Faculty Forum President's Letter

Greetings! As President of Faculty Forum it is my privilege to write a brief letter of introduction. I am pleased to commend to you the Fall 2006 Edition of the Journal of the Union Faculty Forum.

In my view, the greater purpose of the Faculty Forum is to provide a collective voice for the community of teachers and scholars at Union University. This is explicitly stated in terms of providing "a means for the faculty to express its interests/concerns to The Greater Faculty and the Provost." But this voice is also expressed through the faculty scholarship that is published here in the Journal.

Please join David Thomas (Forum Vice President), Joanne Stephenson (Secretary) and me in thanking our contributors. I also wish to thank Roger Stanley for faithfully continuing in his excellent work as the Journal's editor.

—Troy D. Riggs
A Word from the Editor

As JUFF enters its second quarter century of existence, I tip my hat this year to my predecessors Clyde Tilley and, most notably, Ernie Pinson. These fine editors set a high standard for a young faculty member joining Union at the start of the 1990’s who became Ernie’s co-editor several years later and is now your sole editor this twenty-first century.

Unlike JUFF volume 25, a triad of Schools beyond the Arts and Sciences is represented here—we hope the nurses and the professional librarians will come back on board for volume 27. Do enjoy social scientist Tony Chiareli’s challenging book review which manages to incorporate elements of his own journey from Catholicism to Protestantism as he critiques the ideas of a major thinker in theology/cultural studies today. I suspect Walton Padelford answers to the tag of “social scientist” as well, though technically he is housed in the School of Business; Walton brings a background in economics and a sophisticated theological stance to this piece on exegesis, even a touch of the poet (which he has been in a previous incarnation of JUFF). Stay along for David Gushee’s compelling contribution, more than an adequate representation from the School of Christian Studies, newly named.

There are “poets” and then there are poets; Bobby C. Rogers is the most ongoing practitioner of the poetic craft I know—on the Union faculty or elsewhere—so I hope you like the opening piece for this issue, set in nearby Memphis. I myself have felt the need to reflect on what I consider a major loss to the West Tennessee community this year, so hang around for some prose reflections from a frustrated denizen of café life. To round out the issue, Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences and still active faculty member Kyle Hathcox takes a scientific topic and renders it perfectly acute for the lay people among us.

Thanks again to the Provost’s office for funding, and to College Services. Carla and Marjorie: first names only are needed by this point. Readers, enjoy.

—Roger Stanley
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Meat and Three

by Bobby C. Rogers

Any excuse to knock off work. We love this joint, with its sweet tea and pepper sauce, cornbread in a basket, plate lunch and pie. There’s a portrait of Bob the owner over the door: Eat or we both go hungry. We seat ourselves, connoisseurs of the authentic, two theologians met for lunch, self-aware, detached. We’ve grafted any number of theories over the ahiistorical interpretations branded on us in our youth, word-woven and layered the way the untheological talk around us is plaited into the restaurant’s comforting noise, stoneware striking stoneware, rattle of ice, laughter as coarse as a sureform tool shaping hardwood stock in a vice. We add some noise of our own: Unamuno and Messiah, presence in absence, sketch study, line readings, our choice of three vegetables jotted down by a waitress who calls us hon’. The braying air-conditioner in the wall is as calming as half-awake liturgy. When you’re this hungry it’s not even slumming. “That which is only living,” Eliot wrote, somewhere in the Quartets, “can only die.” We look around this dinful room and tell ourselves we know the difference. The books we have read assure us it’s the books we have read that will save us. Ketchup on the chicken livers—call it comfort food, soul food. Yeah, I’ll have the pie. Neither of us would say it aloud, but maybe the world is a heap of miracles, one on top of another. The table of plumbers laughs as one, a laughter they attempt to fend off but fail. If miracles are to mean anything at all, they’ll mean it here, where they might raise an eyebrow. What’s not miraculous about meringue half a foot tall, airy and sweet? We only order it to have an excuse to drink another cup of coffee, a reason to kill another few minutes while the last of the noon crowd clears out of the restaurant, making it more like the rooms we absented, which are silent and will stay that way even when we return to switch on the desk lamp, our work right where we left it, laid out so carefully, but still just words darkening a page. I’ll have to look at them a long time before they turn again to sounds on my ear.
Visualizing Time

by Kyle Hathcox

Space has no reality except as an arrangement of objects we perceive in it, and time has no independent existence apart from the order of events by which we measure it. Our concepts of space and time are generally limited to distances and time spans with which we are familiar in our everyday life. When we attempt to consider the true magnitudes of space and time as reported by scientists today, our finite minds are found to be incapable of such comprehension. The human mind can little comprehend the national debt, much less the distance to some faraway galaxy or the age of the universe.

In an attempt to aid people in visualizing the immensity of time, the following method is often beneficial. First, the time scale chosen for use is the age of the earth, 4.5 billion years, as generally accepted by geologists, evolutionists, and anthropologists. This geologic time scale is chosen for its compatibility with the devised illustration. The illustration is not given in defense or support of this time scale, but merely for assistance in mentally comprehending the enormous time span spoken of in today’s society.

With this method, one is to imagine that the inhabitants of another planet use a super-telephoto lens and a time-lapse camera to record a moving picture of Earth since its beginning. This imaginary film is said to be taken at the rate of one picture per year for the last 4.5 billion years. If we run this film on a projector at normal speed (twenty-four frames per second), then twenty-four years of Earth history flash by each second. The film will be run continuously from beginning to end, twenty-four hours a day. Thus, every day about 2.5 million years of Earth's past history are shown on the screen. In order to view the entire movie, we must run the film continuously for about five years. Let us suppose the film was begun on New Year's Day 2005 and thus note what will be seen.

The movie begins and runs throughout the first year, 2005, without showing any signs of life on Earth. Then, in May of 2006 we begin to see one-cell organisms appear. The single-cell organisms remain on the screen for the next ten months, when in March of 2007 cells capable of photosynthesis appear. Over another year passes before multiple-cell plant life begins to appear in April 2008. It will not be until November of 2008 that soft-bodied animals begin to become visible on the screen. These remain until March of 2009, when the first marine invertebrates show signs of life. From this point, fish begin to develop, and by June several species of fish are prevalent. By the end of June 2009, we begin to see land plants, and by August insects start appearing.

After the insects appear, amphibians are seen, and in September and October we begin to see reptiles, dinosaurs, and a few birds. By the middle of November, the dinosaurs start to disappear and flowering plants make their appearance. In the last half of November, the first primates and mammals are viewed and the Rocky Mountains are beginning to form. Late in December, the Colorado River begins to cut the Grand Canyon. We suddenly realize the movie is almost over. It has been running nearly five years and man has not appeared, but finally December 31 arrives and man is seen in his Stone Age caves late in the day.

About 11:45 we see man begin to use stone implements and cultivate the soil. Sixty-nine seconds before midnight, the Christian era begins. Seventeen seconds before
midnight, Columbus discovers America, and with two seconds left man discovers electricity.

Many aspects of this imaginary film are worth pondering. Life has existed on Earth for three and one-half of the five years; man has been here but part of one day. Dinosaurs dominated the movie for over two months, yet man has been on center stage for just a few hours. Of the brief hours man has been in existence, only a few minutes of any "worthy" civilization have existed. If the movie were continued, what would we see by the end of New Year's Day or by the end of January 2010? It may be somewhat comforting to think we have come such a long way in our civilized progress in such a very short time; on the other hand, it may be frightening to consider the fantastic rate of man's advancement. The "change on Earth" seems to be constantly accelerating, coming faster and faster. Given such a rate of change, we cannot begin to comprehend what the future holds, even in just a few years. Some even question whether humanity will be able to continue adapting to such rapid change.
Can Christian Ethics Be Saved?  
An Agenda for a Marginalized Discipline

by David P. Gushee

Converging Concerns

This essay will attempt to do four things: trace the history of Christian ethics as an academic discipline, map the current geography of the discipline, defend it from neglect and misunderstanding, and attempt to propose fruitful future directions for it, especially among evangelicals and Baptists. One might say that my project here is a top-to-bottom rethinking of the marginalized discipline of Christian ethics and its place in our academic institutions at the beginning of the third Christian millennium.

My work is occasioned by several converging concerns. The first is the disturbing dismissal of Christian ethics as a viable discipline on the part of certain learned skeptics in the Christian world. For example, in the September/October 2001 issue of the evangelical magazine Books and Culture, theologian Stephen Webb opened an article provocatively entitled “Danger! Christian Ethics” with the following claims, among others:

- “Christian ethics is nothing more than simply being a good Christian.”
- “Christian ethics becomes just another name for Christian theology.”
- “What Christianity teaches about ethics is nothing different from or more than what Christianity teaches about Jesus Christ.”
- “Christian ethics is not only an empty idea; it is also a dangerous one.”
- “The study of religious ethics is one of the last strongholds of liberal Protestantism in the academy.” (p. 21)

This assortment of half-truths and untruths deserves a response on numerous levels. I will engage its claims throughout this essay. For now it simply indicates that some scholars and some academic institutions are not convinced that a discipline called “Christian ethics” exists or that it ought to exist. Webb’s claims reflect the broader marginalization of Christian ethics in the evangelical and Baptist academy. It is not an accident that so few evangelical educational institutions employ Christian ethicists or even offer courses in the subject. I believe that this marginalization of ethics is a disastrous mistake and will show why I believe that in this paper.

Skepticism about Christian ethics as a discipline relates, I think, to popular Christian weakness in ethical reflection and ethical living in the midst of a morally confused culture. That is the second occasion for this paper. Done well, Christian ethics as an academic discipline serves Christian churches and Christian people in the formation of their way of life—their own Christian ethics. The North American Christian scene is characterized by the same rampant moral incoherence and relativism that afflicts our culture. If our Christian intellectual life were characterized by the stronger academic practice of a convictional Christian ethics, and if the Christian public began to attend more closely to this work, perhaps the lived ethics of the Christian world would improve. That hope animates not just this paper but all my efforts in Christian ethics.
The third occasion for this paper is an honest recognition of the unsettled state of contemporary North American Christian ethics. Among the best Christian ethicists these days is Stanley Hauerwas, who teaches at Duke Divinity School. In the preface to his significant book *With the Grain of the Universe*, the compilation of his 2000-2001 Gifford Lectures at St. Andrews University, Hauerwas has the following to say:

I never dreamed that I would be asked to give the Gifford Lectures. Theologians did not have a conspicuous role in the Gifford Lectures in the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, I am not even a proper theologian but a representative of the even more disreputable field called Christian ethics, and it is not clear that I am a competent worker in that “field” because it is not apparent what constitutes competence in Christian ethics (p. 9).

With characteristic puckishness, Hauerwas here manages to describe his own primary field (and mine, and about one thousand others of us) as “disreputable”—and to make the more significant claim that there is essentially no standard for competence in Christian ethics. Hauerwas is not saying that there are no competent ethicists, but instead that there is no “center” defining what competence looks like in ethics.

As one who has studied and practiced Christian ethics for fifteen years now, I think that Hauerwas is not far wrong in his claim about the lack of clear standards of competence in Christian ethics. So one occasion for this essay is to sketch how evangelicals should define such competence as we strengthen our involvement with this discipline and in turn perhaps strengthen the discipline itself.

A fourth and final concern animating this paper is my sense of both a personal and professional need to build bridges out of the evangelical/Baptist subculture to the broader church and its associated academic guilds.

At one level, this is merely personal. I am a Baptist evangelical by conviction; yet I am also a practicing member of the Christian ethics guild. Living in two worlds, I have a natural interest in building bridges between them.

But the need for bridge-building is more than personal. I think that the rather stark divorce between the vast (“red state”) evangelical and Baptist subculture and most of the leading (“blue state”) professionals who write and teach Christian ethics is bad for both. In recent years I have noticed a growing interest in dialogue and engagement with evangelical Christians on the part of these Christian ethicists. As I will attempt to show a bit later, we should rush through this open door, not only for the sake of the ethics guild and the churches it serves, but also for our own sake.

*Tracing the History of Christian Ethics*

When mainstream Christian ethicists say “the academic discipline of Christian ethics,” what they normally mean is that discipline practiced by those who have earned a PhD. or equivalent degree in Christian ethics or a closely related field; identify themselves as Christian ethicists; write scholarly and professional publications in the field; teach Christian ethics in college, university, or seminary settings or engage in full-time professional work closely related to the field; find one of their primary professional/institutional homes in the organization called the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE).
Yet, as mainstream ethicist Edward L. Long of Drew University himself put it in his 1984 history of the Society of Christian Ethics: “It is important not to equate the history of the Society with the history of an academic discipline. Christian ethics is as old as Christianity itself and even has roots in OT thought. . . A history of Christian ethics resembles a history of Christian thought and is integrally related to it” (*Academic Bonding and Social Concern*, 160). At one level, then, there is no discrete history of Christian ethics. It is simply the ethical aspect of historic Christian thought. Let’s call this historic Christian moral thought “Christian Ethics A” because it was here first—it can be witnessed in Scripture and every era of church history. Christian Ethics A is the church’s reflection on its own moral life and on its engagement with society. It is a perennial activity of the church.

The precursor of modern North American Christian ethics can be found in the late nineteenth century. Coming on the heels of a variety of social reform movements often spearheaded by evangelical Christians, both universities and seminaries began to offer classes in contemporary social problems in the 1880s and 1890s. This development dovetailed with the birth of the Social Gospel movement with its deep concern for the suffering and injustice created by unfettered laissez-faire industrial capitalism. The goal of the very first coursework in Christian ethics was to help students translate widely shared Christian moral principles into social action in a troubled and suffering world. The first and most influential of these classes was an 1883-84 course at Harvard taught by Professor Francis Greenwood Peabody. Let’s call this germinal moment in the development of Christian ethics as a discipline ”Christian Ethics B.” Long rightly points out that the “social passion” of these early practitioners of so-called “applied Christianity” or “social Christianity” or "Christian sociology" has always been a central characteristic of the field which later came to be called Christian ethics.

Despite the steady existence of courses in social or applied Christianity in the period between the late nineteenth century and World War II, it was not until the 1950s that the contemporary discipline of Christian ethics began to take shape. What eventually became known as the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE) was founded in 1959 after several years of preliminary meetings. Over time its agenda has evolved to include various aspects of the entire moral tradition of the Christian faith (Christian Ethics A). Yet at its heart the discipline retains the “social passion” of the nineteenth century “Social Christianity” (Christian Ethics B) that was such an important part of its birth as a discipline.

North American evangelical disengagement from the mainstream discipline of Christian ethics has been obvious from its very origins. This disengagement clearly was linked to the context in which Christian ethics B was born—the Social Gospel. Though evangelicals were vigorously engaged with urban social reform efforts when that movement began, theological drift in the Social Gospel movement, as well as the related fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s, sheared evangelicals away from social engagement for a long season, at least from 1920 to around 1975. This half-century, unfortunately, coincided precisely with the consolidation of mainstream Christian ethics as an academic discipline, as well as with the urgent social and moral problems of an era that included economic crises, totalitarianism, World War II, the Holocaust, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and other morally significant social upheavals.

One of evangelical theologian Carl F.H. Henry’s signal postwar contributions was his effort to offer evangelical reflection on both “personal” and “social” Christian ethics and
to lead others to do the same. But despite his careful, even magisterial, works in this area—and despite being a member of the Society of Christian Ethics—Henry's work did not signal either his own integration into mainstream Christian ethics or lead many other evangelical thinkers to beat a path in that direction.

In general, when most evangelical universities, seminaries, and even parachurch organizations attempted ethical analysis or instruction in ethics, with certain important exceptions these efforts were undertaken by those not trained in the field. The same pattern remains broadly true today. But ethics cannot be reduced to theology (or philosophy, or biblical studies, or worldview studies, or whatever), so the weakness of these efforts has been profound, leading to what evangelical thinker Daryl Charles has rightly called "the unformed conscience of modern evangelicalism."

As a kind of parenthesis, however, it is important to note that Southern Baptists historically have constituted something of an exception to this evangelical disdain for the discipline of Christian ethics. Both "social Christianity" and Society of Christian Ethics-type ethical instruction were introduced at Southern Seminary at the same time as they were appearing in the broader academy. Southwestern Seminary began to develop its own mainstream Christian ethics tradition with the coming of T.B. Masten in the 1940s. Even today, ethics continues to be taught and ethics professors continue to be sought at the now conservative-led Southern Baptist seminaries. Though it is fair to say that the denominational transition has been hard on the vitality of the (Southern) Baptist ethics tradition, Christian ethics maintains a presence at both conservative and moderate Baptist seminaries that generally exceeds what is offered elsewhere in the evangelical Christian world.

Mapping the Contemporary Discipline of Christian Ethics

So it is time to offer evangelical Christianity, and to some extent the various Baptist communities, a fresh introduction to the discipline of Christian ethics and those who practice it.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of this discipline today is its diversity. This diversity can be mapped in several ways and offers a nice snapshot of the field.

Christian ethicists are Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and nearly every variety of Protestant: Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, Anabaptist, Pentecostal/charismatic, and so on. Mainline Protestants have long played a leading role in mainstream Christian ethics but, contra Webb, Christian ethics today cannot accurately be reduced to a “bastion of liberal Protestantism.” The Catholic voice in the SCE (31% of SCE membership), just to name one example, is strong and quite well represented at every level of leadership and activity. While there do exist some “religious ethicists” representing no particular confessional tradition, they are actually rather few in number. Most Christian ethicists ground their work in a recognizable theological tradition to which they retain some measure of loyalty and whose sources and methods are visible in their work.

It is certainly fair to say that the discipline of Christian ethics has tended to lean to the center-left theologically while encompassing a wide range of views. In this way it has reflected similar trends in the broader academy. Yet it is clear to me that the SCE exhibits considerable theological groundedness. Meanwhile, there is sufficient diversity of
perspective within the Society to keep anyone from getting too comfortable. I believe that
engagement with reasonably diverse perspectives contributes to the sharpening and self-
correction that is essential both to good scholarship and good discipleship.

The last two decades within Christian ethics have seen the growth both of
demographic diversity and ethical perspectives to match. The SCE was interested in
racial issues from its beginning, and in women's empowerment since the 1960s. Over
time the guild has helped to nurture the training, development, and inclusion of a
significant number of black, Hispanic, female, Asian-American, and other scholars from
previously voiceless groups. Meanwhile, from these groups has begun the emergence of
contextual social/theological ethics such as feminist and Hispanic ethics. This effort at
inclusiveness is consistent with the founding vision of Christian ethics and contributes
greatly to the field's richness and diversity, making for a stark contrast to the
overwhelmingly white and male face of most evangelical and Baptist scholarship.

A major source of diversity within Christian ethics is by methodology. I have already
noted the existence of contextual methodologies. These tend to emphasize engagement
with biblical and theological themes and truths, with careful attention to cultural and
social location and personal or group experience. Sometimes these treatments drift from
Christian orthodoxy, but most of the time they do not.

Such approaches are complemented by a variety of methodological options. Various
philosophical, theological, biblical, and social scientific methodologies can be seen in
Christian ethics. These approaches are sometimes rooted deeply in longstanding
confessional traditions; other times they represent the innovations of current thinkers. The
fact is that there is no single "way" to do Christian ethics, despite various proposals made
over the years. This contributes to the unsettled state of affairs in the discipline and often
to an overemphasis on methodological disputes at the expense of consideration of
concrete moral norms.

One longstanding characteristic of the SCE is its focus on social issues. In my training
I frequently heard "social ethics" used as the main term denoting what I was learning to
do, and that language remains significant in the SCE. As we have seen, Christian ethics as
a specialized discipline was born with industrialization and its ills. It came into its own in
the mid-twentieth century in response to the convulsive social crises of those years. Given
those roots, mainstream Christian ethics has tended to focus its gaze on pressing social
issues like these, updating its set of issues with the times. Thus today the issue mix
includes economic globalization, the environment, family ethics, racial justice, bioethics,
and so on. Varieties of professional ethics such as business, ministerial, legal, medical,
and journalistic ethics have also won an important place in Christian ethics. Matters of
public policy are always on the agenda. Thus a key source of the diversity in
contemporary Christian ethics has to do with issue specialization. Bioethics, for example,
is a vast enough concern to be its own field, but other arenas of social concern also have
attracted specialists who give their careers to addressing them.

Of course, it is important to note that the mainstream guild offers diverse proposals for
how Christians should respond to such issues. There is certainly a left-liberal contingent,
perhaps most visible on issues of sexual ethics. Yet the strong Catholic presence, as well
as more conservative voices within the mainline academy (and among evangelicals
already involved in the field), keeps the discipline from becoming merely a "bastion of
liberal Protestantism.” Deepened evangelical engagement would only help balance the scales all the more.

A final note here: in what may be taken as a kind of a reaction to this focus on contemporary issues, other ethicists now specialize in perennial concerns and themes in ethics, such as character, ecclesiology and ethics, the history of ethics, liturgy/worship and ethics, covenantal ethics, moral psychology, and the interpretation of the Bible for ethics—or in the work of major moral thinkers of past and present. In the resurgence of interest in such themes one sees mainstream Christian ethics going back to Christian ethics A and doing work of great value to evangelicals if we would only attend to it.

Unlike what is normally the case for the other theological disciplines, Christian ethics places its practitioners in many places of service other than the classroom. The diversity of the discipline can, in part, be found in this vocational pluralism. Certainly Christian ethicists often inhabit academia. At its origins, Christian ethicists tended to cluster in seminary settings, but by now the secular university, church-related school, evangelical college, university divinity school, freestanding seminary, and so on, all find their way onto this map. But ethicists also can be found in churches, religious orders, denominational agencies, research institutes and think tanks, government departments, parachurch lobbying, advocacy and activist organizations—and in hospitals, health care bureaucracies, businesses, and the military. Whatever it is that this “disreputable” profession does, there appear to be a number of institutions interested in it.

An intriguing way to map the discipline is by what might be called ethics tradition or key ethics icon. That is, since the discipline's founding, it has been possible to identify traditions in Christian ethics associated with key figures either living or dead. Often these are then linked with particular divinity schools or universities where those traditions live on long after their originator has left the scene. Some of the most significant of these ethics icons and the traditions associated with them would include:

- The Reinhold Niebuhr/Union Seminary NY tradition—built around the great mid-century Protestant ethicist/theologian, this tradition has a strong emphasis on engagement with current national and international issues based on the grand themes of Protestant theology.
- The H. Richard Niebuhr/Yale Divinity tradition—built around Reinhold’s more retiring brother H. Richard, this tradition has always been more methodologically rigorous and theologically focused.
- The James Gustafson/University of Chicago Divinity School tradition—Gustafson, one of the distinguished ethicists of the last generation, anchored a vigorous tradition in ethics at Chicago. The early Gustafson was a centrist Protestant of moderate Reformed leanings who engaged most of the important methodological disputes of his day with care and skill; the constructive work of the later Gustafson has been rather idiosyncratic, more theistic than Christian, but still fascinating.
- The Stanley Hauerwas/Duke Divinity School tradition—The most recent powerhouse ethicist to make this rarefied list, Hauerwas has built at Duke a tradition of Christian ethics offering a kind of neo-sectarian “Christ against culture” vision along with a strong emphasis on the retrieval of character and a focus on narrative.
These four streams of tradition hardly exhaust the list: one could also name a Dietrich Bonhoeffer tradition; a John Howard Yoder/Anabaptist tradition; an older Paul Ramsey/Princeton tradition now mainly abandoned; a Karl Barth/Paul Lehmann Princeton Seminary tradition; a Martin Luther King tradition; a feminist tradition that is quite collaborative but perhaps most closely identified with Beverly Harrison of Union Seminary; a strong sociology of religion/social ethics tradition at Emory University, associated with Jon Gunnean; multiple centers for a Catholic tradition in ethics, but especially Notre Dame, Boston College, and Georgetown; the vigorous work in Christian ethics also being undertaken in several California institutions of various confessional traditions; and influential voices from Great Britain and the Continent.

While the existence of major schools of tradition centered around key figures still is a factor in mainstream Christian ethics, the impact of these schools appears to be weakening in light of the increasing decentralization of the field. Dozens of schools offer doctorates in Christian ethics, and the horizon is not dominated by the kinds of towering figures once common in an earlier era. Christian ethics appears to be irreducibly diverse, but the field with few exceptions clings to its Christian identity and its social passion to address grievous public wrongs. The range of diversity certainly makes it hard to identify obvious standards of competence in the field. This contributes to the unsettling sense that various ethicists make various proposals but a methodological center for the discipline is never quite found (Long, 164). Even so, considerable sophisticated and very high-quality work happens nonetheless—much of it at some of the finest educational institutions in the world, and much of it remarkably relevant to evangelical and Baptist life.

The Necessity of Christian Ethics

In light of all of the foregoing, I would like to offer a brief defense of Christian ethics, aimed especially at an evangelical and Baptist audience. I want to claim that without attention to Christian ethics as an academic discipline, four very unwelcome things tend to happen in the Christian community—and thus that evangelical inattention to mainstream Christian ethics has contributed to the existence of these four problems in our midst today.

Without Christian ethics, the moral dimension of the Scriptures gets overlooked.

I usually define street-level Christian ethics (that is, the work that all of us as Christians are called to do) as the Spirit-empowered effort of communities of Christian people to understand and to incarnate a way of life that conforms to God's will and advances God's kingdom. Christian ethics the academic discipline helps Christians do this work of moral discernment and moral living. Ethics has to do with who we as Christians fundamentally are (moral character), what kinds of decisions we make and how we go about making them (moral decision-making), what kinds of goals we embrace (moral intentions), how we see the world and its possibilities (moral vision), how we characteristically conduct ourselves (moral practices), how we interact with and seek to change society (moral activism)—and more. These various dimensions of Christian character and conduct are demonstrated and worked out in various arenas: in individual life, in families, within the church, in the professions and the workplace, and in public life (culture, politics, law). For guidance in all of these areas, we desperately need biblical direction.
The Bible is indeed filled with moral content. But much of the time the moral dimension of the biblical message is overlooked or grossly misinterpreted. Christian ethics as a discipline helps Christians attend to and apply the moral commands, moral vision, morally significant narratives, and moral observations coursing through the Word of God. This discipline also calls our attention to the moral implications of core theological propositions of Scripture, such as the sovereignty of God and the goodness but fallenness of creation. Of course ethicists are not the only ones who do this work, and no claim to exclusivity is intended in any of what I say here. But it does seem to be the case that ethics calls the church to attend to aspects of Scripture and the doctrines emerging from Scripture that are otherwise overlooked. Evangelical engagement with Christian ethics would help ensure attention to such biblical texts, themes, and principles.

Without Christian ethics, the moral tradition of the church gets overlooked.

The classic theological curriculum includes study in church history and the history of Christian thought. In my experience, the discipline of Christian ethics plays a key role in keeping alive the moral heritage of Christian thought. Just as there is a history of Christian theology that must be remembered and transmitted, there is also a history of Christian ethics.

The moral tradition of the Christian church has two dimensions—what Christians have believed about morality, and how Christians have behaved morally. It is important, for example, to know what Martin Luther or John Calvin or Menno Simons had to say not just about election or the sacraments, but also about family, government, and economic life. It is also important to know what role they played in the fierce religious and political battles of their time, and of the legacy of their moral thought and practice for Protestant social ethics and Western culture to this day. The same holds true with every other major thinker in Christian history. Likewise, a morally sensitive history of the church as a whole deserves to be attempted.

One of the salutary developments of our time is the retrieval of the heritage of the church. Tom Oden’s project in patristic biblical interpretation—the Ancient Christian Commentary series—makes a great example of this. On a much smaller scale, a branch of the ethics guild is doing similar archaeology in Christian moral thought. A recent annual meeting included papers on Calvin and the emotions, John Chrysostom’s treatment of marriage, Luther on the self, and Schliermacher on religious experience in ethics—as well as discussions of Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Karl Barth, and the history of treatment of aboriginal peoples in North America. The more we dig around in the ancestral past, the more we discover riches beyond measure—as well as painful evidence of sins and missteps worth avoiding in the future.

Without Christian ethics, the church’s treatment of contemporary social problems is weakened.

Stephen Webb says: “What Christianity teaches about ethics is nothing different from or more than what Christianity teaches about Jesus Christ.” At one level, this is a truthful statement. Glen Stassen and I have offered an introductory text in Christian ethics based on Jesus’ teachings, and it has 198,000 words in it. So Jesus tells us quite a bit about Christian ethics. But of course many of those words are devoted to teasing out answers to such issues as whether an infertile couple should decide to pursue in vitro fertilization; or what stance the church should take on poverty in American society; or what to think and do about genetic engineering; or what the church can do to prevent divorce and build
successful marriages. Discerning the direction that Jesus offers to Christian ethics is a matter of considerable effort. It cannot simply be derived from christological formulations or, far worse, "what would Jesus do" slogans.

That effort involves interaction with other fields of study. Christian ethics—Christian social ethics, at least—is interdisciplinary. Most Christian ethics programs require training both in the classic theological/ethical canon and also in a social or natural science—sociology, economics, biology, genetics, political science. That's because Christian ethics is more than "just another name for Christian theology." It is the interaction of Christian theology with a fallen world on behalf of the church's efforts in moral discernment and moral action.

It may have been possible in the sixteenth century for the church's leading figures, such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, to do it all. They could be theologians, pastors, ethicists, and biblical scholars. Given the scope, complexity, and rapidly changing nature of today's social problems, as well as the explosion of Christian scholarship, specialization is salutary today, even required. Ethicists tend to specialize in particular moral issues and to work in an interdisciplinary fashion with social scientists dealing with the same issues. Somehow, again contra Webb, it will not quite do to say "Christian ethics is nothing more than simply being a good Christian."

Without Christian ethics, the church loses an essential bearer of its internal and external prophetic witness.

Mainstream Christian ethics has always been struck by the example of the prophets and by the prophetic moral teachings of Jesus—perhaps the most neglected parts of the canon in evangelical and Baptist life. Our discipline has always found its heartbeat at the intersection of God's love and human misery. The prophets called Israel to return to God, to keep the covenant once made with God, to do justice and love mercy, to protect and care for the widow, the orphan, and the alien, to live out God's compassion for the poor and victimized. And the prophets did not cease to bring a fiercely critical word from the Lord to the people of God, not because of disdain for God's people, but instead out of the highest kind of love.

As a discipline, we have resisted the reduction of Christian faith to the affirmation of right doctrine. We have resisted the reduction of Christian morality to the recitation of right convictions. We have resisted the reduction of Christian spirituality to the generation of individual good feelings. We have sought to keep the poor and the victimized before the conscience of the church and the culture. And we have called the church away from triumphalism and toward a teachable humility fitting for God's elect-but-fallible people. This stance certainly challenges Webb's careless claim that Christian ethics is "an empty idea"—whether it is also "a dangerous one" perhaps depends on whether one welcomes a prophetic voice or does not.

**Strengthening Christian Ethics**

I want to propose that rather than rejecting or marginalizing Christian ethics as an academic discipline, evangelicals and Baptists need to heighten their efforts in the field, in four ways: training more ethicists, participating more heavily in the Society of Christian Ethics, producing first-rate scholarship in Christian ethics, and allowing the broad social
passion of Christian ethics to be felt again within our churches. Doing these things will have a positive impact both on our churches and on the discipline of Christian ethics.

The dearth of evangelical ethicists has left a gap in seminary and Christian university faculties that is proving very difficult to fill. Even where these schools seek professionally trained ethicists, they have difficulty finding people with both the appropriate training and evangelical theological convictions. This trend becomes self-reinforcing. The lack of ethics instruction and highly trained ethics teachers at evangelical colleges and seminaries helps to limit the number of our students who then pursue ethics at the graduate level. Those who do pursue graduate study in ethics are then less likely to be evangelicals or be in contact with evangelicals.

The same thing needs to happen in Christian ethics as has happened in philosophy, history, theology, and sociology of religion. Young scholars of excellent academic abilities and solid theological convictions need to be trained well and then sent to the best doctoral programs in ethics that can be found. As they do good work, they will find employment in excellent universities and make their mark in the profession. The door is open in ethics just as it is in other fields if evangelicals are willing to walk through it. One of my fondest hopes is to eventually place a number of my finest students in ethics doctoral programs, and to see them eventually take their evangelical vision to the Ivy League and many other unexpected kinds of places.

The Society of Christian Ethics has an Evangelical Ethics Interest Group. I have served as co-leader of this group for some time. Each year, a rather substantial number of ethicists surface for our late-night group session at the annual convention. Two years ago, when Dennis Hollinger and I presented a paper on evangelical ethics in the broader SCE setting, a large number of non-evangelicals showed up.

All of this is to say that the mainstream ethics guild both needs and welcomes the respectful but vigorous participation of evangelicals who teach and write about ethics. Within the 950-member Society, self-identified evangelicals are likely no more than five percent. But someone is teaching ethics at Christian universities and in our dozens of seminaries and Bible colleges, and as far as I can tell, few of these participate in the SCE. Involvement in the Society will both enrich evangelical teaching and have an impact on the direction of Christian ethics as a discipline.

The reason scholars like George Marsden, Alvin Plantinga, Miroslav Volf, and Nicholas Wolterstorff are taken seriously by non-evangelicals is simply that they produce good work. By the canons of the disciplines in which such scholars work, they are excellent. Their work demands attention. Even in a discipline that leans center-left, certain meritocratic standards still prevail. Often evangelicals convince themselves of a vast left-wing conspiracy against us when what is really going on is that our own ghettoization has kept us from reaching the level of excellence that might get our work noticed.

If and when evangelicals produce good scholarship in ethics, we are taken seriously. Richard Mouw, John Howard Yoder, Stephen Mott, Oliver O'Donovan, James McClendon, Gilbert Meilander, Glen Stassen, and Christine Pohl are examples of evangelical scholars representing a variety of traditions whose work has earned the attention of ethicists of all stripes. We need to produce more such work, and soon.
Many fine scholars have documented both the rich early history of American evangelical social and political engagement and then its sudden abandonment in the 1920s after the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.

Evangelicals finally wised up and reentered public ethical engagement beginning in the 1970s. Unfortunately, especially at the popular and mass activist level, we have not always done our work well. But there is unlikely to be a second evangelical withdrawal from such social engagement. Evangelicals are in the public square to stay. The issues are too important to walk away from, and faithful discipleship demands our continued engagement.

Yet even today few evangelicals (academic or otherwise) who engage public ethical issues do so in dialogue with the leading professionals of the field. As we have seen, one result of this estrangement has been some pretty shoddy ethical writing. Another has been a weakening of that passion for justice and righteousness that is so obviously biblical that evangelicals cannot forever neglect it.

But this is a new day. Evangelicals are back in the public square, and with plenty of moral passion in need of refinement and direction. The Christian ethics guild is ready for interaction with evangelicals. For our own sake, we need to pursue that interaction.

Conclusion

The mainline is fading, and everyone knows it—even the mainline. As early as 1984, in his history of the discipline of Christian ethics, Edward L. Long worried:

If the institutional expressions of Christianity in our immediate milieu progressively decline in quality, even if they do survive, that also will undermine the possibility of doing Christian ethics well...If robust Christian ethics can exist only within a context of vibrant faith and viable religious institutions, and if those very contexts are eroding right under our very noses, then business as usual for a society such as ours will not insure a promising future (Long, 176).

My colleague George Guthrie has spoken to me of how evangelical scholars now dominate large sections of biblical scholarship simply because it is increasingly only evangelicals who still care enough about the biblical text to bother with it. In other words, the erosion that Long worried about has already deeply affected mainline involvement in biblical studies. The mainliners now desperately need evangelicals in their midst to keep their churches and academic enterprises alive.

My experience of the mainstream ethics community is that in the midst of signs of their own decline they find evangelicals a refreshing, renewing, and hopeful presence in the discipline. An evangelical spirit in ethics (the right kind of evangelical spirit) reminds the discipline as a whole of its origins and founding passions. Our careful attention to a Bible in which we still wholeheartedly believe, passionate grounding in a personal relationship with Christ, desire for excellence in the service of Christ as Lord, and Kingdom vision for the transformation of the world are like a breath of fresh air in a scholarly guild that once was characterized by more of this spirit as the foundation of its social passion—and at some level wishes it still was. (For this description of characteristics of evangelical ethics, see Dennis Hollinger/David P. Gushee, “Evangelical

I continue to think that one of the best definitions of evangelicalism is simply that it is a renewal movement within Protestant Christianity, calling fellow believers to what they once and truly believed. To renew we must engage rather than withdraw. To renew successfully might mean to make ourselves obsolete—that is, as a renewal movement. Instead we might just find ourselves reintegrated into a renewed church and into a scholarly guild deeply affected by our biblical vision.
Hard-Pressed on Every Side: 
Jenkins and the New Anti-Catholicism

by Antonio A. Chiareli

(A review of The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice, by Philip Jenkins)

Introduction

I begin with an anecdote:

In the late 1980s and early 90s, as military dictators in Central America were being deposed and as the region began experimenting with fledgling democracy, there was a new infusion of Roman Catholic priests into the region. At the same time, some analysts began to take notice of a marked increase in the consumption of rum in the isthmus. By all accounts, rum consumption in fact went through the roof. The natural initial conclusion by the casual and perhaps malicious observer was that the two phenomena were in some way causally related: more priests, much more rum. Legends were soon constructed around this apparent connection, which depicted bacchanalian Catholic priests secretly gathering together and defiling their rum-inebriated selves with each other and members of their parishes. Sobriety finally came when this relationship was examined by some social scientists and judged to be spurious, and that in fact a third variable, that of democratization, was the true but certainly overlooked explanatory factor in the conspicuous rise in rum consumption. A happier and overall freer populace drank more rum. The assumed relationship between priests and rum was thus largely debunked, at least in its more inflammatory and sensationalistic aspects.

— Graduate statistics lecture, Northwestern University, 1991.

In a sense, one might say that Philip Jenkins, in his 2003 book The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice, sets out to accomplish the very same thing—that is, to debunk the hate mythology constructed around a perceived Catholic menace, brought about over the last thirty years in America by the liberal media and by the radicalized activist agendas of countercultural feminist and homosexual groups on the liberal-left end of the political spectrum in this country.

With great use of historical fact and unblemished academic rigor, Jenkins does more than simply inform the reader about the many inconsistencies and double standards, as well as unjust and unfounded visceral attacks on the Roman Catholic Church and its branch in America. He convincingly exposes a persistent practice, external and in some cases internal to the embattled Church, one which has been especially reserved by liberal cultural and political agents for the Catholic religious edifice and its clerical hierarchy, and which if perpetrated against any other religious, or even ethnic group, would be deemed unthinkable in this age of political correctness, and, beyond that, untenable.

But Jenkins does more than convince. He educates, or one might say reeducates. For only complete social hibernation over the past couple of decades could have impeded one
from being exposed—and in some instances overexposed—to the barrage of media-sponsored anti-Catholic sentiment and propaganda, able to sway just about anyone’s opinions except those of the most diligent students and pursuers of truth. I count myself among those former Catholics who, after leaving the Roman church, eagerly, hungrily, and unsuspectingly advanced to the open table of delectable spurious relationships, scandals, and accounts of unpardonable Catholic offenses, served up as a free-for-all liberal banquet by the Hollywood movie industry, by polemics-driven book publishers, by anti-Catholic art exhibits, by left-wing newspapers and broadcast news programs, and by their feminist and homosexual campaign partners and allies within the post-modern, post-Christian culture wars. One must also not forget the role of liberal critics of Rome who were inbred and still continue to position themselves among devoted members of the Church. Jenkins’ work, then, can rightly be cast as an impassioned plea for just treatment of Catholicism, and a “wake-up call” to principled cultural observers whose interests lie not in blindly defending the Catholic Church as much as in being able to form opinions on issues related to Catholicism based on reasoned, robustly supported, truth claims.

To be sure, to some readers like myself, Jenkins’ thesis will come across as exasperatingly myopic, at times, in his over-Catholicization of the problem. After all, what of vicious liberal attacks on Protestant Evangelicalism and Orthodox Judaism? And what of ultra-conservative attacks on radical Islamism as of late? Certainly also to sociologists, Jenkins’ work is found wanting when it comes to engendering a full and explicit answer to the “so what” question, from a more conceptual, theoretical standpoint. In other words, what does his argument say about prejudice of this type to other eras, contexts, antagonists, and protagonists? How can Jenkins’ extensive apologetics for this particular religious group lead to some broader, overarching theory-building about anti-religious prejudice in general?

Yet truly, despite these initial criticisms of this work, by the end of the book I judged Jenkins’ debunking tour-de-force to be deeply insightful and surprisingly eye-opening to me, even as a former Catholic. My previously held views were thoroughly transformed in light of Jenkins’ sober historical analysis of fact, as he sheds light, for instance, on the many actual and imagined connections between the Catholic Church and the Crusades, the Inquisition and one church’s allegedly furtive treatment of the atrocities of the Nazi Holocaust, not to mention the many charges of suppression of the truth in the shocking pedophile priest scandals, which have erupted most forcefully in the United States since 2002.

I’ll reserve my basic critical assessment of the book for the conclusion here. But first allow me to provide a brief overview of the book’s main assertions and evidence brought to bear on the question of anti-Catholicism.

The Structure of Jenkins’ Anti-Catholic Prejudice Argument

Jenkins’ Claim

The book begins with a charge: “Catholics and Catholicism are at the receiving end of a great deal of startling vituperation in contemporary America, although generally those responsible never think of themselves as bigots” (p.1). Jenkins provides an exhaustive list of serious anti-Catholic claims, from grotesque charges centered on the Church’s
structurally-ordained misogyny, to sexual hypocrisy by a tacit closet-homosexual status quo, to fascist anti-Americanism/anti-freedom traditions, to complicit silence, lies, and unethical (even criminal) conduct by American bishops and cardinals who consistently choose to protect Catholic priests over their victims of sex abuse. Not even the fabled, centuries-old but recently revived right-wing Protestant condemnations of the Catholic Church for being Satan’s servant and the great counterfeit religion on the earth over centuries are left out of Jenkins’ argument.

These and many other frontal assaults on the Vatican and its American dominion, Jenkins argues, are unjust, but most disturbingly so because Catholicism “is virtually the only major institution in which such liberties [of hate speech] are still permitted” (p. 15). He further asserts that “Catholics receive fewer [hate speech] protections than other groups” (p. 17), perhaps because Roman Catholicism itself is seen as the main problem. Jenkins points out that out of the more liberal sectors of the Church come intense criticisms by anti-clerical Catholics themselves, who see as the great evil not Catholicism per se, but rather the anachronistic, Vatican-imposed, clerical hierarchy and papal dominance within the worldwide Church. Intuitively, then, one asks, “How can the Catholic Church be okay, when some of its greatest opponents claim to be devoted Catholics crying out for sweeping structural reform?”

**The Long History of Anti-Catholicism in America**

But raw anti-Catholic sentiment is nothing new, as Jenkins ably demonstrates with his overview of the history of anti-Catholicism in this country. Since the seventeenth century, we find strong evidence of a somewhat continuous anti-Catholic current in the cultural, but especially political arena of American society. Anglo-American political ideologies surrounding questions of personal liberty and nationalist ideals translated into the creation of sinister stereotypes of Irish Catholics and their clergy. Charges of priestly sadism, sexual subservience by believers, and political manipulation by New England Jesuits were common expressions of our intolerant beginnings as a nation. As Ronald L. Johnstone (2001: 268) has shown, even after the Constitutional compromise of the First Amendment, and as the nation struggled with issues of religious pluralism, Catholic ethnic groups, especially Irish-Americans and later Italians, were consistent targets of anti-Catholic sentiments and discrimination.

In the nineteenth century, Catholics represented the threat of labor competition against the Anglo-Saxon core, sparking nativist fury against Catholic immigrants. Catholics were also vilified for refusing to assimilate, being seen as cultural separatists whose children would be educated in parochial schools. Catholics became prime targets of the temperance movement’s anti-alcohol crusade, which focused on the drinking habits of clergy and laymen alike to highlight Catholic immorality. In the early part of the twentieth century, anti-Catholicism was adopted by the Ku Klux Klan’s systematic terrorizing of blacks, Jews, and the “aliens,” or “unassimilated hordes of Europe,” (p. 32). In the 1930s and 40s, liberal and secular thinkers propagated the notion of Catholicism not only as the religion of the Old World, but also as one which was scornfully anti-science. In rare form, even hard-line Protestants, Masons, and leftists and communist interests harmonized against the perceived new fascist threat of the Catholic political machine, especially after the New Deal coalition.
While Catholicism enjoyed interspersed and relatively brief periods of respite from these attacks, especially given its staunch anti-communist stance in the 1950s, rising Catholic religious dominance and growing presence in higher education again made them targets of anti-Catholic attacks, especially against so called “Roman-imposed” moral controls and media censorship coming out of the 50s. In 1960, non-Catholics and liberals such as Paul Blanchard and others, who believed that Catholic power could not coexist with liberal democracy, watched nervously and perhaps incredulously as presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, a Roman Catholic himself, spoke forcefully on the separation of Church and State, declaring further: “I do not speak for my church on public matters; and the church does not speak for me” (Kennedy, 1960). In fact, the early 60s saw Kennedy liberalism thriving, and on most social issues the American Catholic Church was found to be a dependable ally of liberalism and the Democratic Party, which precipitated some considerable gains in public opinion and in positive media attention for the Church. Yet, as Jenkins maintains, the media’s liberal honeymoon with Catholicism was short-lived. In 1968, Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical Huananeae Vitae, which prohibited the use of any and all artificial means of contraception. This marked a pivotal point in the Church’s brief journey toward social liberalization and, according to Andrew Greeley, a new, more potent form of anti-Catholic bigotry emerged.

As the United States entered the age of liberal and radical reformism in the 1960s and 70s, grave concerns over the Church’s ultra-conservative views on gender and sexuality came to predominate, especially among liberal groups espousing feminist (Women’s Movement – 1968) and homosexual (Gay Movement – 1969) agendas. Most significantly, however, this period marked the emergence of concerted anti-clerical and anti-pontifical criticisms and reformist agendas within the Church itself, a phenomenon which represented a stark departure from earlier forms of anti-Catholicism. As Jenkins states, the confluence of antagonistic sentiments both exogenous and endogenous to the Church fundamentally helped generate a new type of Catholic hate mythology that laid the groundwork for the current debates and blistering attacks over the purported sexually predatory nature of Catholicism. Indeed, the picture painted by Jenkins is one of an antagonized Church that has been “hard-pressed on every side”: from the right and the left, from within and without.

What’s so new about the “New Anti-Catholicism?”

So what exactly is this “New Anti-Catholicism” about which Jenkins writes? How does it differ from the long history of anti-Roman Catholic rhetoric and action? The answer, Jenkins argues, lies in the particular role the American media has played in propagating and perpetuating the demonization of Catholicism since the 1970s. As Jenkins goes on to show, the notion of a religious institution under an ultra-conservative Pope (the late John Paul II) that hated women and refused to ordain them, that killed gays and denied them basic marital civil rights, and whose hierarchy encouraged a culture of secrecy among its prelates around issues of sexual abuse by its priests, became the very focus of a now decades-long anti-Catholic media campaign unlike anything that has ever been witnessed against any other religion in America.

On women’s issues and the Church, there’s no question that the feminist movement found in Catholicism a ready-made demon and invaluable propaganda tool. Unlike most
of its Protestant counterparts, the Catholic Church, under the Vatican’s rule, continues to be seen as “a weary, dated religion, where women are incubators and servants” (68). Its refusal to conform to increasingly mainstream popular cultural trends in America, for instance on issues around contraception, reproductive rights, and women’s leadership in religion, has earned it “monstrous” notoriety. Since the 70s, there has been no shortage of ferocious anti-Catholic hateful denunciations and distasteful protests by women’s groups, not the least of which has been the organization known as Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC). These attacks have been allowed to go on with little in the way of opposition by local or state authorities, and often with very positive media attention. As Jenkins contends, however, the positions on these issues held by most members of the Church are quite close to the popular mainstream. Therefore, media-engineered agitation, playing on liberal public opinion, has ignored the voice of a majority of Catholics, and has focused on the misogynous, patriarchal Church hierarchy, labeling the Roman Church as a villainous, un-American institution whose demonstrable hatred for women must be brought to light, judged, and sentenced via cultural polemics. The main issue for Jenkins is not the admittedly evident history of Catholic patriarchy and unequal treatment of women in the Church. Rather, it is the manner in which a liberally-bent media has picked up on a politically-contrived discourse by feminist groups and fashioned a demon which has consistently served as instigator of intense and unchecked prejudice against a global institution because it simply refuses to conform to a particularly constructed American feminist disposition.

A second vociferous front in the anti-Catholic campaign in America has come in the form of gay activism. Arguably a more visceral source of anti-Church polemic, this homosexual agenda has captivated liberal media affinities and has risen to some of the highest levels of hateful attitudes and practice against what in one view is the homophobic and confused homoerotic Catholic establishment. Especially since the 1980s, gay anti-Catholicism has institutionalized a particularly graphic form of protest, blending blasphemy-ridden discourse with provocative and exotic transsexual characters such as “The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence” (p.98), along with gay fetish spectacles, producing what can undoubtedly be considered the most offensive face of contemporary anti-Catholicism. According to Jenkins, ACT UP and Queer Nation protests between 1989 and 1992 made Church building desecration and defacing a normal part of the movement’s repertoire of collective action, paralleling the anti-Catholic nativist riots of the 1840s and 1850s. Yet these demonstrations received almost no condemnation in the mass media, which instead of citing such offenses as hate crimes, quite on the contrary carefully framed these actions as gay self-defense against oppressive Catholic policies.

In 1998, the controversial play Corpus Christi created outrage among Christians, which only reinforced the gay movement’s view that Christians, especially Catholics, hated gays. The media, printed and otherwise, chose to denounce the Christian reaction to this and other plays and writings as religious extremism, thus invalidating the Church’s arguments as merely grounded in homophobia. But the gravest charge against the Catholic Church in particular came not as a result of its anti-homosexual policies, often seen by gay activists as hypocritical self-denial and inner contradiction. Rather, it was the Vatican’s unwavering views opposing “safe sex” instruction and contraception, including, of course, condom use, which to gay propagandists in the age of AIDS was tantamount to a death sentence. In fact, the Church was publicly blamed for the loss to AIDS of
thousands in America and millions around the world. For that, Catholicism came under
the most sustained attacks, with virtual impunity, by both the gay movement and the
liberal media. For Jenkins, gay depictions of the evils of a “dreadful, homicidal church”
(p. 112) amount to clear, yet largely socially accepted, anti-Catholic bigotry.

Most assuredly, the “new” Anti-Catholic prejudice reached its zenith after 2002, with
the pedophile priest crisis in the Church. Jenkins writes,

Even reputable news outlets presented a picture of a Catholic priesthood heavily
infiltrated by perverts and child molesters, whose activities were treated so mildly
by their superiors that the bishops themselves were virtually accomplices. This
awful picture gave the opportunity for the widespread public expression of
 grotesquely anti-Catholic and anti-clerical sentiments and the revival of every
ancient stereotype – even the sale of indulgences. (p. 133)

Jenkins does acknowledge some clergy abuse as fact and examines a couple of the more
notorious cases in some depth. He makes no excuse for such reprehensible moral failures
on the part of these trusted religious leaders. However, he goes on to document that the
incidence of actual, established cases of sexual abuse by clergyman (two or three percent)
is far lower than what has been reported by the liberal media (five or six percent). In the
specific cases involving minors, realistic figures for incidences of pedophile offenses are
estimated to be less than two percent, and not six percent or higher, as some media reports
have alleged. Leaving aside the sticky issue of reported versus unreported cases, if actual
figures are indeed what Jenkins shows, they represent an incidence of sexual abuse or
pedophilia in the Catholic Church no higher than what one would find in the general
population. Yet, to the polemic-fueling liberal media, the equation is quite
straightforward: Priestly Celibacy + Closet Homosexuality = Pedophilia.

Jenkins adequately dispels myths of widespread institutional cover-ups, citing Church-
initiated, diligently executed investigations, and reports on these troubling incidences.
Still, as Jenkins states, “a casual observer relying on the mass media would form the
overwhelming impression of a Church institution awash in perversion, conspiracy, and
criminality. That is very far from the truth” (p. 138). Jenkins reminds us that in modern
American history, “no mainstream denomination has ever been treated so consistently, so
publicly, with such venom” (p. 134). An exacerbating factor, however, which attracts
much anti-Catholic attention stems from the ferocious rage of anti-Church arguments by
critics internal to the Church itself. Their authors are self-described faithful Catholics:
Dowd, Carroll, Quindlen, Kennedy, Wills and Sipe (p. 156), who have contributed to the
return to the social mainstream of the ancient caricatures of priests as abusive, closet
perverts.

In relation to mass media, Jenkins notes that with few exceptions, the unabashed
double-standard applied to the Catholic Church when it comes to political expression
means that when the Church condemns anti-Catholic ideology manifested, for instance,
through art, this is considered “hate speech,” and Catholics should just “get over it.” Yet
when highly offensive anti-Catholic political expressions find outlets through the same
artistic venues, that is considered “free speech.” For Jenkins, the list of hateful anti-
Catholicism depictions in the movies and TV since the late 1970s is extensive: The Thorn
Birds (1977), The Life of Brian (1979), Monsignor (1982), Agnes of God (1985), Last

Hollywood's and the TV media networks' justification for the various exaggerations and distorted portrayals of Catholicism in the form of Catholic plotting, Vatican misdeeds and homicidal Popes, oppressive and sexually active and abusive priests, and so on, is at times put forth on the most liberal of grounds: "Catholicism is not like other religions or political systems because it is an oppressive weapon of the overmighty" (p. 176). But as Jenkins notes, "That belief in itself represents anti-Catholic bigotry" (Idem.). It is true that the Catholic Church is an imposing religious edifice whose shadow reaches all across the globe. And when the Vatican speaks, people and governments take notice (consider the current worldwide outcry and controversy fostered by Islamic governments and religious leaders over Pope Benedict XVI’s comments recently about the Prophet Muhammad, during a lecture in Germany on faith and reason). Because of the Catholic Church's visibility in the world, the long tradition of historical stereotypes and distortions of the Church's history, what Jenkins calls "Black Legends," is likely to remain alive and well for the foreseeable future, especially as the strong conservative legacy of John Paul II continues in the Church under Pope Benedict XVI. And as Jenkins reminds us, even if a dramatic proverbial "swing of pendulum" were to take place, the Church would arguably only find itself a target of new criticism, coming this time from the conservative right.

By Way of Conclusion

Premised on Jenkins' account, the end of prejudice remains elusive when it comes to the future of anti-Catholicism in America. Moreover, adequately answering Jenkins' ultimate question "Why can Catholicism legitimately be attacked in such outrageous terms by the American media, while other racial, social, and religious traditions remain exempt?" (Idem.) certainly would require lengthy and laborious analysis and expounding. The easy way out would be to simply reassert Jenkins' claim, which can simplistically be summarized as "It's prejudice, stupid." But it is precisely here that I find what is most lacking in his treatment of the "New Anti-Catholicism" question. Jenkins ends the book with little more than what he himself describes as "A Kind of Solution" (p. 214). Yet to merely suggest that liberals might explore forming alliances with the Catholics, many of whom are not opposed to at least some liberal Church reforms, is to evade a deeper side of the following question: "What truly is it about the Catholic Church that makes it such a favorite target of liberal attacks?" I suggest that what is needed here is a deeper conceptual treatment of the root causes of anti-religious prejudice in society.

I believe the answer lies not in the issue of religiosity. Liberals could care less about that (if suddenly all Christians began attending worship services twice a day, every day, I can assure you we would not be sued by the ACLU). If they did care about religiosity, then I suppose fundamentalist Christians, and any number of fervent sects and cults on the fringes of the religious continuum, might make better targets than Catholics. I contend that the answer lies instead in the intersection of religion and culture, and more specifically, of
religion and politics. The Catholic Church is second to none in the advocacy and defense of moral arguments in the public square relating to abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, embryonic-cell research, marriage, sexual abstinence, artificial contraception, gender and sexuality, and other hot cultural topics. Catholic ethicists, for instance – and here I’ve benefited from Protestant ethicist David Gushee’s insights – on the moderate and conservative end of the political spectrum have bravely and competently written and taught on these issues for the purpose of policy-making. They include, among many others, Lisa Cahill, Julie Rubio, John Langan, Cathleen Kaveny, James Keenan, Jean Porter, June O’Connor, William F. May, and the late John Paul II, in addition to Catholic thinkers such as Richard John Neuhaus and Robert George.

Faced with such a brilliant line-up of teachers and writers, liberals, often unable to contend for their cause on such high intellectual and moral grounds, resort to the age-old tactic of vilification and demonization of their opponent. As Aguirre and Turner (2001) rightly affirm, a clear and present sense of threat is among the most powerful and convincing reasons for prejudicial sentiment and discriminatory action against the feared foe. In the final analysis, to me, the fundamental question that must be asked is not “Why is the Catholic Church the target?” but rather, “Why is it so often the main or only liberal target?” What might this say to us, Evangelical Christians, about our own visibility in these important debates, and about our willingness to take the hits for not just the private religious or spiritual questions – as important as they are – but also for the urgent righteous and moral public causes in culture and society, as we present our views and selves as faithful followers of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

Works Cited


Beyond the Corporate-Chain Model: A Personal Excursion into Independent Bookstore/Café Life

by Roger Stanley

As an idealistic and free-floating grad student in the mid-eighties, I had no qualms, upon finding myself temporarily in the capital city of Virginia, in walking onto the campus of Virginia Commonwealth University and approaching the first open faculty office door of its English Department. “Where is the best bookstore in Richmond?” I boldly questioned its tweedy occupant after the most minimal of greetings. His studied reply—“in Charlottesville”—rightfully sent me packing off campus and, a few days later, back to my much smaller (and practically bookstore-less) east Tennessee college town. As an assistant professor of English today who has completed over a decade and a half’s service to one institution in southwest Tennessee, I have sometimes aspired to riff on the anonymous VCU professor’s quick wit by answering of my town: “in Oxford, Mississippi.” But no one ever asked.

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Thus the alpha and omega of Jackson, Tennessee’s “grand experiment” (Jackson Sun) in independent bookstore life, Davis-Kidd Booksellers and Café, born 1995, dead forever as of January 2006. For five or so years, the first ones of the 90’s, I had the Oxford answer ready for any literate Jacksonian; a decade on, I’m available again to guide such a figure a hundred miles down TN Highway 18 and MS 7 to the lovely Square Books (with token café). In between, I scarcely dared give credence to what seemingly existed (I don’t say thrived) less than a mile from my house, just crosstown from my job/campus. I guess I split my early 90’s “café” time between one of our Waffle House franchises (we’re nothing if not a franchise town, just off interstate 40) and our main branch/one-branch public library. I guess I will now purchase a Books-a-Million discount card and acclimatize the spoiled quasi-bohemian self to fluorescence and a little corner space called Joe Muggs.

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Karen Davis and Thelma Kidd, the former a west Tennessee native, opened their fourth eponymous bookstore in 1995. We knew our market paled in comparison to that of the flagship store in Nashville—as well as to Memphs and Knoxville. The two women, trained as social workers, purportedly canvassed the area’s penchant for book clubs and the like before leasing space, but it’s hard to think Jackson—four colleges or not—could, then or now, stand up to any demographic-based bookstore market analysis worth its corporate salt. What we import are tornadoes, what we provide in the way of service industry are suitable bathrooms inside our franchise eateries at exits 80 and 82. It was a labor of love for Ms. Kidd and Ms. Davis—and I said as much on the giant going-away card patrons and employees signed for them in 1997, as they ceded over their Jackson store and the three others to “independent” Ohio-based entity Joseph-Beth Booksellers.
Those first two years were the glory years, even granting Joseph-Beth’s thesis that the succeeding eight were a constant struggle against small-market red ink. Sure elements of my town objected to a prominent “Gay and Lesbian Studies” section in the store, but this was an understandable reaction from a conservative community, one which soon found a solution in compromise. Sure initial manager Kay Ferrée took her lumps in trying to be an advocate for community morés to the two “outside” owners without yielding to the forces of censorship. But those first months... Coffee was an even dollar, and no one cared if readers or sippers took up prime café real estate—even though lunch and dinner hours got busy, with full menus. Up to its overnight demise in December 2005 (at least the bookstore closing was phased), Jackson’s café was the only one of eight which resisted the notion of table service, of the mandate to go through a hostess even to sit with a book on the restaurant side.

The common wisdom among the denizens of our town—the grievors and the January firesale bargain-seekers alike—was that Joseph-Beth owner Neil Van Uum did all he could to keep the doors open as the century turned and a Books-a-Million franchise opened on Jackson’s relatively booming northside. Folks still point to Van Uum’s retention of the Davis-Kidd name for his Tennessee stores, his alleged efforts to procure new space away from our static midtown as the lease was set to expire in early ’06. Yet the Jackson establishment’s downfall came with precedent, as Joseph-Beth had closed the west Knoxville Davis-Kidd in a matter of months after the 1997 buyout. Granted, that store never had a café, and it was probably a mistake for Kidd and Davis to have uprooted it from the vibrant “Strip” location near the University of Tennessee campus in favor of suburban west. Three separate book franchise book retailers (you can name them yourself, springing off the same letter near the beginning of our alphabet), each with café, opening within a mile and a half of Davis-Kidd’s Knoxville location probably sealed its doom long before Van Uum came south to the Tennessee scene, inherited business (“Joseph-Beth” is a construction based upon spousal and in-law names) in tow.

At Malaprop’s Bookstore of Asheville, North Carolina, I was once denied a highly craved latte because a light jazz quartet was performing across the way and the employee would not activate the steamed milk machine until set break. She was polite but firm, making me feel chastened but not about to chafe in the wake of what was after all an inappropriate request in context. Not so at Davis-Kidd Jackson, where I hosted a monthly open mike poetry reading for three years; the mike may have remained open from 6:30-8 each third Tuesday, but employee-page announcements and the hissing of espresso machines continued unabated, to the occasional discombobulation of our readers, practiced and amateur alike. No one had to signpost the sentiments underlying this to our small yet shifting group, for we could parse the business-as-usual, victuals before verse dynamics for ourselves. When store manager Linda Reed abruptly cancelled the readings
in the summer of 2001, the failure of regional wannabe poets to bring a revenue stream into the building one night a month was as close to an explanation as I got, with a hint as well that “corporate” disapproved. My letter to Van Uum went unanswered.

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The line between a “chain” or “corporate” establishment as opposed to an “independent” one is waveriing at best. How many members of the organization Book Sense own and operate seven stores under two different names, having shuttered two for good while constructing some of the currently operative ones? [Van Uum also closed his Cleveland Shaker Heights space after only a few years, shifting ground to a trendier district of the city] The pattern seems to befit a chain, though Joseph-Beth trumpets its “independent bookstore” status in every piece of promotional literature it can. Clearly Square Books and Malaprops are lone wolves, a fact obvious in décor and layout—though each has expanded down the block or across the street in its time. Perhaps the coalition Book Sense is a bit contradictory itself: independents banding together in an avowed battle against the corporate Man. Aside from its Pittsburgh and Cleveland II franchises, I’ve spent time in all (defunct and present) bookstores under the Joseph-Beth umbrella, and it’s been comfortable there, certainly more welcoming in ambience than any Border’s I’ve tripped, and generally comparable in book selection. Still, former manager Reed was never above a single three-syllable rationale for any change to the Jackson store deemed unfavorable by any given customer: “corporate.” Can you have it both ways, blaming “corporate” for, say, the closing of the outdoor café patio, yet insisting that local and regional well-being is the prime impetus behind any legitimate strides (e.g., resisting café table service) Davis-Kidd Jackson might be making?

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At Tattered Cover Bookstore of lower downtown Denver, there are postcards for sale picturing an elderly reader named Charlie, happy and as if embalmed with his newspaper forever in the store’s own literate confines. I took this for self-metaphor, once mailing such a card back to my bookseller friends in Jackson while on vacation. Before the patio was closed and the somewhat seedy-looking easy chairs and couches hard by the Davis-Kidd fireplace were disposed of, Denver’s great store (chain of two, flagship having remained across town in a strip mall) shared a certain affinity of décor with my Jackson one as a haven for reading. Gradually bric-a-brac usurped book in our town; the nadir came when one employee picked a certain bar of scented soap for her “book of the month” emblematic February. Come to think of it, that display of staff choices quietly faded too sometime after the Van Uum takeover, but I knew this employee well enough to say not a whit of irony graced her selection. Business school colleagues tell me the trade in new books is seldom profitable—whether for a Davis-Kidd, a Joseph-Beth, or a Books-a-Million. Remainers rule the day for the latter, while calendars and candles and the like may give the illusion of per-item profitability. I watched with chagrin as Joseph-Beth eliminated the Reader’s Circle card, a kind of rebate for frequent book buyers, and supplemented the shelves with display kiosks featuring all manner of retail sundries. The expansion into CD’s was good to see, but when you have employees whose entire daily “shelving” hour is devoted to stripping books off the racks for return to the
distributor, it’s easy to wonder whether a prominent used and/or remainder section would have been a better survival tactic.

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At Atticus Bookstore/Café of New Haven, Connecticut, there’s a wraparound counter with elevated stools for food patrons placed centrally to the bookshelves. Such integration of life’s most serendipitous products seemed more than sensible to me one August as I overheard locals lining up on both sides of the Red Sox—Yankees divide during my visit for the Pilot Pen tennis tourney. A sizable Yale contingent lent the patter a more philosophical timbre; I’d like to think the folks I have met through the years at Davis-Kidd Jackson are equally conversant with the escapades of athletes and intellectuals. It was always important to me that the bookstore was closer to my residence than to my job site, a symbolic step away from daytime academia by way of transition to evening leisure. For me, leisure has always included fairly equal parts caffeine, conversation, and reading material. Inside Davis-Kidd, I could rap with my crosstown colleague Gary, a Methodist supply pastor with some progressive ideas that neither of our institutions would be likely to endorse. When my Russian Orthodox friend Thomas tried to start a weekly discussion group in the café concerning “Christian art,” it never got far in numbers—but he and I debated and clashed and empathized there through many a month. Conversely, it was stimulating for me as a Christian to hold court with non-believers of many stripes, employees and fellow customers alike. Theology aside, however, will Jackson lose its Cubs Double A minor league affiliate in the same year as its top bookstore? The debate is on in our daily Sun and once graced our café tables, to be continued perhaps in the corridors of Books-a-Million.

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While the store’s overall heyday was 1995-1997, for me the period between being asked to start a monthly poetry reading (late ’98) and having the plug pulled (summer ’01) was a personal high. Friends who lived far away seemed puzzled that I would do such a public crossover-to-entertainment thing, despite my role as lecturer nine months out of the year. It certainly was not a temperamental fit, and I never quite shook what the singer-songwriters I most admire like Anne McCue and Lucinda Williams still label today their pervasive “stage fright.” Not that our event played to hundreds or thousands (a half dozen readers, double-figure spectators constituted a good Tuesday) or ever needed to go high-tech, but I was petrified for months about simple microphone adjustments, about bungling my reader introductions, about the mix of my own verse and favorite contemporary poems which started each reading and which I feared would set all the wrong tone. Then there was the expectation that I was a representative of the store during these occasions, not an employee mind you but a de facto PR figure. My defense of readers who did such things from the mike like curse or suggest their poetry could be purchased at a local college bookstore but not in the house did nothing to endear me to manager Reed (who never attended a single reading herself in three years, but was told about many). The language was within certain poems and not gratuitous, while the matter of poetry book sales seemed
beyond the ken of my charge as a host, not a booster. Reed wanted the environment bland and safe for the moneyed north Jackson crowd, “closed” as it were, which is understandable from a bottom-line perspective but antithetical to “open” artistic events. Baby and bathwater went down simultaneously; we got cancelled along with our more electrified Monday cousin Open Mic Music Night, which had dared to convene and get raucous weekly since 1997.

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At Elliot Bay Bookstore/Café of Seattle, it all comes together. I’ve had a chance to visit that wonderful place multiple times, always including at least one writer’s appearance downstairs among the used books—most notably Amy Tan and Donald Hall. At Davis-Kidd, author events have generally fallen within archetypal categories like the ghostwriter-assisted coach (Rick Pitino); the confessions of a local thespian (Dixie Carter); or the ever popular astronaut-as-bardic-illuminator (Buzz Aldrin). I mean, I’m glad an effort was made, and I hear that other Davis-Kidd and Joseph-Beth branches have drawn from more literary echelons for signings, but wouldn’t it have been easier just to mike the soap bar and trail an autograph line in its wake? Does Elliot Bay have a line-item budget for such appearances much above what Joseph-Beth could have doled out to all its franchises? I doubt it, and when Jackson’s store hosted the likes of talented Nashville-based singer/songwriter Kate Campbell or eminent North Carolina fictionalist Michael Parker, promotion was poor and virtually no one showed. Which brings us back to 1995: what had we done to deserve this new business, this haven of chairs and books and out-of-town newspapers and journals and cheap coffee and food? Could we have supported it in better (tangible and intangible) ways? Should a decade’s quasi-bliss suffice, or is there some retail analogy to be drawn, some lesson to be learned about the role of the printed book in our new century?

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Though probably unintentional, the banners provided by Joseph-Beth to herald the store’s closing slighted original owners Kidd and Davis: “Thanks Jackson for 8 Great Years.” Let’s say two “great,” eight good. So yes, you’ll find me at the strip mall housing Books-a-Million, but I’ll be going south some too, down Oxford way. Somehow I think neither site will see a Wiccan contingent battling the Society for Creative Anachronism for conference table space anytime soon—as actually happened a few years back at Davis-Kidd. Management’s solution: close the room and farm the fringe folk out to other meeting nooks. And the notion of Square Books owner Richard Howorth or a BAM suit banning the Joshuas or Jennifers of our town from the premises: unthinkable. As I watched my bookstore start posting earlier closing times and its café end daily service and start stacking chairs even before that, I cut back on—though by no means eliminated—my visits. It seemed no longer viable to try to convene my upper division classes there once or twice a semester, or meet our English honor organization there. Under new local management, Davis-Kidd was good enough to commemorate National Poetry Month in the springs of 2004 and 2005 by offering space for one-off readings, and my friend James from the Griot Collective managed to host a couple of literary events
under the radar there. But my bookstore became no longer the first public place where I felt comfortable leaving my daughter alone for a short period; I wouldn’t have replicated that this century, and this has nothing to do with any change of clientele. Perhaps it’s time, some two decades on, to find that unnamed space in Virginia which my tweedy stranger so enigmatically referenced.

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“At ____________ Bookstore/Café of Charlottesville...”
Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Bad Translation

by Walton Padelford

Exegesis means carefully drawing meaning out of a text. Eisegesis means reading a meaning or interpretation into a text. Both of these exercises have implications for translation. I am referring here particularly to Bible translation of one passage in which eisegesis has produced a confusing translation.

The passage in question is found in Genesis 22:17: “indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies” (NASB). Verse 18 follows with: “And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

These verses are taken from the passage concerning Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in which, happily, the Angel of the Lord stays Abraham’s hand, and a ram is substituted as a sacrifice for Isaac. After this event, the voice of the angel comes from heaven saying, “because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you,…”

It doesn’t take great spiritual insight here to see that we are being shown Old Testament figures of the Father giving up His only son, and also one life being substituted for another life, as the ram is substituted for Isaac as a sacrifice. There is more involved in this passage also. The phrase in verse 18, “…in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed…,” is a repetition of one of the original promises given to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 22:18 is an amplification and clarification of that promise indicating that the fulfillment would take place through the seed.

While it may be evident to much of evangelicalism that the seed here is Israel, the Apostle disagrees. “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ” (Galatians 3:16).

Since “your seed” refers to Christ, it is clear that Paul wishes us to understand that the blessing that would come upon all nations through Abraham occurs because of faith in that one seed, namely Christ: “…in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14). It is this truth that becomes muddled through translation in Genesis 22: 17-18. Let’s look at each mention of “your seed” in these two verses and see if each one applies to Christ.

“…I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore;…” I have understood this to refer to the heavenly seed of Abraham (all the saved) and the earthly descendants of Abraham (the Jews and the Ishmaelite and Keturahite Arabs). However, what if the best meaning is “Christ?” Would this do violence to understanding the passage? No. The seed is Christ, and He will multiply His
life in all His people so that the people of God become as numerous as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore.\footnote{“What person now needs an explanation to know how the seed of Christ is multiplied, who sees the preaching of the gospel extended from the ends of the earth to the ends of the earth.” Origen, “Homilies on Genesis 9:2,” Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 2002) 113.}

“...and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.” This passage, as it stands, seems to have a plural meaning in which seed should be understood as a plural collective noun\footnote{“Commencing with Gen 3:15, the word ‘seed’ is regularly used as a collective noun in the singular (never plural). This technical term is an important aspect of the promise doctrine, for Hebrew never uses the plural of this root to refer to ‘posterity’ or ‘offspring’...Thus the word designates the whole line of descendants as a unit, yet it is deliberately flexible enough to denote either one person who epitomizes the whole group (i.e. the man of promise and ultimately Christ), or the many persons in that whole line of natural and/or spiritual descendants.” R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago, Ill.: The Moody Bible Institute, 1980) 253.} to agree with “their enemies.” This would refer to the nation of Israel or the people of God (the Israel of God). However, the Apostle is adamant in saying that “seed” is singular, as indeed it is throughout these two verses. The Hebrew word here is זֵרָא (zerayka). The letter כף (قضاء) is a second person masculine singular possessive, “your,” which in Hebrew is added as a suffix. The root word זָרַע (zeray) is a feminine singular noun, as the Apostle states. Why then use the confusing “their enemies” in this passage if “seed” should have a singular sense? It is here that a little whole-Bible theology might be practiced. We might read “his enemies” as a better meaning, denoting Christ, or that singular seed which is the subject. However, we don’t have to impose our meaning on the text here, because the Hebrew word is זָרַע (изе), which indicates a possessive. In this case it is a third person masculine singular possessive used with plural nouns.\footnote{Waylon D. Bailey and J.O. Strange, Biblical Hebrew Grammar (New Orleans: Insight Press, 1985) 39.} The root word is זָרַע, enemy, here used in a plural form. The translation is “his enemies.”

Now the passage reads smoothly and in accordance with the Apostle’s guidance: “...and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.” It is Christ who possesses the gate of his enemies, namely death and Hades (Rev 1:18). Genesis 22:18 also makes sense in this context: “And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” It is through that one seed of Abraham, Christ, that the blessings of God flow out to the whole world.\footnote{“And to Abraham’s seed he promised —what? In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. His seed is Christ;...And what was promised to Abraham we find fulfilled among ourselves. In your seed, it says, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. He believed this before he had seen anything; he believed, and he never saw what was promised.” Augustine, 113A.10, Ancient Christian Commentary, 115.}

This small amount of work in Hebrew would seem to be the straightforward way of translating Genesis 22:17. Indeed, in Proverbs 16:7 we find the same phrase which is translated in this straightforward manner. “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” “His enemies” is the same construction as above, and is so translated.\footnote{Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, (The Bible Society in Israel, 1991) 684.} The translation fits nicely with the antecedent, “man.” Indeed, the singular noun, “man,” agrees with the singular pronoun,
“his.” Evidently, the translators of Genesis 22:17 believe that the word “seed” is a plural denoting a group like the people of Israel or all the people of God. This difficulty in translation is the reason the Apostle Paul has given us the correct reading of the passage. “Seed” is singular; therefore the pronoun before the word “enemies” should be singular also—that is, “his enemies.”

The truth of the seed promise was well known to interpreters of an earlier generation such as James P. Boyce. Why then the very common translation of Genesis 22:17 as “their enemies” as found in the New International Version, Today’s New International Version, the New King James Version, the New Revised Version, the Holman Bible, and the New American Standard Version?

One reason must be the continuing influence of dispensational theology in evangelical circles in which primacy of prophetic focus is on the nation of Israel. Therefore, it would seem reasonable that “seed” would refer to Israel. Another reason could be the continuing influence of Enlightenment views of Biblical interpretation which place great weight on rationalistic thought and downplay the importance or possibility of messianic predictive prophecy.

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6 The Patriarchal Seed, “A more definite and undoubted promise of the Messiah as ‘a seed’ was made to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The apostle to the Galatians distinctly declares that ‘the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed.’ Gal. 3:8. He also says emphatically (Gal. 3:16) that this seed ‘is Christ.’ The predictions of this kind to Abraham are recorded in Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:17, 18. Each of these three passages refers in so many words to ‘the Seed,’ in connection with the spiritual blessing of the nations. Others, as indeed do the first two of these, contain also promises of the bestowal of the land of Canaan upon the natural descendants of Abraham. See Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:5-18; 17:8; 24:7. By this promise as to the nations the prediction in Eden, which had heretofore been general of the race, confined the birth of the Messiah to a descendant of Abraham. Both promises, that of the earthly Canaan and that of the spiritual seed, were repeated to Isaac....These predictions constitute properly the patriarchal promise of ‘the Seed,’ which is more commonly spoken of as the promise to Abraham, because of his greater prominence, as well as because first announced to him.” James P. Boyce, Abstract of Systematic Theology (Hanford, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, reprint of edition of 1887) 261.

7 This is not an exhaustive survey of different versions of the English Bible. It should also be noted that the New American Standard Version has a marginal note indicating that the literal translation of the passage in question is “his enemies.”
References


JUFF Contributors

antonio a. chiareli is completing his first decade in union’s department of sociology, where he holds the rank of associate professor; his article here springs out of union’s enuktion paideta series.

David P. Gushee, avid tennis player and book discussion club-host, holds the titles of Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy and University Fellow within union’s School of Christian Studies, on whose faculty he has served since 1996.

Kyle Hathcox is beginning his first year as associate dean of arts and sciences; he has twenty-seven years of service in two stints to union, where he is university professor of physics.

Walton Padelford is a multiple JUFF contributor in both poetry and prose, business practice and theology; he is university professor of economics, with twenty-six years of service to union.

Troy D. Riggs, last year’s Faculty Forum vice-president, is Professor of Mathematics and Department Chair, with close to a decade’s service to the University in two stints.

A seventeen-year veteran of union on its former BMH campus and its present Jackson one, Bobby C. Rogers first published “meat and three” in the Greensboro Review; he is professor of English and de facto head of union’s Creative Writing Program.

Roger Stanley begins his second decade as JUFF editor and occasional contributor; he is assistant professor of English and came to union in 1990.
JUFF Contributors

Sean Evans assumes the mantle of Faculty Forum president for 2004-2005 after having served as vice-president last academic year; he is Assistant Professor of Political Science.

Gene Fant has served the Department of English as chair since coming to Union from Mississippi College in 2002.

Judy LeForge, a part-time teacher in the History Department since 1999, begins a full-time stint this academic year as Assistant Professor of History.

Melissa Moore has been an active contributor to JUFF since the late nineties; Reference Librarian and Team Leader for Public Services, she has taught both graduate and undergraduate classes at Union.

Tom Rosebrough serves the College of Education and Human Studies as its Dean and is entering his ninth year of service to Union as a teacher and administrator.

Michael R. Salazar is Assistant Professor of Chemistry and now begins his fourth year at Union.

Roger Stanley has been JUFF editor since 1996, having contributed both poetry and prose to its pages in the early and mid-90's; he is Assistant Professor of English.
CLIO Encounters Eschatology: 
Recent Historiographical Interest in Christian Belief About the Future

by James A. Patterson

Introduction

In 1970, Hal Lindsey publicly inaugurated what proved to be a remarkable career as an evangelical prophecy guru with the initial release of *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This volume, which was not far removed from the literary genre of tabloid journalism, became a national best seller and precipitated a deluge of books, newsletters, films, and television shows devoted to frequently sensationalized depictions of prophetic themes.¹ For his part, Lindsey essentially popularized the dispensational tradition of John Nelson Darby, C. I. Scofield, and Lewis Sperry Chafer; of course, he offered several new interpretive twists to fit the unfolding events of the late twentieth century into the classic system. Moreover, as Chris Hall has recently noted, Lindsey “unexpectedly uncovered a deep vein of eschatological and apocalyptic longing in the fundamentalist/evangelical subculture and in American culture at large.”²

In the same year that *The Late Great Planet Earth* gazed expectantly toward the future for the impending fulfillment of biblical prophecies, the late church historian Ernest R. Sandeen published *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, a landmark monograph that looked to the past for perspective on, among other things, conservative Christian beliefs about the future.³ Lindsey and Sandeen probably were unaware of each other in 1970; in addition, they wrote for different reasons and disparate audiences. Nevertheless, Sandeen’s explorations in British and American millenarian sources yielded historical insights that subsequently would help to explain the Lindsey phenomenon. If American evangelicals and fundamentalists had devoured *The Roots of Fundamentalism* with as much gusto as they imbibed *The Late Great Planet Earth*, their grasp of Lindsey’s context and significance would have been much sharper. Furthermore, they might have been far less euphoric about the former tugboat captain’s prophetic speculations.

Sandeen, then a professor at Macalester College in Minnesota, was not the first scholar to address historical manifestations of prophecy belief.⁴ What set his endeavor apart from others was his focus on American fundamentalism as a theological tradition that could not be explained simply in cultural, psychological, or social terms. As an intellectual historian, Sandeen contended that premillennialism represented one of two major components at the very heart of the fundamentalist movement.⁵ He carefully traced the influence of nineteenth-century British millenarians like Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby, giving special attention to the latter’s ecclesiology and theory of a secret rapture.⁶ Through a number of visits to the United States, the Plymouth Brethren leader convinced many American Protestants to accept his dispensational theology, even if few were inclined to join his movement. As Sandeen demonstrated, dispensationalism was then Americanized through the efforts of men like C. I. Scofield, known especially for his *Reference Bible.*⁷

In his thorough investigation of the origins of fundamentalist eschatological beliefs, Sandeen showed that he took them seriously. While his overall interpretation of fundamentalism has been justifiably challenged, Sandeen contributed significantly to the historiography of Christian beliefs about the future.⁸ His book provided a useful historical backdrop for what was happening among more apocalyptically-oriented evangelicals after 1970; at the same time, it
suggestively paved the way for further research into the historical development of Christian eschatology.

Timothy P. Weber, now the academic dean at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary near Chicago, pursued some of Sandeen’s themes in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, eventually published as Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming. Weber shared Sandeen’s interest in the theological world view of premillennialism, including its methods of biblical interpretation. But he also sought to incorporate the historical models of Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. and Martin E. Marty, his dissertation advisor. Hence, Weber aimed his analytical skills not only at doctrine, but also at the forms of behavior that were shaped and influenced by doctrine. He approached his study of premillennialism by asking whether a belief in the imminent return of Christ made any difference in how people actually lived, behaved, or conducted their lives.

After explaining the eschatology of premillennialism, Weber then examined the impact of belief in the imminent Second Coming on attitudes toward social reform, foreign missions, war, Zionism, and other issues with potential links to biblical prophecy. Like Sandeen, Weber presented premillennialism primarily as a religious movement: “Although it has had some social and political consequences, premillennialism’s paramount appeal is to personal and religious sentiments.” On the other hand, Weber’s behavioral perspective allowed him to show more interest than Sandeen in the social and political implications of premillennial beliefs. In the final analysis, Weber went beyond Sandeen’s basically theological treatment, resulting in a more realistic picture of premillennialism.

Led by historians like Sandeen and Weber, there was an explosion of scholarly writing about prophecy beliefs and apocalypticism in the 1970s and 1980s. These works ranged in scope well beyond American fundamentalism and evangelicalism to include several different historical eras and types of eschatological doctrines. Clearly, Christian eschatology had gained acceptance as a legitimate topic for historical research and writing. In fact, the 1990s would bring a further expansion of scholarly efforts to understand and explain the historical development of Christian beliefs about the end times, most notably in the works of Paul Boyer, Bernard McGinn, and Robert Fuller.

**Paul Boyer: Mining the Sources**

In 1992, Paul Boyer, the Merle Curti Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, published *When Time Shall Be No More*, the most exhaustive study of modern American premillennialism yet written. Raised in the Brethren in Christ denomination, Boyer first became aware of prophecy issues during childhood through the sermons of his grandfather. Through previous works on the Salem witchcraft episode, urban history, and the nuclear age, Boyer achieved wide acclaim in the guild of professional historians.

In *When Time Shall Be No More*, Boyer’s central concern is to account for the pervasiveness, persistence, and adaptability of prophecy belief in modern American culture. He steadfastly avoids condescending or reductionistic analyses, preferring to treat premillennial eschatology with respect as primarily a religious belief system. At the same time, Boyer alertly recognizes that doctrines concerning the end times contribute to a world view that offers psychological and ontological benefits: "Prophecy belief is a way of ordering experience. It gives a grand, overarching shape to history, and thus ultimate meaning to the lives of individuals caught up in history’s stream. Here, I believe, is a key to its enduring appeal."
In a recent article that serves to update his book, Boyer elaborates further on this more functional side of prophecy belief:

So long as premillennial dispensationalism continues to meet the emotional and psychological needs of a great many Americans, and so long as the popularizers of Bible prophecy continue to weave our deepest collective anxieties into their end-time scenarios, this ancient belief system, with its infinite flexibility and its imaginative, drama-filled vision of history, will remain a significant shaping force in our politics and culture. Boyer’s sensitivity to these dimensions of eschatological belief, while not fully developed in *When Time Shall Be No More*, nonetheless helps to qualify the criticisms of reviewers who judge him as long on narrative and short on analysis and interpretation.

Like Sandeen, Boyer is most comfortable employing the tools of intellectual history; in particular, he depends primarily on the reading of texts for his information about the “hidden world” of prophecy belief. Indeed, the mere quantity of prophetic materials that Boyer read staggers the imagination. During a four-year period, he digested over three hundred prophecy books, as well as papers from prophecy conferences, prophecy newsletters, and religious periodicals devoted to prophecy themes. To supplement his scouring of written sources, Boyer also interviewed five prophecy writers, listened to prophecy sermons by visiting speakers at two churches in Madison, Wisconsin, and attended a prophecy seminar held under the auspices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Over one hundred pages of endnotes attest to the thoroughness of Boyer’s research.

In good historical fashion, Boyer sets the stage for the core of his book by establishing the background and context of premillennial eschatology. His first chapter concisely scans the early development of prophetic and apocalyptic thought in ancient Israel and the early church. He limits his discussion of biblical materials to Ezekiel, Daniel, Mark 13, and Revelation; here his comments indicate at least a modest acceptance of higher critical conclusions. For example, Boyer states that “the weight of scholarly opinion views the Book of Daniel as a pseudopigraphic apocalypse written around 167 B.C. and predated to enhance its credibility.” Even so, he recognizes the enormous influence of the Bible’s apocalyptic texts on later believers who viewed them as “vital source of doctrine, reassurance, and foreknowledge.”

His overview in chapter two of the “rhythms” of eschatological beliefs throughout church history covers key individuals and movements like Irenaeus, Augustine, Joachim of Flora, the Reformers, the Puritans, and Jonathan Edwards. The compressed character of this section is understandable in light of Boyer’s overall purpose; certainly it invited other scholars like McGinn to shape more substantive treatments of apocalyptic thinking in periods and contexts to which *When Time Shall Be No More* gives short shrift. Still, Boyer manages to glean some suggestive themes from his historical survey, including (1) the durability and adaptability of prophetic beliefs; (2) the danger of these doctrines becoming politicized; and (3) the reality that in the contemporary world, intellectual and theological leaders are no longer the chief expounders of the prophetic scriptures.

Boyer’s third introductory chapter, which covers some of the same ground as Sandeen’s *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, charts the history of premillennialism through 1945. The Wisconsin professor is especially adept at measuring the impact of the World War II era on premillennialist scenarios. In fact, the momentous wartime events, Boyer concludes, provided prophecy writers with “compelling empirical validation of their unfashionable but remarkably tenacious vision of human destiny.” Many of the themes that unfold more fully in later chapters are introduced in this section.
The heart of Boyer’s tome can be found in the five chapters that make up part II. Here he meticulously draws on his vast reading of prophecy literature to recount the story of dispensational premillennialism over the last half-century. Boyer focuses specifically on how the prophecy movement sought to interpret biblical texts in response to the advent of the atomic bomb, the regathering of Israel as a nation, the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, and the prominent role of the United States in world affairs. Chapter eight tactfully catalogs the host of Antichrist candidates that prophecy speculators have identified since 1945--Anwar el-Sadat, King Juan Carlos, Henry Kissinger, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Ronald Reagan, among others, received consideration for beastly status. In these chapters, Boyer copiously cites prophecy writers and preachers like Donald Grey Barnhouse, M. R. DeHaan, Dave Hunt, Salem Kirban, Tim LaHaye, Mary Stewart Relfe, Chuck Smith, Charles Taylor, Jack Van Impe, John Walvoord, and, of course, Hal Lindsey. The reader has to be struck not only by the apocalyptic nature of the times, but also by the boldness with which the prophecy experts put forth their applications of biblical texts to current events.

The final two chapters reveal Boyer at his interpretive best. For example, he offers the image of the theater as the most helpful metaphor for understanding the premillennial view of history as predestined. Premillennialism’s keen sense of harmony, symmetry, and meaning in history, in fact, partly explains its appeal: “With secular historians no longer speaking the language of progress or portraying the majestic unfolding of a divine plan in history, prophecy popularizers took up the slack and found a vast audience in the process.” Boyer is also effective in pointing out how the premillennial concept of history is linked to a pronounced utopianism with its emphasis on the coming Millennium as an “alternative future.”

Boyer’s most weighty achievement in this long volume is his consistent attention to the resiliency of prophecy belief. Even when the prophecy teachers and writers have been wrong on the significance of events or in their identifications of the Antichrist, they have not hesitated to reset their timetables or rework their interpretations of prophetic passages. Near the end of his book, Boyer comes close to commending the flexibility of contemporary premillennialists: “As the configuration of world power alignments and public concerns shifts at the end of the century, prophecy popularizers, like their predecessors over the centuries, are proving extremely resourceful at restructuring their scenario.” While this assessment might suggest that biblical prophecy becomes a ball of wax in the hands of some of its expounders, it also helps to explain why a distinguished historian like Paul Boyer regards prophecy belief as an enduring reality in modern American culture.

**Bernard McGinn: Antichrist over Two Millennia**

Bernard McGinn’s *Antichrist* represents only one of several works that this respected medieval historian has penned on the historical development of Christian eschatological beliefs, an area he has researched for over twenty years. Among other important volumes on prophetic doctrines, the Naomi Shenstone Donnelley Professor of Historical Theology and the History of Christianity at the University of Chicago Divinity School has authored *Visions of the End* and served as one of the editors for *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*. Like Boyer, McGinn writes primarily as an intellectual historian, although his major area of expertise is Europe, not America.

The fact that McGinn is a Roman Catholic in the Augustinian tradition helps to explain his overall approach in *Antichrist*. From the outset, he disclaims a literal Antichrist, averring
instead that the paramount manifestation of evil has already come: “the most important message of the Antichrist legend in Western history is what it has to tell us about our past, and perhaps even about our present attitudes toward evil.” He then elaborates on this theme with the proposal that “the Antichrist legend can be seen as a projection, or perhaps better as a mirror, for conceptions and fears about ultimate human evil.” Thus an allegorical or symbolic understanding of the Antichrist functions as McGinn’s vehicle for taking Christian eschatology seriously.

McGinn’s aversion to a literal Antichrist is even more evident when he discusses the internal-external and dread-deception polarities that have characterized the various images of the Antichrist in Christian history. He unequivocally identifies with those Christian thinkers, such as Augustine of Hippo, who have located the central meaning of Antichrist in “the spirit that resists Christ present in the hearts of believers” or in the deceit of those “who confess Christ with their mouths but deny him by their deeds.” For McGinn, this spiritualized, even domesticated Antichrist is far more plausible than an external enemy who inspires dread like a persecutor or who practices outright deception from a seat of religious power.

These theological musings about the nature of the Antichrist form the backdrop for McGinn’s historical survey. He begins his account by delving into the apocalyptic traditions of Second Temple Judaism, which he regards as a complex interaction of myth, legend, and history. The angelic and human adversaries of God and His messiah that emerge in these writings, McGinn argues, “form a necessary part of the background to the Antichrist legend.” Among the important Jewish antecedents he discusses is the “Final Tyrant” found in the Book of Daniel, a writing that McGinn dates to the Maccabean period. By limiting the application of the “little horn” in Daniel 7-12 to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, McGinn adopts a posture toward the Old Testament prophetical book that is very similar to Boyer’s. In other words, the author of Daniel creatively utilized apocalyptic eschatology to interpret his own troubled times. Even as he ignores any predictive value in Daniel’s prophecies, McGinn frets over the apocalyptic writer’s externalization of good and evil “in terms of present historical conflicts.” Consequently, McGinn infers that the apocalypticism of Second Temple Judaism influenced Christian eschatology in deleterious ways.

McGinn’s comprehensive overview of Christian Antichrist images occupies eight chapters, each one devoted to a distinct historical period. In covering early Christianity, the Chicago historian combines a higher critical approach to the New Testament with a marked preference for patristic authorities like Origen, Jerome, Tyconius, and Augustine. All of these Fathers articulated non-millennial eschatologies, usually accompanied by inner moral interpretations of Antichrist. Four chapters on the Middle Ages, McGinn’s specialty, scrutinize topics like the monk Adso’s “Last Emperor” motif, Hildegard of Bingen’s innovative symbolism, Joachim of Flora’s apocalyptic speculations, and dissident Franciscans’ espousal of a papal Antichrist. In these sections, McGinn incorporates useful references to poetry, drama, and art, thus illustrating how apocalypticism played out in popular culture.

For the Reformation and modern periods, McGinn employs the rubrics “Antichrist Divided” and “Antichrist in Decline.” First, he adeptly shows how polarization became inevitable as a result of Martin Luther’s “uncompromising denunciation of the papacy as true and final Antichrist present in the world.” This stridency set the tone for later debate; indeed, radical, Anabaptist, Puritan, and Catholic voices all responded in one way or another to the Lutheran Reformer’s identification of the papacy as the Final Enemy. Second, McGinn depicts
the marginalization of literal Antichrist beliefs after 1660, a development he appears to welcome. He offers this critical prognosis of modern trends:

Antichrist as a form of vague rhetoric to be used against any opponent helped weaken the content of a term that was already being undercut by the neglect of its more personal applications. . . . Antichrist’s reality became increasingly problematic as Enlightenment ideas spread, but Christianity itself had prepared the way for this collapse. Because of this, most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century views of Antichrist seem empty repetitions of once-vibrant symbols. 38

In McGinn’s analysis, a divided Western Christendom lacked the resources to sustain a viable Antichrist tradition.

In his final chapter, “Antichrist Our Contemporary,” McGinn assesses various twentieth-century versions. After a brief discussion of Roman Catholic perspectives, he evaluates dispensational premillennialism’s chronic search for the Antichrist, covering much of the same ground as Sandeen, Weber, and Boyer—although failing to cite the latter. McGinn seems somewhat hopeful about the Antichrists of literature, noting writers of modern fiction like Frank Kermode, Czeslaw Milosz, Robert Hugh Benson, and Charles Williams, all of whom wrestle with the motivation behind ultimate human evil. McGinn also points to Carl Jung’s notion of Antichrist as “an inexorable psychological law,” not because he views it as plausible but rather as another possible way of emphasizing the “inner meaning of Antichrist.” 39

McGinn’s quest for the contemporary relevance of Antichrist stems largely from his concern that the traditional “legend” serves mainly to foster “hatred and oppression of groups, such as Jews and Muslims, seen as collective manifestations of Antichrist’s power.” 40 His salvage operation on Antichrist belief finally arrives where it began, stressing the symbolic nature of the Antichrist within: “At the end of this millennium we can still reflect on deception both within and without each of us and in our world at large as the most insidious malice—for which is most contrary to what Christians believe was and still is the meaning of Christ.” 41 As some of McGinn’s critics have suggested, it remains to be seen whether this Antichrist image is adequate to account for either the biblical texts or contemporary manifestations of evil in our world. 42 Nevertheless, McGinn has written the best one-volume historical account of the Antichrist tradition, one that is still influencing our journalistic culture today. 43

Robert Fuller: An American Obsession?

Following Paul Boyer’s magisterial study of prophecy belief in America and Bernard McGinn’s thorough examination of the Antichrist tradition in Christian history, Robert Fuller’s Naming the Antichrist is something of a disappointment. First, Fuller is much briefer than McGinn on the overall history of Antichrist belief and not nearly as comprehensive as Boyer when dealing with the American scene. Second, Fuller writes with an obvious agenda. He is appalled by the persistence of literal interpretations of biblical prophecy in fundamentalism. Rather than appraise these beliefs at face value, Fuller attempts, with limited success, to explain them primarily with psychological and social categories. In fact, he claims that one of the essential tasks of intellectual history is to be alert to “the sociology of knowledge”:

The whole point of humanistic inquiry, particularly historical inquiry, is to explicate meanings that are not overly present in a text, a historical event, or a person’s self-awareness. A judicious use of social, economic, and psychological perspectives that
make such an explication possible is thus an indispensable part of the interpretive process. 44

While this is a laudable goal, Fuller seems more bent on discrediting the fundamentalist world view than on offering a plausible and convincing account of it.

Fuller, Professor of Religious Studies at Bradley University, contends in his introduction that Christians through history have used the Antichrist symbol to shape their self-understanding and to demonize their enemies. For Americans, in particular, naming the Antichrist aids in the establishment of “the symbolic boundaries that separate all that is holy and good from the powers of chaos that continually threaten to engulf them.”45 Apocalyptic thought then, according to Fuller, functions as a protective device for those plagued by doubts and uncertainties about life.

The initial chapter of Naming the Antichrist traces the origins of Antichrist doctrine from the New Testament era through the colonial period in America, a span of almost eighteen hundred years. Fuller’s psychosocial approach to eschatology is clearly evident when he interprets the beast of the sea, or Antichrist, in John’s Apocalypse as “a mythic device” that has allowed readers “to label and interpret their fears and frustrations.”46 The remainder of Fuller’s historical survey through the Reformation correlates apocalypticism not so much with theological speculation as with social, economic, and political disruption.47

Fuller’s treatment of the Puritans in chapter two leaves much to be desired. In terms of historical matters, he wrongly implies that Puritans were Separatists, and fails to distinguish carefully between Puritans and Pilgrims.48 On the interpretive side, he organizes his analysis around the idea that apocalyptic thought in New England provided a mechanism for the Puritans to demonize their enemies, whether they be native Americans, dissenters, or witches. Fuller, however, does not supply sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the Puritans identified all their “enemies” with Antichrist, or that they viewed all their social and political conflicts in apocalyptic proportions. He also delivers some low blows; for example, he suggests that “Cotton Mather’s lifelong obsession with the devil was an inherited trait.”49 Except for his generally balanced presentation of Jonathan Edwards’s eschatology, Fuller’s overview of Puritanism is condescending and much too driven by social and psychological explanations.

Following a chapter on developments in American apocalyptic thought during the nineteenth century, Fuller devotes most of the remaining parts of his book to fundamentalist eschatology. Overall, his explication of fundamentalism in many ways parallels his treatment of Puritanism. He sees both movements as representative of the darker side of apocalyptic belief; both used Antichrist doctrine to project their fears and anxieties upon demonic enemies, thus serving as typical exemplars of the American “obsession.” Hence, Fuller writes about both with a decidedly polemical edge.

Fuller’s portrait of fundamentalism draws on the scholarship of Boyer, Marsden, Sandeen, and Weber, among others. The major difference is that they are more nuanced and less tendentious than Fuller. For example, far more than any previous author, Fuller wants to identify premillennialism as the sine qua non of fundamentalism, ignoring the fact that not all fundamentalists have been premillennialists. He also jumps from a discussion of early fundamentalism in chapter four to “Crusades of Hate” in chapter five, assuming significant historical continuity between those who stood for the fundamentals of the faith in the 1920s and those more extreme fundamentalists who later launched virulent anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, and anti-New Deal campaigns. Indeed, it is not entirely obvious who falls under this judgment of Fuller: “[t]he story of twentieth-century Antichrist is thus in large part the story of naming,
dramatizing, and mythologizing the enemies of ultraconservative Protestantism.” At times, Fuller appears to classify anyone who believes in biblical inerrancy, premillennialism, evangelism, and social and moral separatism with the “apostles of discord” and “paranoid” types described in chapter five. Fuller’s assessment of fundamentalism as basically ill, empty, and even evil has provoked one critic to remark that Naming the Antichrist “is an invitation not to understand but to deride and dismiss.”

Although Fuller drops many interpretive hints throughout his book, he waits until the epilogue to reveal his full agenda. After reviewing several earlier theories concerning apocalypticism, he opts for a perspective that combines philosophical pragmatism and functionalism:

A functionalist interpretation of specific religious beliefs, such as belief in the Antichrist, focuses on the functions of these beliefs in guiding individual and group interaction with the surrounding world. Philosophical pragmatism comes into play as we begin seeking some means of comparing or evaluating competing ideas or beliefs. Pragmatism shifts our attention away from philosophy’s traditional interest in judging the truth of an idea, in favor of the task of assessing an idea’s functional value. What especially irks Fuller about apocalyptic fundamentalism is that its eschatological beliefs promote nativism, territorialism, and “tribalistic boundary posturing,” which he apparently judges to be “absolutely” wrong, even though his philosophical allegiance is to a system that denies absolutes.

In the final analysis, Fuller regards naming the Antichrist as a functionally counterproductive activity. It not only prevents people from becoming fully participating contributors in a pluralistic society, but it also represents an attempt to project one’s own faults and shortcomings onto an enemy, which is psychologically dysfunctional. Yet Fuller seems not entirely satisfied with his functionalist perspective when he borrows social gospel rhetoric for his last sentence: “[t]his relentless obsession with the Antichrist appears to have done more to forestall than to signal the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.” Perhaps even a pragmatic functionalist like Robert Fuller is entitled to entertain an eschatological hope.

Conclusion

In his recent book Apocalypses, retired UCLA professor Eugen Weber sets forth a compelling rationale for the historical investigation of prophecy belief:

If scores of eschatologists have proved mistaken, the answer is not that one of them will prove right one day, but that too many of them have proved too influential—destructive, constructive, inspiring, consoling—and that it is foolish for historians to dismiss or, worse, to ignore them. The point of Weber’s statement reverberates through the scholarly contributions considered in this essay. Because several researchers chose not to neglect an important and legitimate sphere of historical inquiry, we have a fuller and much richer portrait of the development of eschatological doctrines in Christian history. Their work not only demonstrates the significant impact that beliefs about the future have exerted at various times in the past; it also illuminates the cultural, historical, and religious contexts that have helped to shape those beliefs.

The studies of Boyer, McGinn, Fuller, and others hold special relevance for Christian readers. As Weber observes, several “eschatologists” have made serious miscalculations about prophetic timetables or patently erroneous conjectures regarding the fulfillment of biblical
prophecies. The existence of contrived, sensationalized, or highly speculative apocalyptic scenarios in the past should alert evangelical Christians against such follies in the present. If the history of prophecy belief teaches anything, it calls its practitioners to exercise caution and humility when attempting to chart the future plans and actions of God.

Finally, while the historical labors reviewed here yield many benefits, they also suggest some interpretive limitations. McGinn, Fuller, and—to a lesser degree—Boyer at times adopt an adversarial posture toward their subjects. As a result, some of their analyses tend toward reductionism, especially when they employ political, psychological, and social explanations for the vitality and persistence of prophecy belief. While such perspectives certainly have validity, they also threaten to obscure the importance of religious aspirations and theological convictions in the lives of those energized by eschatology. To enlarge on Weber's warning, patronizing the eschatologists can be as problematic as dismissing or ignoring them.

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4For example, see the earlier path-breaking work by Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957). Ironically, the third edition of Cohn's book was published in 1970 by Oxford University Press.

5Sandeen saw the Princeton Theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the other vital component. See *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, esp. chap. 5.

6Ibid., esp. chap. 3.

7Ibid., 222-24.


12Ibid., 229.


18 Boyer, “Bible Prophecy Belief in Contemporary American Culture,” Anglican and Episcopal History 67 (December 1998): 466. It is not clear whether “this ancient belief system” is a reference to biblical prophecy in general or to premillennial dispensationalism in particular.


20 On his sources, see Boyer, When Time Shall Be No More, xiii-xiv. For the endnotes, see ibid., 341-444.

21 Ibid., 31.

22 Ibid., 45.

23 Ibid., 77-79.

24 Ibid., 112.

25 Ibid., 317-18.

26 Ibid., 318-24.

27 Ibid., 338-39.


30 McGinn, Antichrist, xii.

31 Ibid., 2.

32 Ibid., 4-5.

33 Ibid., 9.
34 Ibid., 32.

35 Ibid., esp. chaps. 2 and 3.

36 Ibid., chaps. 4-7.

37 Ibid., 208.

38 Ibid., 249.

39 Ibid., 274-75.

40 Ibid., 273.

41 Ibid., 280.


43 For example, look for the impact of McGinn on Kenneth L. Woodward, “The Way the World Ends,” Newsweek, 1 November 1999, 67-74. At the end of his article, Woodward asks, “And who’s to say that John’s mythic battle between Christ and Antichrist is not a valid insight into what the history of humankind is ultimately all about?”


46 Ibid., 30.

47 For example, see ibid., 34-37.

48 Ibid., 42-44.

49 Ibid., 62.

50 Ibid., 136.


52 Fuller, Naming the Antichrist, 194-95.

53 Ibid., 195-96.
54 Ibid., 200.

Tennessee: Raveling the Edges of Who I am

by Jenny Brooks White

When I was there, I was a cotton farmer's daughter with wild hair and bare feet and I let no one tie my days to order. I climbed the highest trees, fingered scars in the rough bark, and felt my hands turned raw and sweaty. When I looked over the cotton fields, I saw deer flash their white tails and run when they caught my scent. I've run, too, through the roughest fields with grass whipping my bare legs and the ground rising up to meet my fast steps. I was a sister and fought my brothers with the wrath of a young woman. I pounded my fists into their adolescent chests and I even bloodied their noses. And I bloodied my knees and elbows, fell from swings and bicycles, cut my feet on the gravel drive. I was a granddaughter and I walked my grandfather's garden rows, found bits of coal and glass, reached through the scratchy squash and picked fruit swollen with time. And now time reaches up for me and takes me back to Tennessee, a place far away, a place once visited, once lived, and it shakes out its memory in my mind the way my grandfather shook fruit trees—bringing the ripest, most delicate to the ground. I look back at that cotton farmer's daughter and see her ragged pants and tangled hair and I say to myself: this is who I am.
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honorific, which became widely popular in the Middle Ages. Honorius Augustodunensis writes that Mary Magdalene merited her singular Christophany ("angelum videre meruit Dominusque resurgens primo omnium ei publice apparuit"), and that Christ sent her as an apostle to his Apostles ("eamque apostolam apostolis suis misit"); Honorius sees Mary as a second Eve bearing the message of eternal life instead of subjecting humankind to mortality ("et sicut prima femina mortem viro traderet, ita nunc femina perhennem vitam viris nunciaret"; PL 172.981). In Joseph Szövérfy's survey of medieval Magdalene hymns, Apostola is one of four principal titles that she is repeatedly given (92). Vernacular authors such as Osbern Bokenham (139) and Nicholas Love (206) also observe this distinction in their praise of the Magdalene, and Joseph Harris has argued that the ballad "Maiden in the Mor Lay" draws upon similar Magdalene traditions (79). Possibly the most dramatic illustration of her apostolic role can be found in an English twelfth-century psalter probably prepared for Christina of Markyate. Here the Magdalene, with hand raised, extends her finger in a gesture of address, recounting the news of the Resurrection to eleven wide-eyed Apostles who hang on her every word. This iconography is not common, but it can be found in multiple manuscript illustrations, carvings, and stained glass beginning in the eleventh century (Haskins 220, 452).

Conscience's suggestion that the Magdalene noised her news indiscriminately abroad undermines her quasi-evangelical authority. Even his summarizing statement, "Thus cam it out þat crist overcoom, recouerede and lyuede," implies a random relaying of information. The language of the Vulgate, confirmed by patristic, hagiographic, dramatic, and lyric traditions, stresses Mary Magdalene's role as an appointed envoy to the Apostles, not the indiscriminate speaker we find in Conscience's account.

III

Conscience's portrayal of a garrulous Magdalene offers an ideal opportunity to employ the proverb "What a woman knows may not well remain secret." The garrulity of women was a proverbial commonplace, and its appearance in one of the most encyclopedic poems of the English Middle Ages may therefore be unsurprising. Examination of the contexts in which this proverb occurs elsewhere, however, reveals more specific, and more specifically ideological, agendas which condition its use and which motivate Conscience's apparently gratuitous denigration of the Magdalene.

The "counseille" proverb's first English attestation comes from the widely popular Proverbs of Alfred, in which we are told that King Alfred was "þe wysuste mon þat wes englelon on" (lines 23-24). For the author or compiler of the Proverbs, part of the king's wisdom involved a facility with misogynistic traditions. At "Sifford," before a gathering of bishops and earls, knights and clerks, Alfred counsels his men: "Be never so insane nor so drunk with wine that you ever tell your wife all your plans, because she will reveal all in front of all your enemies . . . for woman is word-crazy and has a tongue too swift, and even though she

Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident, des origines à la fin du moyen âge.

6 I translate from the J text (Jesus College Oxford MS. 29). The "counseille" proverb is item W534 in the Whitings' proverb dictionary; compare items F426 and W485, and Tilley's item W649.
might want to, she cannot withhold anything.” In the *Proverbs of Alfred* we first witness what will become a recurrent narrative context for this proverb: the secrets which a “word-wod” woman divulges will be hazardous to men.

No text more strongly emphasizes the danger of confiding in wives than Jean de Meun’s portion of the *Roman de la Rose*, in which the female personification Nature “confesses” to a male Genius for creating that most reprehensible of all creatures, Man. What ensues is a broad parody of Catholic confession in which a priestly Genius uses his authority not only to counsel Nature, but also to embark on a diatribe against the seductive menace and verbal infidelity of women, employing the same sententious advice found a century earlier in the *Proverbs of Alfred*:

No man born of woman, unless he is drunk or demented, should reveal anything to a woman that should be kept hidden, if he doesn’t want to hear it from someone else . . . for if, just one single time he ever dares grouse at her or scold her or get angry, he puts his life in danger—if he deserved death for his deed—that she will have him hanged by the neck, if the judges catch him, or secretly murdered by friends. (276)

As in the *Proverbs of Alfred*, we see the details of the insanity or drunkenness that must afflict a foolish man who speaks his mind to his wife, as well as the disastrous consequence which would befall him. A few lines later, Genius dramatizes the proverb by portraying a sexually seductive wife who weasels her husband’s secret out of him, saying:

I see all these other women who are sufficiently mistresses of their houses so that their husbands confide in them enough to tell them all their secrets. They all take counsel with their wives when they lie awake together in their beds, and they confess themselves privately so that there is nothing left to them to tell. Truth to tell, they even do so more often than they do to the priest. I know it well from them themselves, for many times I have heard them; they have revealed to me everything, whatever they have heard and seen and even all that they think. In this way they purge and empty themselves. However, I am not the same sort. (278)

Jean de Meun’s mention of priests in this passage transforms these loose-lipped wives into metaphorical confessors—a metaphor further explored below.

Chaucer would make liberal use of the “counseille” proverb, employing some form of it in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* (the digression on Midas and his ass’s ears, line 980), *The Monk’s Tale* (2015-30; 2090-94), and *The Tale of Melibee* (1060). Chaucer’s Monk, for example, does not ascribe Samson’s downfall to fortune, but to his error of confiding in women:

Of Sampson now wol I namoure sayn.  
Beth war by this ensample oold and playn  
That no men telle hir conseil til hir wyves  
Of swich thyng as they wolde han secrey fayn,  
If that it touche hir lymes or hir lyves.  

(*MkT* 2090-94)
The Wife of Bath is especially fond of quoting proverbs, even to the disparagement of her own gender. In her tale, when she discusses the suggestion that a woman most desires her husband’s confidence, she embarks on a long digression employing, and radically altering, the familiar myth of King Midas and his ass’s ears—a digression in which Midas’s wife, not his barber, betrays his embarrassing secret. She further affirms the truth of the proverb in a confessional passage concerning the secrets of Jankin:

My fift houesbonde--God his soule bless[e]!-
Which that I took for love, and no richesse,
He som tym[e] was a clerk of Oxenforde,
And hadde left scole, and went at hom to bord
With my gossib, dwellynge inoure toun;
She knew myn herte, and eek myn privete,
Bet than our parisshe preest, so moot I thee!
To hire biwreyed I my conseil al.
For hadde my housbonde pissed on a wal,
Or doon a thyng that sholde han cost his lyf,
To hire, and to another worthy wyf,
And to my nece, which that I loved well,
I wolde han toold his conseil every deel.
And so I did ful often, God it woot,
That made his face often red and hoot
For verray shame, and blamed hymself for he
Had toold to me so greet a pryvete.

(Prol. WBT 531-42)

Thus Jankin joins husbands from the Proverbs of Alfred, the Roman de la Rose, and the Wife’s own tale as men whose lives are ruined or jeopardized by their loose-lipped wives.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) One might also observe that the verbal promiscuity of these women frequently possesses a sexual correlative. The wife of Genius’s Roman de la Rose diatribe partially undresses as she solicits her husband’s secret, while Delilah and the Wife of Bath are both portrayed as sexually powerful and potentially dangerous. The “counseille” proverb also features prominently in Thomas Hoccleve’s Tale of Jonathas, in which the prying woman is the prostitute Felicula. This correlation between verbal and sexual promiscuity might have prompted Langland’s audience to recall the Magdalene’s traditional status as a reformed prostitute, thereby associating her with the Venerien Wife of Bath, the prostitute Felicula, the temptress Delilah, and the seductive wife of Genius’s diatribe in a sorority of sexually and verbally dangerous women. Langland alludes to the Magdalene’s sexuality in passus 5, lines 496-498 and passus 10, line 428, presenting the Magdalene as one of salvation history’s greatest sinners whose redemption illustrates God’s abundant grace. No one, according to the Dreamer, could have led a worse life in the world than her. Conscience, however, does not make the Magdalene’s presumed sexual past an issue in passus 19.
This selective but representative narrative history of the proverb reveals that loose-lipped and prying women jeopardize men’s crucial secrets, and sometimes their very lives. And in two instances the usually domestic “counsellor” proverb carries with it implicit ecclesiastical associations. Genius’s diatribe in the *Roman de la Rose*, with its portrayal of women as irresponsible secular confessors, reinforces the exclusively male role of confessor by pointing out a woman’s inability to hold an office so dependent upon the ability to “keep counsellor.” Chaucer was to repeat these ecclesiastical associations in the Wife of Bath’s *Prologue*, in which Alisoun asserts that her gossip “knew myn herte, and eek myn privatrye, / Bet than oure parishe preest . . . .” If this is how women keep counsel, so the argument would run, they surely would make disastrous priests. In the *Roman de la Rose* and the Wife of Bath’s *Prologue*, the proverbial garrulity of women is expanded from a domestic sphere to reflect a religious one.

However, the author who provides the clearest connection between the “counsellor” proverb and anxieties over women’s religious authority is Langland himself. In passus 5, Wrath, a former friar, slanders all women while confessing to Repentance:

I haue an Aunte to Nonne and an Abbesse bope;
Hir were leure swowe or swelte þan suffre any peyne.
I haue be cook in hir kichene and þe Couent serued
Manye Monþes wþ hem, and wþ Monkes bope.
I was þe Prioriesse poterger and opere pouere ladies,
And maad hem loutes of langlyng þat dame Iohane was a bastard,
And dame Clarice a knyþtes doþter ac a cokewold was hir sire,
And dame Pernele a preestes fylþ; Prioriesse worþ she neuer
For she hadde child in chrietyme; al oure Chapitre it wiste.
Of wikkede wordes I, wraþe, hire wortes made
Til “þow lixt!” and “þow lixt!” lopen out at ones
And eiper hitte oþer vnder þe cheke.
Hadde þei had knyues, by crist! hir eiper hadde kild oþer.
Seint Gregory was a good pope, and hadde a good forwit:
That no Prioriesse were preest, for þat he purueiede;
They hadde þanne ben *Infamis*, þei kan so yuelo hele counsell.
(5.153-68)

For Wrath, the “counsellor” proverb involves no mere metaphor but stands as the principal argument against women priests. Wrath dismisses the prioresses’ assumptions of authority with the same reproach that Conscience levels at the Magdalene, using the same proverb; they cannot restrain their “janglyng” mouths.

IV

Up to now my focus has been on literary traditions that may help make sense of Langland’s problematical Magdalene, but it is in a social context that Conscience’s proverbial denigration of the Magdalene can be better understood, and gendered controversies of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries recommend such an approach. In the first half of the
thirteenth century, it appears that some priresses were testing the limits of their religious authority despite the oft-repeated injunctions of 1 Timothy 2:11-12, encroaching upon the priestly duty of hearing nuns' confessions. Their presumption led to a sharp rebuke by Pope Gregory IX, who forbade priresses to assume such duties. It is this decretal to which Wrath alludes in passus 5, and Wrath's use of the "couseille" proverb implies an association on some level in Langland's mind between the Magdalene and these priresses who had overstepped their bounds.

Perhaps Langland was concerned with these gendered tensions because his age was uniquely marked by an increasingly public feminine religiosity that became associated with everything subversive and dangerous. The explosion of lay piety, affective devotion, and vernacular translation of Scripture threatened to circumvent the already-besieged clerical community in England. Mystics such as Julian of Norwich were recording their spiritual experiences while Langland was writing his poem, and those who received visions from God authorizing non-traditional actions would prove most difficult to contain. Jean de Gerson, the staunch defender of orthodoxy best known for his vigorous persecution of Wyclif's continental counterpart, Jan Hus, felt compelled to remind Langland's generation that "the female sex is forbidden on apostolic authority to teach in public, that is either by word or by writing . . . All women's teaching, particularly formal teaching by word and by writing, is to be held suspect unless it has been diligently examined, and much more fully than men's" (Colledge and Walsh 151). Here we may be reminded of a Canterbury monk's reaction to Margery Kempe: "I wold now wer closyd in an hows of ston pat per schuld no man speke wyth pe" (27).

If contemporary accounts can be trusted, there were not enough houses of stone in all of England to contain the women who were supposedly assuming important roles in heretical movements of Langland's day. Lollardy especially offered opportunities for women that orthodox Catholicism would never have allowed, as women assumed important but hazardous roles as readers and interpreters of Scripture. Yet the extent to which women were actually involved in Lollardy is the subject of considerable debate. Claire Cross has suggested that through being central to the family unit by which Lollardy thrived, women were spiritual leaders in the heresy. According to Cross, women were active teachers mainly through Conventicle recitation of memorized Scripture (360, 370-71). Margaret Aston continued Cross's line of inquiry, additionally addressing rumors that Lollard women were actually functioning as priests. However, Shannon McSheffrey has cautioned against exaggerating women's roles, reminding us that most of these women were illiterate and ancillary to a definite male leadership structure. McSheffrey writes, "Even most influential female Lollards confined their endeavors to informal situations rather than public teaching roles" (21).

Although the extent of women's actual involvement in Lollardy is debatable, one thing is certain: women were perceived to be usurping traditionally male roles in heretical movements, including preaching and expounding Scripture, and this usurpation was to be a source of great anxiety. Margery Kempe's public religiosity repeatedly earned her the accusation of "fals loller," suggesting an association among her contemporaries between the heresy and preaching

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8 See Friedberg, Decretal Gregor. IX Lib. V. Tit. XXXVIII. cap. x (cols. 886-7).
women. It may be no coincidence that the two great persecutors of Wycliffite and Hussite belief, Thomas Arundel and Jean de Gerson, also made a point of condemning women preachers. Margaret Aston adduces considerable evidence from chronicle and sermon literature, poetry, and polemical tracts to reveal widespread concern over women’s roles among the champions of orthodoxy. By the 1390s rumors were circulating throughout London that women were celebrating masses, and Hoccleve’s oft-quoted verbal assault on Oldcastle shows how women were already established as vigorous heretical interpreters of Scripture in the minds of the orthodox by this time:

Some wommen eke, thogh hir wit be thynne,  
Wole argumentes make in holy writ!  
Lewde calates! sittith doun and spynne,  
And kakele of sumwhat elles, for your wit  
Is al to feeble to despute of it!  
To Clerkes grete apparteneth pat aart  
The knowleche of pat, god hath fro yow shite;  
Stynte and leue of for right scendre is your paart. (13)

Hoccleve responds to the threat of Lollard women scholars in what is by now a predictable pattern: by impugning their authority through misogynistic portrayals of small minds and big mouths. The imagined “kakeling” of Hoccleve’s women is a revealing correlative to Langland’s depiction of “janglyng” prioresses and an indiscriminate Magdalen. The charge of garrulity seems to have been a multi-purpose putdown for any group of presumptuous women.

Aston discusses the most compelling evidence for a late fourteenth-century debate over women’s religious authority in the case of Walter Brut (or Brit), arrested in 1391 on heresy charges. Brought before the Bishop of Hereford, John Trefnant, Brut contended that women did indeed have priestly powers denied them by orthodoxy, expressing such powers in explicitly Petrine terms (e.g., they have the power “to bind and to loose”). Prominent theologians were convened to counter Brut’s claims, and his case evolved into a kind of referendum on whether women could attain religious privileges formerly reserved to men. In the debate between Brut and his opponents, the Magdalene was introduced as proof of the defensibility of women preachers: “multe mulieres constanter predicaverunt verbum quando sacerdotes et alii non audebant verbum loqui et patet de Magdalena et Martha” (“Many women steadfastly preached the Word when priests and others did not dare speak the Word, as evinced by the Magdalene and Martha” (Aston 52; my translation). Brut’s case demonstrates that the symbolic power of the Magdalene’s voice could be and was appropriated by proponents of expanded female religious liberties.10

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9 William White was also alleged to have used these Petrine terms in the early fifteenth century; see Aston 52, 59.

10 Here one might also be mindful of allegations made toward Waldensian women. In his Summa adversus Catharos et Valdenses (ca. 1241), the Dominican Moneta of Cremona asserts that “the Waldensians appealed to the example of Mary Magdalene to justify preaching
Brut’s defense benefitted from hagiographical traditions that made Mary and Martha outstanding women evangelists. In the Legenda Aurea, St. Peter entrusts Mary Magdalene to the care of Maximin fourteen years after the Resurrection. When the disciples disperse to spread the gospel, Maximin, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and others are cast out to sea in a rudderless ship by unbelievers. Miraculously arriving safely at Marseilles, the Magdalene immediately sets to work converting heathens through the power of her speech. The composer of the vita invests the Magdalene’s lips with both erotic and rhetorical power:

When blessed Mary Magdalene saw the people gathering at the shrine to offer sacrifice to the idols, she came forward, her manner calm and her face serene, and with well-chosen words called them away from the cult of idols and preached Christ fervidly to them. All who heard her were in admiration at her beauty, her eloquence, and the sweetness of her message . . . and no wonder, that the mouth which had pressed such pious and beautiful kisses on the Savior’s feet should breathe forth the perfume of the word of God more profusely than others could. (376-77)

It is no wonder then, given Mary Magdalene’s status as an emblem of the value—even the privilege—of women’s speech, that she could be perceived as a dangerous role model by later clerics. A figure outside the male apostolic circle of Christ but who was still clearly favored by him, the Magdalene would serve as an inspiration for a growing body of late medieval women who similarly sought an affective bond with Christ independent of a male clerical “inner circle.” Prominent women such as Christina of Markyate and possibly even Richard II’s Queen Isabella owned Psalters depicting the Magdalene proclaiming the Resurrection to the other Apostles. Osbern Bokenham tells us that Lady Bourchier, Countess of Eu, commissioned the English translation of her vita, with pointed emphasis on her apostolic role:

“I have,” quod she, “of pure affeccyoun
Ful longe tym had a synguler deuocyoun
To þat holy wumman, wych, as I gesse,
Is clepyd of apostyls þe apostyllesse;
Blyssyd Mary mawdelyn y mene,
Whom cryste from syn made pure & clene,
As þe clerkyss seyn, ful mercyfully,
Whos lyf in englysshe I desyre sothly
To han maad, & for my sake
If ye lykyd þe labour for to take,
& for reuereuce of hyr, I wold you preye.”

(5065-75)

And when Margery Kempe portrays herself repeatedly answering the question, “Why wepist þu so, woman?” surely she is engaging in more than a little self-fashioning. Conscience’s proverbial

by women” (Kienzle 105). Of course, since this Summa was intended to point out the errors of the heresy, its allegations may be distortions of actual Waldensian practice.
denigration of the Magdalene, then, reflects contemporary tension between a male clerical orthodoxy struggling to maintain ecclesiastical control in opposition to a growing number of women who, like the Magdalene, refused to be silent, who believed in the validity of their spiritual experience, and who sought a greater public authority in matters of the soul.

V

We are finally confronted with an issue raised at the outset of this study: if Conscience is such a courteous character in passus 19, why attribute this proverbial misogyny to him? Any discussion of Conscience’s role must begin with a definition of his function in faculty psychology, and Mary Carruthers offers a useful summary of scholarly readings. According to Carruthers, scholastics held that Conscience represented basic “moral sense,” a blend of synderesis and conscience. Quoting Aquinas, Carruthers defines synderesis as a “habit, a natural disposition of the practical intellect, ‘the first practical principles bestowed on us by nature,’ by means of which the practical intellect is inclined to the good and is able ‘to discover, and to judge of what [it has] discovered’” (Schroeder 15). Conscience, then, is a catch-all term for several “intellectual habits” derived from synderesis, and is a faculty devoted to making distinctions and applying knowledge. Carruthers further comments, “The role of conscience was able to include not only the function of moral judge but also that of intellectual judge distinguishing between truth and falsehood” (16). Given this definition, it appears strange that Conscience would depart from Scripture and portray an indiscriminate Magdalene by means of an antifeminist proverb in his account of the Resurrection. Perhaps Carruthers’ discussion of Conscience’s collective role explains the portrayal. Citing the work of Morton Bloomfield, Carruthers observes that Conscience’s role as knight “may indeed reflect an aspect of the monastic conception of conscience—not only as the guide and protector of the individual soul but as a collective conscience defending the collective soul of the Church” (17-18).

I would suggest that Conscience’s account of the Resurrection results from his collective role as defender of Holy Church, and his use of proverbial misogyny constitutes an attempt to unify and defend an increasingly fractured Catholic orthodoxy. This is a role he will play in greater detail as the final two passus unfold—building and defending the Barn of Unity. Immediately after employing the “counselse” proverb, Conscience tells us that “Peter parceuyed al pis and pursued after, / Bope James and Johan, Iesu to seke, / Thaddee and ten mo wip Thomas of Inde.” Conscience emphasizes Peter’s intellectual understanding of Mary Magdalene’s words, for these words prompt him and other Apostles to await Christ’s appearance before the Eleven. The sense of 19:157-69 is that Mary Magdalene indiscriminately broadcasts the news of the Resurrection, but it is Peter who first fully understands its ramifications and, with the other Apostles, takes action. Here Langland may have been influenced by an interpretation best developed by Aquinas, who argued that the Magdalene’s Christophany was flawed, that she was unfit to preach and needed the male Apostles to translate her information into action (Børresen 245-46).

Perhaps Conscience, in devaluing Mary Magdalene’s authority and affirming Peter’s, is making clear just who exactly has the power to bind and loose. Given the historical rivalry that
obtains between the two figures, it may be no coincidence that the divestment of Mary’s authority and the investment of Peter’s occurs in the space of a mere thirty-four lines, culminating with the papal privilege given to St. Peter:

And when his dede was doon do best he pouȝte,
And yaf Piers pardon, and power he grauntede hym,
Myght men to assoille of alle manere synnes,
To alle maner men mercy and forȝínesse
In couenaunt pat þei come and kneveliche to paie
To Piers pardon þe Plowman redde quod debes.
Thus hap Piers power, be his pardon paied,
To bynde and vnbynde boþe here and ellis,
And assoille men of alle synnes saue of dette one. (19.182-90)

Here Conscience replaces Christ’s post-Resurrection commission to all of the Apostles (John

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11 Christ’s command to Mary Magdalene to bear the news of the Resurrection specifically to Peter entwines these two figures forever in the narrative of the greatest authority-conferring experience in church history, and calls attention to Peter’s dependence upon Mary Magdalene for the news. The Magdalene’s Christophany granted her a privilege unattained even by Peter, the foremost of the Apostles and the “rock” upon which the church is founded. The respective designations of Mary Magdalene and Peter even betray a kind of hierarchical rivalry, as apostola apostolorum and princeps apostolorum both make special claims for themselves. This rivalry was much more than a nominal one. Gnostic gospels reveal a well-documented and strongly gendered tension between Mary Magdalene and Peter in nascent Christianity. (On the Magdalene in Gnostic writings, generally see Malvern 42-56; Pagels 12-14, 22, 64-66; and Haskins 42. For other early texts that depict a gendered tension among the Apostles, see Schüssler-Fiorenza 304-9, 332-33.) Perhaps Gnostic and medieval writers were elaborating on the same tensions suggested in New Testament accounts in which Peter seems to doubt the Magdalene’s words (e.g., Luke 24:12). Most importantly, Mary’s unequivocal privilege of seeing Christ first was undermined by Paul’s mention of Peter and omission of Mary in the Resurrection account of 1 Corinthians 15:5, thus making them competitors for the distinction and fostering a debate that would prove to be of the highest importance in establishing papal power and the roles of women in the church. In the figure of Peter, medieval dramatists would depict an Apostle angrily dismissive of the Magdalene in terms that emphasized her gender. The Towneley Thomas Indie, for example, begins with Mary Magdalene bringing the news to the Apostles; Peter shouts her down with an impassioned “Do way, woman, thou carpys wast!” (line 7). The exchange continues at length, with the Magdalene accusing Peter of heresy and Peter vigorously maintaining that the Magdalene’s lying is shameful. For other medieval texts which depict Peter’s skepticism of the Magdalene, see the Coventry (“Corpus Christi”) Appearance to Mary Magdalene (Davies 343-46), and the Ms. e Museo 160 Christ’s Resurrection (726-29; Baker 191). This rivalry would provide Langland with an inviting narrative context in which to insert a misogynistic proverb so dependent upon gendered tension and mistrust.
20:19-23) with Peter’s singular commission (Matt. 16:18-19). Conscience also undermines the communal sense of John 20 by referring to the gathering as “Peter and... his Apostles”--a foregrounding of Peter not found in Scripture. Peter’s special commission is similar to the communal commission, but it occurs well before the Resurrection, even before Christ’s transfiguration. Perhaps Conscience makes these changes in the belief that a resurrected Christ would have greater divine authority to bestow on Peter; the sequence of events is shifted accordingly.

Given Langland’s skepticism regarding the ecclesiastical abuses of the post-apostolic church, perhaps Conscience’s portrayal of the Magdalene is meant to demonstrate how earthly power can corrupt this essential faculty. (Conscience’s unwise decision to allow the friars, particularly Frere Flaterere, entrance into the Barn of Unity will later demonstrate his debilitated powers of discernment). In Conscience we see a figure enhancing the authority of Peter (and, by extension, papal authority) at all costs, even at the expense of a beloved saint. And of course the Great Schism forms the contemporary backdrop for Langland’s narrative--a backdrop of divisiveness in which church authority was fragmented among two and three popes between 1378-1417, and to which Langland alludes in 19.417-27. Conscience’s efforts in the name of unity illustrate the impulses that yield such a state of affairs; his attempts to consolidate Peter’s authority necessarily detract from Mary Magdalene’s. For a church to have one earthly leader, there can be no division of power.

Although it is true that Langland was in many ways a social conservative who probably would have opposed women’s pursuit of greater ecclesiastical authority, Conscience seems too deeply flawed for his views to be considered authorial. Langland might have supported the end of his arguments, but not the means, characterized as they are by a mocking application of proverbial misogyny. Conscience’s prejudices involving Mary Magdalene cannot be attributed merely to a confusion of traditions; Langland manifests a strong familiarity with relevant Scripture and Magdalene hagiography elsewhere. There are six references to Mary Magdalene in *Piers Plowman*. In 5.497 Repentance says that Christ appeared to the Magdalene first to show that he died for sinners. In 10.428 Will refers to her sinful nature to justify a self-indulgent predestinarianism since even some of the most iniquitous are saved: “Than Marie Maudeleyne who myȝte do worse?” In the speech attributed to Trajan in 11.250-58, Langland employs the interpretation of Luke 10:40-42 that casts Mary Magdalene as a representation of the contemplative life in order to praise poverty. In 13.194 Conscience praises poverty as well, noting that Mary Magdalene gained more from her box of ointment than Zacchaeus did from half his riches. Anima also associates the Magdalene with virtuous poverty in 15.294, observing the extra-biblical tradition that she lived on roots and dew and her devotion to God in her later life. The Resurrection account of 19.157-62 marks the final appearance of Mary Magdalene in *Piers Plowman*. It seems, then, that for Langland’s characters, as well as for principal actors in church history, Mary Magdalene could be whatever each figure needed her to be--saint, sinner, whore, apostle, gossip--and Conscience is no different. His interest in affirming male ecclesiastical authority leads him to apply the proverb “ȝat womman witeȝ may noȝte wel be counsell,” with all of its unflattering narrative associations, in depicting a “word-wod” Magdalene unworthy of the momentous news she bears, incapable of using it to establish Holy Church. For Langland, Conscience is the revisionist historian of a church lamentably estranged from a once unified, divine origin.
Works Cited


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The Status of Pollution in Tennessee

by H. W. Wofford

What places come to mind when you think about polluted sites in the United States? Perhaps you think about Love Canal in Niagara Falls, New York, where the Hooker Chemicals and Plastics Co. buried 22,000 tons of chemical waste in a half-dug canal and where a housing development was built on top of it (1). Or maybe Lake Erie comes to mind. It was so heavily contaminated by industrial wastes and sewage that it was closed for fishing and swimming, and many species of lake fish were on the verge of extinction. In 1965, almost one-fourth of the lake was so polluted that its oxygen supply was virtually depleted (2). What about Los Angeles, California? Los Angeles is located in a geological bowl which traps air pollution, and during the sixties smog sometimes got so bad that industries and motor vehicle traffic had to be shut down for several days a year. You may not be as familiar with Boston harbor. At one time it was so polluted that there were reports of rats walking across the harbor on the floating debris!

When people are asked to name polluted states, New Jersey is often mentioned. This is probably because industrial areas on the coast such as Newark, with its sprawling railroad yards and chemical refineries. Most of Newark is an eyesore, prompting a friend of mine from New Jersey to describe it as the "armpit of the universe." However, this is probably not a fair way to characterize New Jersey as a whole. When you get away from the industrial areas, the countryside in New Jersey is among the most beautiful and undisturbed in the United States. Sometimes Texas and Louisiana will be added to the list because of the expansive petrochemical industries on the Gulf Coast of these states.

But what about our state? Where would you rank Tennessee as a polluted state? I don’t think most people in Tennessee would consider our state to be very polluted. After all, we have traditionally been known for our agricultural economy, rather than for our industrial output. I must confess that, until I returned to Tennessee after having spent fifteen years training as an ecotoxicologist, I did not think of Tennessee as polluted. It is interesting how differently you look at the place where you grew up after having been away for some time. You can back off and look at it a little more objectively. Coming back as a trained environmental toxicologist, I looked at Tennessee through new eyes. Over the last twelve years, I have been accumulating information about the state of pollution in Tennessee from newspaper clippings, state and federal publications, and web sites. My goal for this paper is to pass on to you a summary of what I have gleaned from all this information. What you read may surprise you.

I can’t possibly write about every environmental problem in Tennessee in a paper of this length. In order to make the task a bit more manageable, I will begin with some overall statistics concerning the status of pollution in Tennessee, and then focus on our immediate environment, Madison and surrounding counties.
Tennessee’s Environmental Scorecard

There are many ways in which the environmental health of an area can be assessed. These include determination of the amount of air pollution, the amount of water pollution, the amount of waste emptied into the sewer system, the rate of deforestation, the public health status, and the status of environmental education. I have summarized some of them in Table 1. As you can see, Tennessee consistently comes in as one of the ten worst polluted states in the nation.

It is informative to go to the Agricultural Museum in Milan, Tennessee. In this museum, there is an exhibit about soil erosion and conservation efforts made by Tennessee to prevent it. There is a picture in this exhibit of a man standing in a ditch caused by soil erosion. He cannot see out of the ditch! Great strides have been made in recent years to control soil erosion, with no-till farming being the most recent such control measure.

Air pollution is also a big problem in Tennessee. It is probably contributing to the destruction of hundreds of thousands of acres of trees in the Great Smoky Mountains Park. Air pollution, mainly sulfur and nitrogen oxides, from industry and the cars of the millions of tourists who visit this park weakens the trees, making them susceptible to infections by fungi, bacteria and insects (5). I had the opportunity to talk to a technician at the Agricultural Experimental Station here in Jackson. He has been measuring the pH of the rainwater falling on the station for several years. Though it isn’t part of his job, he does it out of interest. On several occasions, the precipitation falling on Jackson was acidic enough to be classified as acid rain. Interestingly, this always happens when the wind is coming from the southwest. This shouldn’t be too surprising, since Memphis, the largest center of industry in West Tennessee, is southwest of us. On one or two occasions he recorded alkaline rain. I have never seen this discussed in the environmental literature. What are we putting into the air in West Tennessee that is making our air more alkaline (basic)?

Tennessee Rivers and Lakes

Another way to assess the environmental health of a state is to examine the health of its rivers and lakes. 60,000 stream miles and 540,000 lake acres can be found within Tennessee (27). One way of determining the health of these waterways is to look at whether or not these waterways have been posted. In other words, have some intended uses of these waterways been restricted? This usually means that either body contact, recreation, or fishing has been restricted or banned. In 1996, twenty-six per cent of stream miles and twenty-two per cent of lake acres in Tennessee were classified as not fully supporting their intended use (27). These waterways have been posted for such diverse causes as presence of fecal coliforms, lead, mercury, PCBs, chlordane, and dioxins.

Two Tennessee rivers, the Forked Deer River and the Obion River (which pass through parts of Madison or Gibson Counties), are classified as completely failing to support their intended use (Table 2). The Mississippi River, which is notorious for its pollution, has been added to the table for purposes of comparison. As you can see from the table, our local river systems are not considered safe for the usages we commonly make of waterways and are considered less safe than the “mighty Mississippi.” Having contracted either Giardia or amebic
dysentery from swimming in the Forked Deer River in the days of my youth, I heartily recommend that you heed the warnings!

**Madison and Gibson Counties’ Environmental Scorecards**

The Environmental Defense Fund maintains a web site that allows individuals to rank almost any site in the country according to its rate of release of toxic chemicals and the health effects of these chemicals (28). In terms of release of Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) chemicals, an inventory of chemicals maintained and monitored by the EPA, Madison County ranks forty-seventh in the state in release of these chemicals, while Gibson County ranks sixteenth. This surprised me. I expected that Madison County would release more chemicals than Gibson County. However, Gibson County has four facilities in the top one hundred for most chemicals released, while Madison County has none. It is important to note that these numbers do not take into consideration non-TRI chemicals, including many agricultural chemicals. I shudder to think of what I was exposed to while “growing up on the farm.”

However, these rankings should not give residents of Madison County too much peace of mind. Although Madison County fares well in comparison to other Tennessee counties, it must be compared to the nation as a whole (28). Madison County ranks in the top twenty per cent of all counties in the U.S. in terms of:

- Release of non-cancer hazards
- Water releases of recognized developmental toxicants
- Water releases of suspected immunotoxicants
- Release of chemicals with ozone-depleting potential.

Gibson County fares even worse. It ranks in the top twenty per cent of all counties in the U.S. in terms of:

- Release of cancer hazards
- Air releases of recognized carcinogens
- Air releases of recognized developmental toxicants
- Air releases of suspected cardiovascular or blood toxicants
- Air releases of suspected reproductive toxicants.

**Problem sites in the Madison County Area - Superfund Sites**

Another criterion that can be used as a yardstick of the environmental health of a region is whether or not that region contains any Superfund sites. Residents of Jackson have the dubious distinction of living within thirty miles of four EPA Superfund sites (Table 3). Two of these are located within the city limits of Jackson and are within two miles of ten of Jackson’s water wells. EPA Superfund sites are sites that are deemed to be so contaminated and pose such a health risk that they are assigned the highest priority for cleanup. The problem with Superfund sites is that when the funding was set up for this program, the cost of the cleanup was grossly
underestimated. As a result, many sites have been identified, but have not been cleaned up. Regarding the four sites in the vicinity of Jackson, only partial cleanup has been undertaken, and cleanup efforts are still underway.

The state of Tennessee also has a Superfund program. Table 3 contains a listing of the Tennessee Superfund sites in Madison and Gibson Counties. As you can see, Tennessee has added an additional seven sites in our area to the Superfund list. Of these sites, only the Owens-Corning site has been declared clean. Table 3 also includes some sites in this area that have not been declared Superfund sites, but have been in the news lately because of environmental problems.

In order to give you a better appreciation of the magnitude of these environmental problems in our area, I have given some of the history and the possible health consequences of some of these sites in the following sections.

**American Creosote Works**

The American Creosote Works was declared an EPA Superfund site in 1987 and is considered to be one of the worst creosote-contaminated sites in the country (21). The plant operated from the early 1930’s until 1981. It was located on fifty-five acres in southwest Jackson just off of State Street, between the Forked Deer River and the 45 Bypass.

Creosote is used as a wood preservative. It is most often seen in old telephone poles and railroad ties. After the wood was treated by placing it in baths of hot creosote, it was stacked on racks outside to dry. The excess creosote dripped onto the ground and has been working its way into the water table. Creosote contains a large number of chemicals called polyaromatic hydrocarbons and related compounds, many of which are potentially carcinogenic (cancer-causing). One PAH, benzo[α]pyrene (BAP), was found in high concentrations in the soil. BAP is one of the five most carcinogenic chemicals that we have currently identified.

In 1991, the EPA started the cleanup of the site. All of the remaining creosote (approximately 200,000 gallons) was removed, and all structures were torn down to the ground. However, funding problems halted the cleanup of the soil at the site (22). The state and federal governments planned to spend $5 to $12 million to clean up this site (21). However, the total projected costs have increased to as much as $50 million. About 8.4 acres of land will be scraped two to five feet deep, removing 35,000 to 88,000 tons of soil. The work was scheduled to begin in 1996 or 1997, but I have not seen evidence of cleanup operations. At one point it was seriously suggested that the site be used as a jail! I can’t imagine how many lawsuits that would have generated. Does being used for bioremediation constitute cruel and unusual punishment?!

**Iselin Railroad Yard**

The Environmental Protection Agency wants to put Jackson’s old Iselin Railroad Yard on its Superfund list of the most serious hazardous waste sites (12). This eighty-acre site is just south of Iselin Street in Southeast Jackson, directly across from Washington-Douglass Elementary School. It is also near ten of JUD’s city water wells. This site was used for the maintenance and repair of railroad engines for many years by the Mobile & Ohio and Illinois
Central railroads (13). The degreasers used to clean the engines and their parts were often allowed to run onto the ground and into a creek that fed into the Forked Deer River. Often, the water in the creek ran black.

Among the chemicals found at the Iselin site are chromium, lead, vinyl chloride, chloroethane, benzene, copper, tetrachloroethane, dichloroethane, ethylbenzene, and xylene. These chemicals carry such possible health risks as cancer, birth defects, liver toxicity, kidney toxicity and neurotoxicity. JUD is currently monitoring the city water for these chemicals and has plans in place for treating the water if necessary.

Cleanup of the Iselin site was predicted to start in 1996, but to the best of my knowledge this process has not started yet (14).

**Milan Army Ammunition Plant**

The Milan Army Ammunition Plant has been in operation since 1942, manufacturing ordinance for the military. From 1942 to 1978, wastewater from the O-line production area was discharged into eleven unlined settling ponds. In 1991, it was discovered that RDX and other potential carcinogens such as TNT, 2,4-dinitrotoluene, nitrobenzene, and HMX used in the manufacture of explosives, had seeped out of these ponds and had gotten into the groundwater that provides the drinking water for Milan (19). In 1992, the U.S. Army started a $9 million study to assess the degree of contamination of the water, eventually drilling four hundred test wells (16, 20). The results of this testing indicated that the city’s drinking water was below the danger point of 2.0 ppb.

In light of concerns that the levels of these chemicals could increase in the future, the Army agreed to spend $9 to build a water treatment facility at the plant and to drill three new water wells for Milan farther away from the arsenal. In May 1995, the levels of the chemicals in the city water had not increased significantly (17). By 1997, the Army had spent $58 million on the cleanup operation. This involved the design and construction of cleanup systems using a combination of high-tech filtration and UV systems, and a low-tech artificial wetlands where native plants and microorganisms break down the chemicals, a process called bioremediation (18). The O-line ponds were also capped with clay to prevent further leaching of the chemicals into the water table. A recent report indicates that the cleanup of the contaminated ground water is on schedule and should be complete by 2009 (29). Unfortunately, parts of the city park will be unavailable for the next six to eight months as wells are being dug which will be used to filter the groundwater.

**Lead Exposure in Jackson**

Jackson is the only city in West Tennessee to be cited by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for having high lead levels in the drinking water. According to EPA guidelines, lead levels in drinking water must not exceed fifteen ppb. Unsafe levels of lead were found in a small number of homes with lead materials in their plumbing and are not due to lead in the JUD water supply. Although a report in 1994 showed that about twenty-two per cent of the children
in Madison County have elevated levels of lead in their blood, it is believed that most of this lead
did not come from the water, but from lead-based paint and leaded gasoline.

More recently, residents of East Jackson in the neighborhood of the former H. O. Forgy
recycling plant have been tested for lead levels (15). This plant that turned scrap metals into
materials for industry allowed lead to seep into the soil for thirty-seven years, from 1946 to
1983. When evaluated for its risk, this site received a score of 85.26. In order for a site to be
placed on the EPA Superfund List, it must have a score of 28.5. The score for the H. O. Forgy
site is one of the highest ever seen.

Velsicol Corporation Dump Site

The Velsicol Corporation is a Memphis-based company involved in the manufacture of
insecticides. Several hundred thousand drums (seven million gallons) of waste created from the
production of these insecticides were buried on thirty-seven acres between 1964 and 1974 in
Hardeman County near Toone, which is just south of Jackson (23). Over time the drums rusted
and leaked, allowing the chemicals to leach into the water table. It is estimated that over one
thousand acres of groundwater are contaminated because of this leakage (24).

Removing and properly disposing of all these drums could cost in excess of $1 billion. At
this point, a ground water treatment plant has been constructed, and the area has been capped
with clay to prevent further leaching into the water table. This is all the cleanup that is currently
planned. Velsicol has spent $12 million on capping and stabilizing the site to this point (25).
However, the clay cap over the site has been found to be only ninety-eight per cent effective
(26). It is now being capped with plastic, which will be “one hundred per cent effective.” The
workers who went into this site to stabilize it were either very brave or very foolish. This is by
far the worst contaminated site that I have ever encountered, and it’s only a thirty-minute drive
away!

Conclusions

I have presented a large number of facts and figures about the state of pollution in
Tennessee. What conclusions can we draw from all of this? The obvious conclusion is that
Tennessee is a relatively contaminated state. It is very likely that health problems are and will
continue to be a result of this contamination. Many of these sites are areas where chemicals are
entering our water table. Adequate quality drinking water may very well be the next great
environmental crisis for the whole world, including the United States. West Tennessee is blessed
with one of the best aquifers in the world. However, there are many sites in which chemicals are
slowly working their way into this aquifer. These chemicals will not stay localized.
Hydrologists tell us that the aquifer in West Tennessee flows. As it does, it will carry chemicals
to areas that are many miles away from the sites of contamination.

It should be noted that as bad as the status of pollution in Tennessee may seem, it is getting
better. Almost every statistic I have mentioned in this paper has shown improvement in the last
twenty years. For example, in 1996, twenty-six per cent of stream miles and twenty-two per
cent of lake acres in Tennessee were classified as not fully supporting their intended use (27). In
1984, forty-six per cent of stream miles and thirty-four per cent of lake acres were not fully supporting. This constitutes a significant improvement.

How did we get this way? I suspect it has much to do with our state historically having a predominantly rural economy. Thus, some of the problems resulting from urbanization and industrialization have come to us later than for other states, and we are dealing with them much later as a result. Also, I feel there is almost a vacuum of environmental awareness and consciousness in West Tennessee. I was impressed by this when I came back to Tennessee after having spent fifteen years in other parts of the country. Many people think nothing of littering in this area, and they tend to pour out chemicals such as used oil and antifreeze on the ground. This same attitude has carried over into industry. For most of this century, industrial wastes have just been dumped into a ditch. Jackson has only very recently put a tree ordinance in place. In New England, you must get permission from all of your neighbors before you can cut one tree in your yard. Union, as a Christian university, must set an example of environmental stewardship for the community.

I suspect that the contamination of our area also has to do with the loss of contact between our citizens and the environment. As people moved away from the farms, seeking jobs in the cities, they lost their contact with the soil. I grew up on a farm. I spent most of my waking hours prowling around, turning over logs, watching birds fly, and catching insects and tadpoles; in the process, I developed a deep appreciation and love for the environment. The students in my classes have learned this, as I frequently get on my "soap box" about environmental issues. Children who grow up in cities don't have these opportunities. Studies have shown that inner city children have no idea where their food comes from, other than the store. These children don't have a connection to the land, and it is less likely that they will show concern about environmental issues. I have been impressed on many occasions by individuals who will get outraged about the fate of whales, which they have never seen, and not be concerned about the destruction of the environment going on behind their own house.

Ultimately, the contamination of Tennessee is about our population. As the population and economy of Tennessee has grown, so has the demand for food and goods. With this increase, there has to be an increase in the utilization of chemicals and subsequent problems of dealing with the byproducts of the manufacture of these chemicals. My dad understands this very well. He is a retired farmer. During his career as a farmer, he has released thousands of pounds of agricultural chemicals into the environment. He despises these chemicals, but he can't see any way around the use of them. Without the use of pesticides and herbicides, we wouldn't be able to feed everyone in the U.S., much less export excess food to starving people in other parts of the world.

What can we do about it? We can't avoid the use of water. There are some things that we can do at a personal level to help protect ourselves. For example, we could drink bottled water. But recent studies have shown that bottled water, despite its cost, is not necessarily any safer than our tap water. It would be a good choice if you live in an area with a known contamination problem.

Filtration of the water might be an option. However, this also has its problems. The type of filtration employed must match the contamination problem. A different approach is necessary to remove bacteria from water than to remove heavy metals or organics. Another problem is
knowing when to change out the filters. In many cases, there is no obvious way to tell when a filter is saturated other than having the water tested. After a filter becomes saturated, it may start to release its absorbed chemicals back into the water and, in some cases, the concentration of the pollutants in the water may be higher than without a filter.

You can have your water tested. This is especially advised if you have reason to believe that it is contaminated. However, unless you can convince the Health Department that there is a problem, you may have to pay for the testing yourself. Depending on the contaminant you are concerned about, this can range from fifteen dollars up to several hundred dollars per test. If you have city water, it should be tested for a wide range of chemicals on a regular basis, and you should be able to get a report from the city.

The best way to get good quality drinking water is to have uncontaminated water in the first place. This requires us to develop a sound environmental ethic about the proper handling of waste products. Here, education is probably the most important factor. Be informed. I suspect that often chemicals have been released into the environment more out of ignorance than out of greed. Get involved. Attend community meetings on environmental issues. There have been many in this area, some very recently. Write your legislators. Remember that in even the worst cases that I have described, the companies involved were not breaking any laws at the time.

After reading this article, has your opinion about the amount of pollution in Tennessee changed? If so, let me know.
Table 1 - Tennessee’s Environmental Scorecard

**Quantity of release**

No. 1 in the nation for soil erosion

2\textsuperscript{nd} worst air-polluting state

139 million lbs of toxic chemicals into the air in 1990

12\textsuperscript{th} worst water-polluting state

8\textsuperscript{th} worst state for toxins dumped into sewers

21 million lbs of toxic wastes

10\textsuperscript{th} worst state for toxins dumped into sewers

15.7 million lbs of toxic wastes

6\textsuperscript{th} worst toxin-emitting facility in the country

New Johnsonville power plant

3\textsuperscript{rd} worst state in the nation overall

5\textsuperscript{th} worst state in the nation overall

**Health Implications of the release**

2\textsuperscript{nd} worst in the nation for protecting the environment

Criteria: Drinking water, Food safety, solid-waste recycling, forest management, and impact of growth

9\textsuperscript{th} worst in the nation in release of chemicals which cause birth defects

11\textsuperscript{th} worst in the nation in release of chemicals which cause cancer

Three cities in top 25 % with premature heart- and lung-related deaths linked to particulate air pollution: Nashville, Memphis, Chattanooga
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>River</th>
<th>Miles in Tennessee</th>
<th>Fully Supporting</th>
<th>Partially Supporting</th>
<th>Not Supporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forked Deer</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obion</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>175.3</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supporting** - Can be used for body contact, recreation and fishing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EPA Superfund Sites</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Creosote Works</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iselin Railroad Yard (Proposed)</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milan Army Ammunition Plant</td>
<td>Gibson</td>
<td>Milan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velsicol Corp. Dump Site</td>
<td>Hardeman</td>
<td>Toone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tennessee Superfund Sites</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. O. Forgy and Son</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boone Dry Cleaners</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porter-Cable Corporation</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noma-ITT</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owens-Corning (Now declared clean)</td>
<td>Madison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B &amp; H Transformer</td>
<td>Gibson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michie Dump</td>
<td>McNairy</td>
<td>Michie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Problem Sites</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITT Milan (Jones Companies Ltd.)</td>
<td>Gibson</td>
<td>Milan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkville Elementary School</td>
<td>Gibson</td>
<td>Yorkville</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


   http://www.state.tn.us/environment/


Juff Contributors

John Jaeger further explores his interest in philosophical issues here, on the heels of his 1998 JUFF piece on Kierkegaard. He is assistant professor of library sciences and holds a master of divinity degree as well.

Randy Johnston is Department Chair and associate professor of chemistry. This is his third article to appear in JUFF since his 1994 arrival at Union.

Barbara McMillin has just been named Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences after serving six years as chair of English. The article here is a reworking of a paper presentation last February at the Tennessee Philological Association meeting in Jackson.

Melissa Moore has contributed multiple articles to JUFF in the area of literary criticism. Currently on maternity leave, she holds the title of associate professor of library services.

Gavin Richardson begins his second year at Union with his JUFF debut. Assistant professor of English, his article is being revised for cross-publication.

Roger Stanley has edited or co-edited JUFF since 1995. He holds the title of assistant professor of English.

Jan Wilms assumes the presidency of the Faculty Forum after serving as its vice-president for 1998-99. He is associate professor of computer science and Chair of mathematics and computer science.

H. W. Wofford is a former president of Union’s Faculty Forum and well known regionally for his acumen on environmental issues. He serves as Director of the Center for Scientific Research and is an associate professor of biology.

Janice Wood enters her second year as co-editor of JUFF and has been a past contributor. She is assistant professor of communication arts.