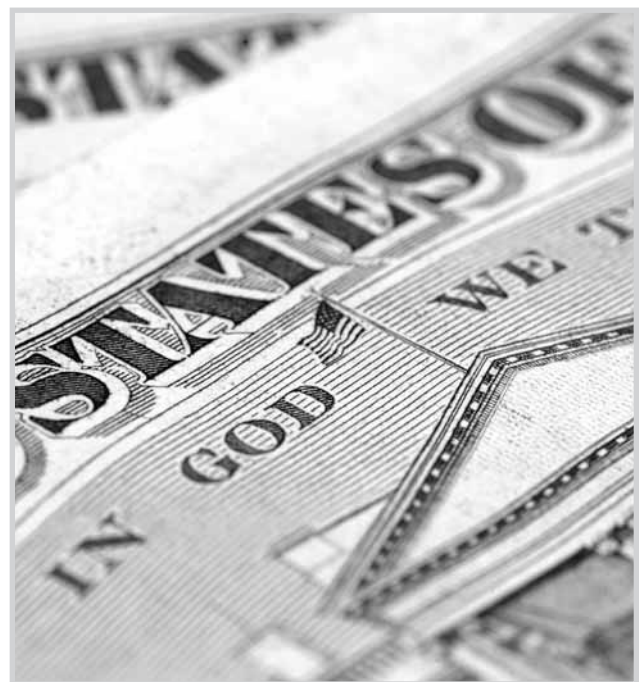
The current issue of the *New York Review of Books* (February 15, 2007) contains a probing article by the noted author and columnist on international relations, William Pfaff. Entitled “Manifest Destiny: A New Direction for America,” Pfaff’s essay excoriates the Bush administration for pursuing its international economic and political goals “by means of internationally illegal, unilateralist, and preemptive attacks on other countries, accompanied by arbitrary imprisonments and the practice of torture, and by making the claim that the United States possesses an exceptional status among nations that confers upon it special international responsibilities, and exceptional privileges in meeting those responsibilities.”

Increasingly, the American public is joining the international community in criticizing the catastrophic folly of President Bush’s violent efforts to impose his vision of democratic virtue. “A claim to preeminent political virtue is a claim to power,” Pfaff rightly observes, “a demand that other countries yield to what Washington asserts as universal interests.”

For *Sightings*, however, with its mandate to identify and assess the role of religion in public affairs, another aspect of Pfaff’s essay holds particular interest. How is it, Pfaff wants to know, that President Bush’s political, journalistic, and foreign policy critics find themselves “hostage to past support of his policy and to their failure to question the political and ideological assumptions upon which it was built?” The ideological assumptions, Pfaff recognizes, have deep roots in an American religious history that has generated a national

myth of exceptional mission and destiny. Pfaff locates the origins of this national myth in the religious beliefs of the New England Puritans and synoptically observes its later appearances in nineteenth-century ideas of manifest destiny, Woodrow Wilson’s idealism regarding the League of Nations, and the Cold War rationale for American international involvement, “interpreted in quasi-theological terms by John Foster Dulles.”

The myth-building energies of religious ideas are a perennial source of hope in a world all too frequently cruel and difficult. Simultaneously, these energies combine with the human will to power to generate many of these very cruelties and difficulties. Theologians through the centuries have therefore constrained and counterbalanced visions of future possibility with more austere spiritual norms. Among the New England Puritans, for instance, the first governor of Massachusetts Bay, John Winthrop, did not simply announce that the colony would be “as a city upon a hill” but immediately followed with the warning that the people’s failure to observe their covenant with God would invite the wider world to “speak evil of the ways of God and all



In a film that is ultimately about redemption, religion neither brings about that redemption nor stands in its way.

professors for God's sake." Embarking on their mission, these Puritans insisted that humility was the "fundamental grace" and the gateway to all the virtues, and they agreed completely with the great Puritan poet John Milton that the primordial sin was pride.

The "failure to question the political and ideological assumptions" of the Bush administration, therefore, lies not only with Congress, the media, and the foreign policy community. In addition, the public responsibility of the theologian entails appraisal of the role of religious ideas in the formation of ideological assumptions. When religious vision migrates from its theological context, amidst the constraining and countervailing spiritual norms of responsible humility and wariness of pride as the deepest fault, its hope-engendering powers become perilous indeed. ✕

MARCH 29, 2007

Religion and Redemption in *Black Snake Moan*

Kristen Tobey

While many reviews describe Craig Brewer's *Black Snake Moan* as a movie about religion, the immediate impression one gets from the trailers and posters is more accurate: The film is primarily about a barely-clad woman named Rae chained to a radiator. Some have argued that the religious elements serve only to disguise the film's pornographic nature, but there are deeper implications to the relationship between sex and religion, not only as plot elements but as tools of filmmaking.

We in the audience know we're supposed to feel bad about watching a portrayal of utterly degraded femininity, but we feel better because the film deals with religion — which presumably will lead to redemption, as the character of Lazarus

sets out to "cure" Rae's nymphomania with a Bible in hand. At the same time, we know we're supposed to feel just as bad about being titillated by portrayals of crazed religiosity, because being titillated by someone else's religion (fire-and-brimstone preachers are among those to whom this film is decidedly not marketed) implies objectification, much as pornography does.

We're not supposed to gawk at religion, or at a naked woman beaten and in chains. But Brewer gives us license to gawk at them in tandem by making us think that we're gawking at the other one, each in turn. And in the battle for thematic supremacy, we end up taking neither wild sexuality nor wild religiosity seriously. The film sets itself up to present sex and religion as pervasive and powerful forces, responsible for who people are and who they become — but ultimately *Black Snake Moan* deals with an ambiguous, tenuous kind of redemption that has little to do with either.

The movie's religious aspects initially seem intended to appeal on the same prurient level as its sexual content. This is nothing new; a recent spate of religious films has portrayed religion provocatively. However, the early hints of crazed religiosity don't bear on the plot. More significantly, they don't bear out atmospherically. Religion starts out intense and threatening, with Lazarus hissing to his estranged wife, "You best pray, girl." Her response, "Don't you lay a curse on me," suggests a deep and dark power to religion.

But from there the religion portrayed is humdrum. Perhaps the director felt he had to live up to his tagline, "Everything is hotter down south": sexuality is more desperate, the music is more trance-inducing, and the religion is more dodgy. But after a few scenes, Brewer presents religion as the stuff of everyday life — not unimportant but tame, a social institution that compels one to ask after churchgoers who are missing from the pew on Sunday. And this might make for a disappointingly boring film, if not for the woman chained to the radiator — which would be appalling, if not for the soothing religion in the background.

In the one overtly theological scene, a local reverend instructs Rae in a kinder, gentler version of Christianity, more quiet and prayerful than the fire-and-brimstone variety with which she has been raised. But in the film, redemption comes not from prayer but from action: for Lazarus, in

. . . religions do not get killed by surprises that
would seem to necessitate revision.

making blues music, a form of spiritual fulfillment; for Rae, in putting on a dress and making scrambled eggs, marks of her integration into conventionally moral domestic life.

The “message” preached by the film, then, is platitudinous: pull yourself together, live your life, bond with someone. It would be rather dismal to identify this as particularly “religious.” Indeed, this mild portrayal of redemption mirrors a conspicuously tepid portrayal of religion.

While audiences know how to be outraged or annoyed at some depictions, or even suggestions, of religion in film — consider reactions to *The Passion of the Christ*, *The DaVinci Code*, or *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* — in *Black Snake Moan* religion is, despite early suggestions to the contrary, neither particularly scandalous nor potent. In a film that is ultimately about redemption, religion neither brings about that redemption nor stands in its way.

But when the picture of redemption is such a tentative one, the disconnect between redemption and religion, though it counters the film’s set-up, may actually be comforting — for Brewer’s unwillingness to show the viewer the potential power of religion is also an unwillingness to show its potential ineffectuality. And while this may be less titillating, it is also rather less depressing. ✕



SEPTEMBER 24, 2007

Mother Teresa’s Agony

Martin E. Marty

Once when Mormon origins were being radically questioned by a man who turned out to be a forger, I asked Jan Shipps, foremost Gentile scholar of Latter-Day Saints, what if the publicized fake documents turned out to be authentic? Wouldn’t such shaking of the foundations bring down the whole edifice? No, she reminded me: The faithful have ways, indefinite and maybe infinite, of responding with new explanations. Without cynicism, Shipps noted that religions do not get killed by surprises that would seem to necessitate revision.

I thought of Shipps’ dictum this month when a beautifully sad or sadly beautiful book by the late Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*, saw the light of day and met the glare of publicity. Aha! was the instant and general response of well-selling a-theists: This shows that a character on the way to sainthood was inauthentic, and her failure to experience God “proves” God’s non-existence.

Not to worry, was the main literate Catholics’ response. Catholic apologists and experts on mysticism addressed Teresa’s agony over her non-experience of God and her disappointment in the Jesus in whom she believed but whom she did not experience. They scrambled to show how her story would more likely lead people to the search for faith than it would disappoint them and drive them away. But if Mother Teresa had trouble feeling the presence of God, wrote critics, the old hypocrite should not have hung in there as a model, a self-sacrificing but not always easy to applaud rigorist. We were told that she would be a challenge to every right-thinking and right-experiencing Catholic.

Wrong. Her published diary is likely to sell as well as

. . . austere, threatening experiences like Teresa's
are as old as faith itself.



those attacking her. From what I have read, it is a cry of the heart to a heaven evidently empty and silent to her: "Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me?" In response, historically informed commentators reached back to the Psalms or medieval precedent for analogies. Those familiar with mysticism were ready with "Is this the first time you've heard of this?" or "Let's make this a teaching opportunity." Eileen Marky in September 14th's *National Catholic Reporter* laid it out well, as did colleagues in most weekly Catholic and many Protestant papers. Most asked what any of this had to do with the existence of God.

Then followed, in most accounts, learned revisitations of believers who had doubts or were victims of what medievalists called *accidie* or, deeper than that, "The Dark Night of the Soul." While few who value the experience of God's presence would envy Mother Teresa, most expressed sympathy to a now deceased figure who always offered compassion but did not always receive it. The Jan Shipps dictum did not even have to be put to work. Catholics and other Christians did not need to reinvent the faith — austere, threatening experiences like Teresa's are as old as faith itself. It was asked: If there are bright sides to this darkness or palpitations to replace the numbnesses of spirit, so that the darkness can be, conditionally, a boon, why don't believers put more energy into preparing their fellow devotionals, showing that such silence may be in store for them, and then telling them not to fear. ✕

NOVEMBER 12, 2007

The Economist on Religion

Martin E. Marty

The *Economist*, our favorite weekly (still—) news magazine, published a keeper on November 3rd in the form of a sixteen-page "special report on religion and public life." As many of you know, our Center's early "public religion" efforts presumed that we would have to squint when searching for tiny, fine-print media references to religion. This week again, however, we are nearly blinded by the coverage. The editors drew on substantial figures, from old-pro sociologist Peter Berger, who provided the liveliest lines, to younger-pro Philip Jenkins, currently the most notable interpreter of what global Christianity means for the U.S.

A key Berger line: "We made a category mistake. We thought that the relationship was between modernisation

. . . the practice of waterboarding has roots
in the Spanish Inquisition . . .

and secularisation. In fact it was between modernisation and pluralism.” Because pluralism implies “choice,” it becomes a major theme. The editors and the people they quote depict religious offerings almost on the model of a cafeteria line. It’s a buyer’s market, and both growth and vitality patterns pretty much follow the lines of those who package the most attractive offerings. Scriptures of the faiths discuss such approaches as threatening to spiritual integrity, but those who resist tend to be left behind.

A reader seeking balance might fault *The Economist* for featuring “religious wars” on the cover, when it set out to cover “religion.” Inevitable distortion results when the accent is on “wars of religion,” “religious politics at its worst,” how “the world’s most religious country is still battling with its demons,” et cetera. One does not learn from topics like these why so many people remain religiously involved in a time when religious forces are so lethal. There’s not much here on the spiritual side of raising children, or on what faith means when one is in doubt, on a deathbed, or seeking comfort. But, admit it: the religions that come out of hiding and present themselves in the public fray are often violent and unfair.

One can note that most coverage of religion occurs when “in God’s name” people take advantage of religion for malign purposes. The editors here are engrossed in surveying the awesome varieties of religion that are in the public eye, and do some justice to them. Unsurprisingly, given the UK base of their magazine, the editors spend time on Europe and offer “a heretical thought about it,” namely that there is a potential for recovery on a continent with largely empty churches.

An alert from the editors: “If you gather together a group of self-professed foreign-policy experts — whether they be neoconservatives, realpolitickers or urban European diplomats — you can count on a sneer if you mention ‘inter-faith dialogue.’ At best, they say, it is liberal waffle; at worst it is naive appeasement. But who is being naive?” And then *The Economist* comes out swinging against the sneerers, pointing to the fruits of tough inter-faith interactions around the world. The sneers will continue, and so will misportrayals of the enemy.

What this weekly magazine does is go against the grain of sophisticated opinion, as it discerns how much anti-waffle strength characterizes those who take the risk of not

contributing to the climate in which religious groups have to be absolutist, sure of themselves, ready to shoot — and shooting. ✕

NOVEMBER 29, 2007

Baptism by Torture

William Schweiker

Religious practices have often been tied to violence and torture, but this connection is often hidden within public discourse. That is the situation now in the United States with the debate about waterboarding, the religious meanings of which have yet to be articulated and explored.

The candidates in the current presidential campaign have taken starkly different stances on the practice of waterboarding. Some condemn the practice as outright torture; others have refused to condemn the practice if in an extreme case it could save millions of American lives. The topic has been divided into two separate but related questions: is waterboarding a form of torture, and, however torture is defined, are there situations in which waterboarding and other practices are justified?

The argument for possible justification turns on several assumptions: that we could infallibly know that someone



. . . it is time for repentance, the affirmation of new life, and
the humane expression of religious convictions.

had vital information that would in fact save millions; that torture would extract this information without distortion; and, finally, that if the information was secured truthfully and infallibly, it could be put to use in good time. None of these assumptions is warranted. Expert opinion and empirical evidence concur that torture is an ineffective means to gain reliable information. The scenario of the lone knower of the facts whose torture would save millions of lives is the stuff of bad spy movies and bad exam questions in ethics courses. In terms of the question of definition, matters are both legal and visceral. International conventions provide ample guidelines, and, as more than one commentator has noted, if waterboarding is not torture it is not clear what else to call it, the Bush Administration's penchant to alter definitions notwithstanding.

Less often observed is that the practice of waterboarding has roots in the Spanish Inquisition and parallels the persecution of Anabaptists during the Protestant Reformation and the Roman Catholic Counter Reformation. Why did practices similar to waterboarding develop as a way to torture heretics—whether the heretics were Anabaptists or, in the Inquisition, Protestants of any stripe as well as Jews and witches and others?

Roman Catholics and Protestants alike persecuted the Anabaptists or “re-baptizers” since these people denied infant baptism in favor of adult baptism. The use of torture and physical abuse was meant to stem the movement and also to bring salvation to heretics. It had been held—at least since St. Augustine—that punishment, even lethal in form, could be an act of mercy meant to keep a sinner from continuing in sin, either by repentance of heresy or by death. King Ferdinand declared that drowning—called the third baptism—was a suitable response to Anabaptists. Water as a form of torture was an inversion of the waters of baptism under the (grotesque) belief that it could deliver the heretic from his or her sins.

In the Inquisition, the practice was not drowning as such, but the threat of drowning, and the symbolic threat of baptism. The *tortura del agua* or *toca* entailed forcing the victim to ingest water poured into a cloth stuffed into the mouth in order to give the impression of drowning. Because of the wide symbolic meaning of “water” in the Christian

and Jewish traditions (creation, the great flood, the parting of the Red Sea in the Exodus and drowning of the Egyptians (!), Christ's walking on the water, and, centrally for Christians, baptism as a symbolic death that gives life), the practice takes on profound religious significance. Torture has many forms, but torture by water as it arose in the Roman Catholic and Protestant reformations seemingly drew some of its power and inspiration from theological convictions about repentance and salvation. It was, we must now surely say, a horrific inversion of the best spirit of Christian faith and symbolism. Is it the purpose of the United State nowadays to seek the conversion, repentance, and purity of supposed terrorists and thus to take on the trappings of a religious rite? The question is so buried behind public discourse that its full import is hardly recognized.

In the light of these religious meanings and background to waterboarding, U.S. citizens can decide to reject any claim by the government to have the right to use this or other forms of torture, especially given connections to the most woeful expressions of Christianity; conversely, they can fall prey to fear and questionable reasoning and thus continue to support an unjust and vile practice that demeans the nation's highest political and moral ideals even as it desecrates one of the most important practices and symbols of Christian faith.

I judge that it is time for repentance, the affirmation of new life, and the humane expression of religious convictions. ✕



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