

Ten Commandments in America (Radio)

The ongoing debate about the posting the Ten Commandments in public places has certainly been controversial for the last few decades. But as we will see this week, there was a time not so long ago when politicians and citizens alike saw the Ten Commandments as the very foundation of our society.

In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled against the posting of the Ten Commandments in the public schools in the case of *Stone v. Graham*. They ruled that the preeminent purpose for posting the Ten Commandments on schoolroom walls is plainly religious in nature.

The justices even worried what would happen if students were to read the Ten Commandments on their classroom wall: If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all, it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments. However desirable this might be as a matter of private devotion, it is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment Clause.[\[1\]](#)

In 2005, the Supreme Court revisited this decision because of cases from Kentucky and Texas. A divided court struck down displays in two Kentucky courthouses, but ruled a Ten Commandments monument on state government land in Texas was acceptable. Anyone looking for a clear line of reasoning that provides guidance for future cases will not find them.

In the Kentucky cases, two counties posted copies of the Ten Commandments on the walls of their courthouse. These framed copies of the Ten Commandments hung alongside documents such as the Bill of Rights, the Star-Spangled Banner, and a version of the Congressional Record declaring 1983 the Year of the

Bible. These were considered unconstitutional.

The Texas case involved a six foot granite monument on the grounds of the Texas Capitol. It was deemed acceptable because it is one of seventeen historical displays on the twenty-two-acre lot. Although this was considered constitutional, some justices couldn't even accept that. Justice John Paul Stevens said, The monument is not a work of art and does not refer to any event in the history of the state, he wrote. The message transmitted by Texas chosen display is quite plain: This state endorses the divine code of the Judeo-Christian God. [{2}](#)

Other justices noted that one monument among many others is hardly an endorsement of religion. You can stop to read it, you can ignore it, or you can walk around it. Chief Justice William Rehnquist argued that the monuments placement on the grounds among secular monuments was passive, rather than confrontational. Justice Antonin Scalia listed various ways in which higher beings are invoked in public life, from so help me God in inaugural oaths to the prayer that opens the Supreme Courts sessions. He asked, With all of this reality (and much more) staring it in the face, how can the court possibly assert that the First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality?

The framers of the Constitution didn't try to mandate neutrality. They understood that ultimately law must rest upon a moral foundation. One of those foundations was the Ten Commandments.

Ten Commandments in American History

When we look at the Founding Fathers, we see they were anything but neutral when it came to addressing the influence of the Ten Commandments on our republic. For example, twelve of the original thirteen colonies incorporated the entire Ten Commandments into their civil and criminal codes. [{3}](#)

John Quincy Adams stated, The law given from Sinai was a civil and municipal as well as a moral and religious code. These are laws essential to the existence of men in society and most of which have been enacted by every nation which ever professed any code of laws. He added that: Vain indeed would be the search among the writings of [secular history] . . . to find so broad, so complete and so solid a basis of morality as this Decalogue lays down.{4}

John Witherspoon was the president of what later came to be known as Princeton University and was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He said that the Ten Commandments are the sum of the moral law.{5}

John Jay was one of the authors of *The Federalist Papers*. He later became the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. He said, The moral or natural law, was given by the sovereign of the universe to all mankind.{6}

On September 19, 1796, in his Farewell Address, President George Washington said, Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports.{7}

William Holmes McGuffey, considered the Schoolmaster of the Nation, once said, The Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus are not only basic but plenary.{8}

The founders of this country also wanted to honor Moses as the deliverer of the Ten Commandments. After separating from England, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were responsible for designing a symbol of this newly formed nation. Franklin proposed Moses lifting his wand and dividing the Red Sea.{9}

In the U.S. Capitol, there are displays of the great lawgivers (Hammurabi, Justinian, John Locke, William Blackstone, etc). All are profiles of the lawgivers except for one. The relief of Moses is full faced rather than in profile and looks

directly down onto the House Speakers rostrum.

Anyone who enters the National Archives to view the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution must first pass by the Ten Commandments embedded in the entry way of the Archives. Likewise, there are a number of depictions of the Ten Commandments. One is on the entry to the Supreme Court Chamber, where it is engraved on the lower half of the two large oak doors.

Another is engraved in the stone above the head of the Chief Justice with the great American eagle protecting them. And Moses is included among the great lawgivers in the sculpture relief on the east portico.

Chief Justice Warren Burger noted the irony of this in the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Lynch v. Donnelly*. The very chamber in which oral arguments on this case were heard is decorated with a notable and permanent symbol of religion: Moses with the Ten Commandments. [\[10\]](#)

The Commandments in Civil Law

Let's see how the Ten Commandments were expressed in American civil law. It may surprise you to find out that all of the commandments were written into law in some way. [\[11\]](#)

These illustrations are descriptive, not normative. I am not arguing that we must return to these legal formulations in every case cited. We may certainly disagree to what extent the Ten Commandments should be part of our legal structure. But there should be no disagreement that at one time the Ten Commandments were the very foundation of the civil laws of America.

The Ten Commandments can be summarized in this way: (1) Have no other gods, (2) Have no idols, (3) Honor Gods name, (4) Honor the Sabbath, (5) Honor your parents, (6) Do not murder,

(7) Do not commit adultery, (8) Do not steal, (9) Do not commit perjury, (10) Do not covet. The Ten Commandments might be called rules of (1) religion, (2) worship, (3) reverence, (4) time, (5) authority, (6) life, (7) purity, (8) property, (9) tongue, and (10) contentment.

The first commandment is: You shall have no other gods before Me (Ex. 20:3). There were a number of early colonial laws that addressed this command.

A law passed in 1610 in the Virginia colony declared that since we owe our highest and supreme duty, our greatest and all our allegiance to Him from whom all power and authority is derived . . . I do strictly command and charge all Captains and Officers . . . to have a care that the Almighty God be duly and daily served.[{12}](#)

A 1641 Massachusetts law stated: If any man after legal conviction shall have or worship any other god but the Lord God, he shall be put to death. Deut. 13:6,10; Deut 17:2,6; Ex. 22:20.[{13}](#)

The second commandment is: You shall not make for yourself an idol (Ex. 20:4). A 1680 New Hampshire law declared: It is enacted by ye ssembly and ye authority thereof, yet if any person having had the knowledge of the true God openly and manifestly have or worship any other gods but the Lord God, he shall be put to death. Ex. 22:20; Deut. 13:6 and 10.[{14}](#)

The third commandment is: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (Ex. 20:7). Laws to obey this commandment came in two forms. Some were laws prohibiting blasphemy and others were laws against profanity. Noah Webster discussed both of these categories in relation to the third commandment in one of his letters:

When in obedience to the third commandment of the Decalogue

you would avoid profane swearing, you are to remember that this alone is not a full compliance with the prohibition which [also] comprehends all irrelevant words or action and whatever tends to cast contempt on the Supreme Being or on His word and ordinances.[{15}](#)

Nearly all of the colonies had anti-blasphemy laws. This includes Connecticut, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

As Commander-in-Chief, George Washington issued numerous military orders during the American Revolution that prohibited swearing. This is one of his orders issued on July 4, 1775:

The General most earnestly requires and expects a due observance of those articles of war established for the government of the army which forbid profane cursing, swearing, and drunkenness; and in like manner requires and expects of all officers and soldiers not engaged on actual duty, a punctual attendance on Divine Service to implore the blessings of Heaven upon the means used for our safety and defense.[{16}](#)

After the Declaration of Independence, George Washington issued similar orders to his troops during the Revolutionary War. And similar prohibitions against blasphemy and profanity were issued throughout the rest of the Eighteenth century and into the Nineteenth century.

The fourth commandment is: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8). Each of the colonies and states had laws dealing with the Sabbath. Even the U.S. Constitution has a provision stipulating that the president has 10 days to sign a law, Sundays excepted. This clause was found in state constitutions and thus incorporated into the U.S. Constitution.

An 1830 New York law declared that: Civil process cannot, by statute, be executed on Sunday, and a service of such process on Sunday is utterly void and subjects the officer to damages.[{17}](#) Many other states had similar laws.

During the American Revolution, George Washington issued military orders directing that the Sabbath be observed. Here is his order of May 2, 1778 at Valley Forge:

The Commander in Chief directs that Divine Service be performed every Sunday at 11 o'clock in those brigades to which there are chaplains; those which have none to attend the places of worship nearest to them. It is expected that officers of all ranks will by their attendance set an example to their men.[{18}](#)

The fifth commandment is: Honor your father and your mother (Ex. 20:12). A 1642 Connecticut law dealt with this commandment and cited additional verses:

If any child or children above sixteen years old, and of sufficient understanding shall curse or smite their normal father or mother, he or they shall be put to death; unless it can be sufficiently testified that the parents have been very unchristianly negligent in the education of such children or so provoke them by extreme and cruel correction that they have been forced thereunto to preserve themselves from death [or] maiming. Ex. 21:17, Lev. 20, Ex. 20:15.[{19}](#)

The sixth commandment is: You shall not murder (Ex. 20:13). The earliest laws in America illustrate that punishment for murder was rooted in the Ten Commandments. A 1641 Massachusetts law declared:

4. Ex. 21:12, Numb. 35:13-14, 30-31. If any person commit any willful murder, which is manslaughter committed upon

premeditated malice, hatred, or cruelty, not in a mans necessary and just defense nor by mere casualty against his will, he shall be put to death.

5. Numb. 25:20-21, Lev. 24:17. If any person slayeth another suddenly in his anger or cruelty of passion, he shall be put to death.

6. Ex. 21:14. If any person shall slay another through guile, either by poisoning or other such devilish practice, he shall be put to death.[{20}](#)

The seventh commandment is: You shall not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14). Most colonies and states had laws against adultery. Even in the late Nineteenth century, the highest criminal court in the state of Texas declared that its laws came from the Ten Commandments:

The accused would insist upon the defense that the female consented. The state would reply that she could not consent. Why? Because the law prohibits, with a penalty, the completed act. Thou shalt not commit adultery is our law as well as the law of the Bible.[{21}](#)

The eighth commandment is: You shall not steal (Ex. 20:15). All colonies and states had laws against stealing based upon the Ten Commandments. In 1940, the Supreme Court of California acknowledged:

Defendant did not acknowledge the dominance of a fundamental precept of honesty and fair dealing enjoined by the Decalogue and supported by moral concepts. Thou shalt not steal applies with equal force and propriety to the industrialist of a complex civilization as to the simple herdsman of ancient Israel.[{22}](#)

The Louisiana Supreme Court in 1951 also acknowledged: In the

Ten Commandments, the basic law of all Christian countries, is found the admonition Thou shalt not steal.

The ninth commandment is: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Ex. 20:16). The colonies and states had laws against perjury and bearing false witness. In modern times, the Oregon Supreme Court declared that: No official is above the law. Thou shalt not bear false witness is a command of the Decalogue, and that forbidden act is denounced by statute as a felony.{23}

The tenth commandment is: You shall not covet (Ex. 20:17). Many of the founders and framers saw this commandment as a foundation for others. William Penn of Pennsylvania declared that he that covets can no more be a moral man than he that steals since he does so in his mind.{24} John Adams argued that: If Thou shalt not covet and Thou shalt not steal were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society before it can be civilized or made free.{25}

Notes

1. *Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980).
2. John Paul Stevens, dissenting, *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. ___ (2005).
3. Matthew Staver, "The Ten Commandments Battle Continues To Gain Steam," *National Liberty Journal*, December 2001.
4. John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams, to His Son, on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), 61.
5. John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon* (Edinburgh: J. Ogle, 1815), 95.
6. John Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay* (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), 403.
7. George Washington, Farewell Address (Philadelphia), September 17, 1796.
8. William Holmes McGuffey, *Eclectic Reader* in D. James

Kennedy, "What's Happening to American Education" in Robert Flood, *The Rebirth of America* (Philadelphia: Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, 1986), 122.

9. John Adams, *Letters of John Adams Addressed to His Wife* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1841), 152.

10. *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 677 (1984).

11. The primary document for the following material can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/lkxnv>

12. "Articles, Laws, and Orders, Divine, Politic and Martial for the Colony of Virginia," *Colonial Origins* (1610-1611), 315-316.

13. "Massachusetts Body of Liberties," *Colonial Origins* (1641), 83.

14. "General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire," *Colonial Origins* (1680), 6.

15. Noah Webster, *Letters to a Young Gentleman*, 8.

16. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931), Vol. III, 309.

17. George C. Edwards, *Treatise of the Powers and Duties of the Justices of the Peace and the Town Officers in the State of New York* (Nashville: J.C. Mitchell and C.C. Norvell, 1834), 38, "General Rules Applicable to a Summons, Warrants of Attachment," Rev. Stat. 675.

18. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. III, 342.

19. "Capital Laws of Connecticut," *Colonial Origins* (1642), 230.

20. Ibid.

21. *Hardin v. State*, 46 S.W. 803, 808 (Tex. Crim. App. 1898).

22. *Hollywood Motion Picture Equipment Co. v. Furer*, 105 P.2d. 299, 301 (Cal. 1940).

23. *Watts v. Gerking*, 228 P. 135, 141 (Oregon 1924).

24. William Penn, *Fruits of Solitude, In Reflections and Maxims Relating To The Conduct of Human Life* (London: James Phillips, 1790), 132.

25. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United*

States (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), Vol. Vi, 9.

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South African Apartheid Leaders Apology for Racial Sins

Could the world use a bit more contrition, forgiveness and reconciliation?

Recent international news reports brought a startling example of contrition by Adriaan Vlok, former Law and Order Minister under South Africa's apartheid regime.

Robert Enright is an educational psychology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and president of the International Forgiveness Institute. He laments the fact that despite society's conflicts, "almost never do we hear public leaders declaring their belief that forgiveness can bring people together, heal their wounds, and alleviate the bitterness and resentment caused by wrongdoing." [\[1\]](#)

Here's an exception.

During the 1980s, conflict raged between South Africa's white minority Afrikaner government and the black majority opposition. One former African National Congress operative—now a government official—told me over breakfast in Cape Town that his responsibilities back then had been "to create chaos." Mutual hostility and animosity often reigned.

Bombing Campaign

In 1998, Adriaan Vlok confessed to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission that in 1988 he had engineered the bombing of the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches, a prominent opposition group. The bombing campaign also included movie theaters showing "Cry Freedom," an anti-apartheid film. {2}

I had tickets to see "Cry Freedom" in Pretoria for opening night, but the screening was cancelled. The next morning, a bomb was discovered in the theater I would have attended.

You might imagine my interest when BBC television told of Vlok's recent attempt to reconcile personally with Rev. Frank Chikane, former head of the South African Council of Churches, the group whose headquarters Vlok had bombed. Chikane, now director general of the South African president's office, reports that Vlok visited his office and gave him a Bible with these words inscribed: "I have sinned against the Lord and against you, please forgive me (John 13:15)."

An Example to Follow?

That biblical reference is Jesus' Last Supper admonition that his disciples follow his example and wash one another's feet. The inscription's words echo those of the Prodigal Son who in the famous biblical story returns home after squandering his inheritance, hopes his father will accept him as a hired hand, and says, "I have sinned against heaven and against you." {3} The father rejoices over his return, warmly receives him as son, and throws a welcome celebration.

Chikane tells what Vlok did next: "He picked up a glass of water, opened his bag, pulled out a bowl, put the water in the bowl, took out the towel, said 'you must allow me to do this' and washed my feet in my office." Chikane gratefully accepted the gesture. {4}

Vlok, a born-again Christian, later told BBC television it was time “to go to my neighbor, to the person that I’ve wronged.” He says he and his compatriots should “climb down from the throne on which we have been sitting and say to people, ‘Look, I’m sorry. I regarded myself as better than you are. I think it is time to get rid of my egoism my sense of importance, my sense of superiority.’” {5}

Startling contrition, indeed.

Forgiveness Components

The late and renowned ethicist Lewis Smedes stressed three components of forgiving others: “First, we surrender our right to get even.... Second, we rediscover the humanity of our wrongdoer...that the person who wronged us is a complex, weak, confused, fragile person, not all that different from us.... And third, we wish our wrongdoer well.” {6}

Former U.S. Senator Alan Simpson has quipped that those in Washington, DC traveling “the high road of humility” won’t encounter “heavy traffic.” {7} Too often the same holds in workplaces, neighborhoods and families. Could Vlok’s example inspire some changes?

Notes

1. Gary Thomas, “The Forgiveness Factor,” Christianity Today, January 10, 2000, 38.
2. “Botha implicated in Church bombing,” BBC News online, July 21, 1998; news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/136504.stm; accessed September 3, 2006.
3. Luke 15:21 NIV.
4. “Feet washed in apartheid apology,” BBC News online, 28 August 2006; news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5292302.stm; accessed September 3, 2006.
5. “Minister atones for race sins,” BBC News video, 3 September 2006; <http://tinyurl.com/g899l>; accessed October 4,

2006.

6. Lewis B. Smedes, "Keys to Forgiving," Christianity Today, December 3, 2001, 73; www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/015/42.73.html.

7. Harry Kreisler, "Let 'er Rip! Reflections of a Rocky Mountain Senator: Conversation with Alan K. Simpson, Former U.S. Senator, Wyoming," Conversations with History, Institute of International Studies, University of California-Berkeley, September 17, 1997; globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/Simpson/simpson1.html; accessed October 2, 2006.

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Christian Discernment

We are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. We must apply biblical principles to these social and political issues. And we must avoid the pitfalls and logical fallacies that so often accompany these issues.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Turn on a television or open a newspaper. You are immediately presented with a myriad of ethical issues. Daily we are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. Society is awash in controversial issues: abortion, euthanasia, cloning, race, drug abuse, homosexuality, gambling, pornography, and capital punishment. Life may have been simpler in a previous age, but now the rise of technology and the fall of ethical consensus have brought us to a society full of moral dilemmas.

Never has society needed biblical perspectives more to

evaluate contemporary moral issues. And yet Christians seem less equipped to address these topics from a biblical perspective. The Barna Research Group conducted a national survey of adults and concluded that only four percent of adults have a biblical worldview as the basis of their decision-making. The survey also discovered that nine percent of born again Christians have such a perspective on life.[{1}](#)

It is worth noting that what George Barna defines as a biblical worldview would be considered by most people to be basic Christian doctrine. It doesn't even include aspects of a biblical perspective on social and political issues.

Of even greater concern is the fact that most Christians do not base their beliefs on an absolute moral foundation. Biblical ethics rests on the belief in absolute truth. Yet surveys show that a minority of born again adults (forty-four percent) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (nine percent) are certain of the existence of absolute moral truth.[{2}](#) By a three-to-one margin adults say truth is always relative to the person and their situation. This perspective is even more lopsided among teenagers who overwhelmingly believe moral truth depends on the circumstances.[{3}](#)

Social scientists as well as pollsters have been warning that American society is becoming more and more dominated by moral anarchy. Writing in the early 1990s, James Patterson and Peter Kim said in *The Day America Told the Truth* that there was no moral authority in America. "We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."[{4}](#) Essentially we live in a world of moral anarchy.

So how do we begin to apply a Christian worldview to the complex social and political issues of the day? And how do we avoid falling for the latest fad or cultural trend that blows

in the wind? The following are some key principles to apply and some dangerous pitfalls to avoid.

Biblical Principles

A key biblical principle that applies to the area of bioethics is the sanctity of human life. Such verses as Psalm 139:13-16 show that God's care and concern extend to the womb. Other verses such as Jeremiah 1:5, Judges 13:7-8, Psalm 51:5 and Exodus 21:22-25 give additional perspective and framework to this principle. These principles can be applied to issues ranging from abortion to stem cell research to infanticide.

A related biblical principle involves the equality of human beings. The Bible teaches that God has made "of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26). The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority (Philippians 2). Believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people (James 2). Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). These principles apply to racial relations and our view of government.

A third principle is a biblical perspective on marriage. Marriage is God's plan and provides intimate companionship for life (Genesis 2:18). Marriage provides a context for the procreation and nurture of children (Ephesians 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:2). These principles can be applied to such diverse issues as artificial reproduction (which often introduces a third party into the pregnancy) and cohabitation (living together).

Another biblical principle involves sexual ethics. The Bible teaches that sex is to be within the bounds of marriage, as a man and the woman become one flesh (Ephesians 5:31). Paul teaches that we should "avoid sexual immorality" and learn to

control our own body in a way that is “holy and honorable” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). He admonishes us to flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). These principles apply to such issues as premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality.

A final principle concerns government and our obedience to civil authority. Government is ordained by God (Rom.13:1-7). We are to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21) and submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Even though we are to obey government, there may be certain times when we might be forced to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). These principles apply to issues such as war, civil disobedience, politics, and government.

Biblical Discernment

So how do we sort out what is true and what is false? This is a difficult proposition in a world awash in data. It underscores the need for Christians to develop discernment. This is a word that appears fairly often in the Bible (1 Samuel 25:32-33; 1 Kings 3:10-11; 4:29; Psalm 119:66; Proverbs 2:3; Daniel 2:14; Philippians 1:9 [NASB]). And with so many facts, claims, and opinions being tossed about, we all need to be able to sort through what is true and what is false.

Colossians 2:8 says, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” We need to develop discernment so that we are not taken captive by false ideas. Here are some things to watch for:

1. Equivocation – the use of vague terms. Someone can start off using language we think we understand and then veer off into a new meaning. Most of us are well aware of the fact that religious cults are often guilty of this. A cult member might say that he believes in salvation by grace. But what he really

means is that you have to join his cult and work your way toward salvation. Make people define the vague terms they use.

This tactic is used frequently in bioethics. Proponents of embryonic stem cell research often will not acknowledge the distinction between adult stem cells and embryonic stem cells. Those trying to legalize cloning will refer to it as “somatic cell nuclear transfer.” Unless you have a scientific background, you will not know that it is essentially the same thing.

2. Card stacking – the selective use of evidence. Don’t jump on the latest bandwagon and intellectual fad without checking the evidence. Many advocates are guilty of listing all the points in their favor while ignoring the serious points against it.

The major biology textbooks used in high school and college never provide students with evidence against evolution. Jonathan Wells, in his book *Icons of Evolution*, shows that the examples that are used in most textbooks are either wrong or misleading.^[5] Some of the examples are known frauds (such as the Haeckel embryos) and continue to show up in textbooks decades after they were shown to be fraudulent.

Another example would be the Y2K fears. Anyone who was concerned about the potential catastrophe in 2000 need only read any of the technical computer journals in the 1990s to see that no computer expert was predicting what the Y2K fear mongers were predicting at the time.

3. Appeal to authority – relying on authority to the exclusion of logic and evidence. Just because an expert says it, that doesn’t necessarily make it true. We live in a culture that worships experts, but not all experts are right. Hiram’s Law says: “If you consult enough experts, you can confirm any opinion.”

Those who argue that global warming is caused by human activity often say that “the debate in the scientific community is over.” But an Internet search of critics of the theories behind global warming will show that there are many scientists with credentials in climatology or meteorology who have questions about the theory. It is not accurate to say that the debate is over when the debate still seems to be taking place.

4. Ad hominem – Latin for “against the man.” People using this tactic attack the person instead of dealing with the validity of their argument. Often the soundness of an argument is inversely proportional to the amount of ad hominem rhetoric. If there is evidence for the position, proponents usually argue the merits of the position. When evidence is lacking, they attack the critics.

Christians who want public libraries to filter pornography from minors are accused of censorship. Citizens who want to define marriage as between one man and one woman are called bigots. Scientists who criticize evolution are subjected to withering attacks on their character and scientific credentials. Scientists who question global warming are compared to holocaust deniers.

5. Straw man argument – making your opponent’s argument seem so ridiculous that it is easy to attack and knock down. Liberal commentators say that evangelical Christians want to implement a religious theocracy in America. That’s not true. But the hyperbole works to marginalize Christian activists who believe they have a responsibility to speak to social and political issues within society.

Those who stand for moral principles in the area of bioethics often see this tactic used against them. They hear from proponents of physician assisted suicide that pro-life advocates don’t care about the suffering of the terminally ill. Proponents of embryonic stem cell research level the same

charge by saying that pro-life people don't care that these new medical technologies could alleviate the suffering of many with intractable diseases. Nothing could be further from the truth.

6. Sidestepping – dodging the issue by changing the subject. Politicians do this in press conferences by not answering the question asked by the reporter, but instead answering a question they wish someone had asked. Professors sometimes do that when a student points out an inconsistency or a leap in logic.

Ask a proponent of abortion whether the fetus is human and you are likely to see this tactic in action. He or she might start talking about a woman's right to choose or the right of women to control their own bodies. Perhaps you will hear a discourse on the need to tolerate various viewpoints in a pluralistic society. But you probably won't get a straight answer to an important question.

7. Red herring – going off on a tangent (from the practice of luring hunting dogs off the trail with the scent of a herring fish). Proponents of embryonic stem cell research rarely will talk about the morality of destroying human embryos. Instead they will go off on a tangent and talk about the various diseases that could be treated and the thousands of people who could be helped with the research.

Be on the alert when someone in a debate changes the subject. They may want to argue their points on more familiar ground, or they may know they cannot win their argument on the relevant issue at hand.

In conclusion, we have discussed some of the key biblical principles we should apply to our consideration and debate about social and political issues. We have talked about the sanctity of human life and the equality of human beings. We have discussed a biblical perspective on marriage and on

sexual ethics. And we have also talked about a biblical perspective on government and civil authority.

We have also spent some time talking about the importance of developing biblical discernment and looked at many of the logical fallacies that are frequently used in arguing against a biblical perspective on many of the social and political issues of our day.

Every day, it seems, we are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. As Christians it is important to consider these biblical principles and consistently apply them to these issues. It is also important that we develop discernment and learn to recognize these tactics. We are called to develop discernment as we tear down false arguments raised up against the knowledge of God. By doing this we will learn to take every thought captive to the obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Notes

1. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," The Barna Update (Ventura, CA), 1 Dec. 2003.
2. "The Year's Most Intriguing Findings, From Barna Research Studies," The Barna Update (Ventura, CA), 12 Dec. 2000.
3. "Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings," The Barna Update (Ventura, CA), 12 Feb. 2002.
4. James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991).
5. Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2000).

Ethics and Economics

Introduction

What does the Bible have to say about economics? As we will see, the Bible does provide a firm moral foundation for economics. Previously we have talked about what the Bible has to say about [economics](#).^{1} In this article we will discuss the ethical implications of economics, drawing many principles from the book *Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves* by John E. Stapleford.^{2}

We should begin by establishing that there is a moral aspect to economics. This question was an important one a few centuries ago, but today economics is usually taught without any real consideration of an ethical component.

Paul says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). He adds that this will enable the people of God to be equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). Certainly that would include economic works.

James calls on believers to be “doers of the word, and not merely hearers” of the word (James 1:22). This command applies to more than just our church life and family life. This would apply to doing good works in the economic realm.

There are obvious moral implications to issues often discussed in relation to economic issues. For example, in previous radio programs we have talked about the morality of such topics as [drugs](#), [pornography](#), and [gambling](#). We have also talked about the importance of Christians learning to be [good stewards of the environment](#). Each of these topics has an economic component to it, and thus implies that we should apply ethics to economics.

Legalizing drugs has economic consequences, but it also has moral consequences as well.

In previous programs, we have talked about the pornography plague.[{3}](#) The Bible teaches that we are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). We should, therefore, flee the temptation of pornography (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Tim 2:22).

We have in previous programs also talked about what the Bible has to say about the subject of gambling.[{4}](#) The Bible teaches that we are to work by the sweat of our brow (Gen. 3:19). This is God's command as well as an opportunity. Work can be fulfilling to us as we accomplish a task and is an essential element of human worth and dignity. Gambling undercuts the work ethic by emphasizing greed (Rom. 1:29), materialism, laziness (Prov. 19:15), and covetousness (Ex. 20:17).

Private Property

What does the Bible say about property, and especially about private property? First, the Bible clearly teaches that everything in the world belongs to the Lord. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

At the same time, the Bible also teaches that we are given dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:28). We are accountable to God for our stewardship of the resources.

Because God owns it all (Ps. 24:1), no one owns property in perpetuity. But the Bible does grant private property rights to individuals. One of the Ten Commandments prohibits stealing, thus approving of private property rights. The book of Exodus establishes the rights of property owners and the liabilities of those who violate those rights.[{5}](#) Financial restitution (Ex. 22) must be made to property owners in cases of theft or neglect. Physical force is allowed to protect

property (Ex. 22:2). Lost animals are to be returned, even when they belong to an enemy (Ex. 23:4). Removing landmarks that protect property is clearly forbidden (Deut. 19:14; 27:17; Job 24:2; Prov. 22:28; Hos 5:10).

Some Christians have suggested that the New Testament rejects the idea of private property because the book of Acts teaches that the early Christians held property in common. But this communal sharing in the New Testament was voluntary. Acts 2:44-47 says, "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The early Christians did not reject the idea of private property. Notice that they still retained private property rights until they voluntarily gave up those rights to help other believers in Jerusalem. This was a specific leading of the Holy Spirit to meet the increasing needs of the growing New Testament church.

We can see that they retained property rights in the actions of Ananias and Sapphira. Their sin was not that they retained control of some of their property but that they lied about it. Acts 5:4: "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Also notice that Paul called for voluntary charity toward believers in Jerusalem when he called New Testament believers to give to the needs of those within the church. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 says, "For this is not for the ease of others and for

your affliction, but by way of equality—at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.’”

Work

What is the place of work in economic activity? First, we see that God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to work. God commanded them to work it and take care of it (Gen. 2:15-17). They were given an explicit command to exercise stewardship over the creation.

However, when sin entered the world, God’s curse brought toil, sweat, and struggle to work (Gen. 3:17-19). But we still maintain the responsibility to work the land and cultivate it. We are also given the privilege by God of enjoying the earth and deriving profit and benefit from what it might produce (Gen. 9:1-3).

Second, we are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27), so we can find work rewarding and empowering. At the same time, we should also be held accountable for the work we do or fail to do. Paul says, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10, NIV).

Third, there is also a satisfaction in work. It not only satisfies a basic human need but it also is a privilege provided by the hand of God. Ecclesiastes 2:24 says, “There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.”

Fourth, we are to work unto the Lord. Paul admonishes believers to “work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men” (Col. 3:23). He also says, “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the

flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord' (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

We also learn from Scripture that without God's involvement in our work, human labor is futile. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." God's blessings come to us through our labors.

Finally, with work there should also be rest. The law of the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11) and the other Old Testament provisions for feasts and rest demonstrate the importance of rest. In the New Testament also we see that Jesus set a pattern for rest (Mark 6:45-47; Luke 6:12) in His ministry. Believers are to work for the Lord and His Kingdom, but they must also avoid being workaholics and take time to rest.

Government

What is the role of government in the economic arena? In previous radio programs, we have discussed the role of government in society. [\[6\]](#)

First, Christians are commanded to obey government (Rom. 13:1) and submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13-17). We are called to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21). However, we are not to render total submission. There may be a time in which Christians may be called to disobey government leaders who have set themselves in opposition to divine law (Rom. 13:1-5; John 19:11). We are to obey civil

authorities (Rom.13:5) in order to avoid anarchy and chaos, but there may be times when we may be forced to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Second, we understand that because of the fall (Gen. 3), all have a sin nature (Rom. 3:23). Government must therefore administer justice in the political and economic realm. It must also protect us against aggression as well as provide for public works (1 Kings 10:9).

As we have discussed in previous articles, the reality of sin nature dictates that we not allow a political concentration of power. Governmental power should be limited with appropriate checks and balances. Government also should not be used in a coercive way to attempt to change individuals. We should not accept the idea that the state can transform people from the outside. Only the gospel can change people from the inside and so that they become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).

In his book *Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves*, John E. Stapleford sets forth many functions of government in the economic realm. Government must ensure justice in the following ways:

- “Weights and scales are to be honest, a full measure (shaken down) is to be given (Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:15; Prov. 20:23; Lk. 6:38), and currency is not be debased by inflationary monetary policy or other means (e.g., mixing lead with silver).”[\[7\]](#)
- Procedural justice requires that contracts and commitments be honored (Lev. 19:13).
- Government must also ensure justice when people are cheated or swindled. In these cases, the cost of restoration should be borne by the guilty or negligent party (Ex. 21:33-36; 22:5-8, 10-15). Government should also deal with those who give a false accusation (Deut. 19:16-19).
- Government should also prevent economic discrimination. This

would apply to those of different economic class (James 2:1-4) as well as to those of different sex, race, and religious background (Gal. 3:26-29). Government can exert a great influence on the economy and therefore should use its regulatory power to protect against discrimination.

- That being said, the primary function of government is to set the rules and provide a means of redress. The free market should be allowed to function with government providing the necessary economic boundaries and protections. Once this is done in the free enterprise system, individuals are free to use their economic choices in a free market.

Conclusion

What is the connection between economics and ethics? The fact that we even refer to these as separate issues is an indication of the times in which we live. In the past, ethics and economics were interconnected.

Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, addressed economic issues in a moral and theological way. He wouldn't just ask about prices and markets, but also asked the fundamental question, What is a just price?

John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* also devoted whole sections to government and economics. These were issues that he believed Christian theologians should address.

Today if moral questions about economics are discussed at all, they might be discussed in a class on economic theory. While we might hope that such discussions might surface in a seminary, usually those classes focus on theological questions rather than economic questions that deserve a moral reflection.

We have shown that economic issues often have a moral component. You can't just talk about the economic consequences

of legalizing drugs, promoting pornography, or promoting gambling without dealing with the moral consequences.

We have also seen that the Bible has a great deal to say about work. Through the creation and the fall, human beings have a right and an obligation to work.

We find that the Bible also warns us of the consequences of idleness. Proverbs 24:30-34 says, "I passed by the field of the sluggard and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles and its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest, Then your poverty will come as a robber and your want like an armed man."

People are supposed to work and should be held accountable for the work they do or fail to do. Paul says, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10, NIV).

The Bible also teaches that God has endowed individuals with different gifts and talents (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12). Even within the body of Christ, there are different members even though we are all one body in Christ.

When these differences in gifts and abilities are expressed within a free market, their respective value in terms of supply and demand means that they will receive different remuneration (1 Tim. 5:18). So it is not surprising that there are economic distinctions among individuals. Proverbs 22:2 says, "The rich and the poor have a common bond, The Lord is the maker of them all."

Ethics and economics are related, and Christians would be wise to begin exploring the moral implications of economic behavior and the impact it is having on them and society.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, "A Biblical View of Economics," Probe Ministries, 2001, www.probe.org/a-biblical-view-of-economics/
2. John E. Stapleford, *Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).
3. Kerby Anderson, "Pornography," Probe Ministries, 1997 (revised 2008), www.probe.org/pornography/
4. Kerby Anderson, "Gambling," Probe Ministries, 2005, www.probe.org/gambling/
5. Stapleford, 63.
6. Kerby Anderson, "Christian View of Government and Law," Probe Ministries, 1999, www.probe.org/christian-view-of-government-and-law/
7. Stapleford, 86.

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Education Myths

Don Closson offers 5 myths about education commonly held by the American public, from a Christian perspective. These myths include neutrality, more money is the solution, teachers are underpaid and school choice harms public education.

The Myth of Neutrality

Most of us assume that those involved with our public schools have at least one thing in common: the belief that the kids come first. This assumption allows us to believe that a kind of neutrality exists among the various participating parties. Since they all have the best interests of our children in mind, we can trust their motives and their actions. It also leads some to believe that there is no place for politics in schools; again, thanks to the myth of neutrality.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that no such neutrality exists. Our schools are highly political and are a battle ground for the various groups hoping to cash in on the huge amount of money Americans spend on public schools every year. Politics is all about deciding how our tax monies will be distributed, who gets what resources, when, and how. In the 2003-04 school year, America spent over \$500 billion on public schools with about 60 percent of that amount going to actual classroom expenses. But even though we spend more on public education than any other industrialized nation, our schools continue to fail to adequately educate those who are most in need of a good education: our inner city students.

Despite being in an almost constant state of reform, the school districts in our largest cities perform poorly. In New York schools, only 18 percent of children receive a Regents Diploma after four years of high school. Those numbers fall to 10 percent for black and Hispanic students. Yet year after year, regardless of their performance teachers, principals, and central office staff cash their paychecks. Teachers unions, textbook publishers, and even colleges and universities that earn millions training and retraining teachers, thrive on their connection to the annual education budgets of our nation's cities. As New York Post columnist Bob McManus once put it: "This is the New York City public school system, after all, where power comes first and kids come last—but where money matters most of all."[\[1\]](#)

The entrenched bureaucracy that has grown up around the education industry knows how to protect itself and its link to the billions of dollars being spent. The lobbying efforts of teachers unions, national organizations representing school board members and superintendents, as well as the textbook companies all fight for influence in Washington and state capitols.

It must be said that there are many teachers, principals, school board members and countless others involved with our

schools who are diligently and conscientiously working to educate our nation's children. However, the way that our school systems are organized virtually guarantees that politics will reign supreme when important decisions are made on behalf of our most needy students.

In this article, we take a look at five myths about public education held by the American public.

The “If Only We Had More Money” Myth

Rarely do representatives of our nation's teachers unions, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers write about deficiencies in our public schools without blaming them on a lack of adequate funding. The “we need more money” mantra has been heard so often that it is ingrained in the minds of most Americans and goes unquestioned by most. But is this always the best explanation for the failure of our schools to educate well? In fact, inadequate funding is only one of many possible reasons for poor performance.

The U.S. has been increasing per pupil spending consistently for the last fifty years. From 1945 to 2001, inflation adjusted spending has grown from \$1,214 per student to \$8,745. Measuring increases in performance over that period is more difficult. We do have good data from the early 1970s when the National Assessment of Educational Progress began. Unfortunately, scores for twelfth grade students have remained essentially flat in reading, math, and science over that time period, and graduation rates have changed little. Many studies have concluded that although we have increased our educational spending significantly there has been little or no significant improvement in our schools.

Various explanations have been given for why more money hasn't resulted in improved student performance. One of the most

popular is that much of the increase in funding has gone to services for disabled students and special education programs. The special ed complaint is answered by the fact that we don't have a higher percentage of disabled students; rather, we are choosing to label students disabled who in the past would have been called slow or under-average learners. The percentage of students with severe disabilities has actually remained level between 1976 and 2001, and the number of students classified as mentally retarded has actually declined.^{2} Regardless of what label we give these students, increased dollars spent should result in improved performance, but it hasn't.

Some argue that a smaller fraction of every budget dollar actually goes to classroom instruction, but whose fault is that? Others complain that students are harder to teach today due to the effects of poverty, greater healthcare needs, and the fact that they are more likely to speak a foreign language than in the past. However, childhood poverty rates have held fairly steady since the late 70s and has been declining since 1992.^{3} One of the best indicators of health care for children, the child mortality rate, has improved 66 percent in the last thirty years, so it is hard to argue that today's children have poorer health care. The only argument that holds up is that more students have a native language other than English. But this factor alone does not explain why the huge increases in spending have not resulted in better performance.

Teachers Are Badly Underpaid

Another myth is that students perform poorly because teachers are severely underpaid.

Every few years we are warned about a looming shortage of teachers or that teachers cannot afford to live in the cities in which they teach, resulting in either inferior teachers or large classes. For instance, during the internet boom of the 90s, it was feared that teachers could not afford to live in

Silicon Valley due to the high cost of real estate. But a number of years later, the San Jose Mercury analyzed housing data from that period and discovered that there was no crisis. In fact, 95 percent of the teachers who taught there lived there, and about two thirds owned their own homes.[{4}](#) In fact, teachers fared better than software engineers, network administrators, and accountants when it came to home ownership.[{5}](#)

Others argue that the best and the brightest stay away from teaching because salary rates compare poorly to similar professions. But most researchers compare teachers' annual salary with the annual salary of other professions without taking into account the one hundred eighty day work year for the typical teacher. Adjusting the average teacher's annual salary of \$44,600 to a full-time equivalent brings it to \$65,440. This amount represents a respectable middle class salary by anyone's calculation.

Another way to look at the issue is on an hourly basis. In 2002, high school teachers made an average of \$31.01 per hour. This compares to \$30 per hour for chemists, \$29.76 per hour for mechanical engineers, \$28.07 per hour for biologists, and \$24.57 per hour for nurses.[{6}](#) Doctors, lawyers, dentists, and others do make more per hour than teachers, but their education is far more rigorous, and they often require long internships or residency obligations.

Even when one compares benefits other than income teachers fare well. One researcher discovered that half of all teachers pay nothing for single-person health care coverage, while the same is true for less than one-quarter of private-sector professionals and technical employees.[{7}](#) Another type of employment benefit that teachers enjoy is job security. It becomes remarkably difficult to fire a teacher who has been employed by a school district for three or more years. Tenure protection for public school teachers give them almost unparalleled job security compared to professionals in the

private sector.

The reason that teaching does not attract the best and the brightest is more likely tied to the way that individual teachers salaries are determined than the average amount paid. A recent study found that the inability of teachers to make more money by performing better than their peers is the main cause for the declining academic abilities of those entering the field.[{8}](#) Talented people want to know that they can earn more if they work harder than others around them.

School Choice Harms Public Education

Another controversy that has generated myths of its own is the debate over educational choice or voucher programs. There are two popular misconceptions: first, that research has been inconclusive regarding the benefits of voucher programs, and second, that educational choice damages public education.

Whenever the topic of school vouchers comes up in major media outlets the consistent message is that research on their benefit to students is mixed at best. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Time* magazine have all sounded the same warning. *Time* wrote, "Do vouchers help boost the test scores of children who use them? Researchers are trying to find out, but the evidence so far is inconclusive."[{9}](#) Why would publications and even researchers equivocate on the benefits of vouchers? There are a number of possible reasons. Ideology can play a role. If one has come out against vouchers it's difficult to affirm them regardless what the research says. Financial interests might also play a role if supporting vouchers might result in the loss of funding or readership.

The most accurate way to research the impact of voucher programs is to perform random-assignment studies.[{10}](#) There have been eight such studies, and all of them found a positive effect or advantage in academic progress for students who

received a voucher to attend a private school. Seven of the eight findings were statistically significant. The question left to researchers is to determine the magnitude and scope of the positive effect and to establish the conditions that result in the greatest amount of progress.

The second myth; that voucher programs damage nearby public schools, is also contrary to the evidence. Although not all voucher programs are large enough to impact the public schools nearby, those programs that have the potential to do so have been studied. The consistent finding is that the competition caused by vouchers always results in an increase in public school performance. For instance, as a result of Florida's A-Plus voucher program, "public schools whose students were offered vouchers produced significantly greater year-to-year test score gains than other Florida public schools."[11](#) Schools that faced competition experienced a 5.9 percentile point advantage on the Stanford-9 math test over schools not facing competition.[12](#) Other studies showed that even the threat of future competition produced public school improvement.

Harvard economist Caroline Hoxby studied the impact that the oldest voucher program in the country has had on student performance in Milwaukee's public schools. Again, she discovered that "schools exposed to greater voucher competition made significantly larger test score gains than schools less exposed to voucher competition."[13](#)

Studies in other states have supported the benefit of competition as well. Vouchers offered in Maine, Vermont's "tuitioning" programs, and charter schools in Arizona and Michigan have all prompted better performance in nearby public schools.

Public Education Doesn't Matter

Our final American education myth is often held by conservative Christians. It is the belief that public education doesn't matter. The argument goes something like this: the public educational establishment has adopted a completely naturalistic worldview. And, as a result, it is hostile towards anything Christian, rendering it morally bankrupt.

While it is true that our public education system is primarily built upon the assumptions of naturalism, and that it is often hostile to both individual Christians and Christian thought. It does not follow that Christians, even those who chose to home school or place their children in a private Christian school, should be indifferent to the fate of children in our public schools.

Perhaps we can compare our situation to that of the Israelites while in captivity in Babylon. Although the culture was alien and often hostile, as ours can be today, and it would have been tempting to undermine its institutions and seek its destruction, God communicated via the prophet Jeremiah that the Jews were to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."[\[14\]](#)

Out of love for our neighbors and their children, we should desire to see them receive the best education possible. One of the earliest justifications for public education was that children needed to become literate in order to understand the Bible and apply it to their lives. In 1647, Massachusetts passed the Old Deluder Act which argued that public education was necessary because Satan attempted to keep men in ignorance of the Scriptures by keeping them from the true sense and meaning of the text. If they could read it for themselves they would be less susceptible to deception. The same need is present today. A literate society is not necessarily more open

to the Bible and its message, but illiteracy places a large gulf between an interested individual and God's revelation.

Another reason to not lose interest in the funding and functioning of our public schools is because we continue to pay for them. If we are to be good stewards of the monies granted us by God, we cannot ignore perhaps the largest single government expense. The amount of money spent on public education in America is massive by any standard, and the potential for abuse and misuse is equally large.

Into the near future, most American children, Christian and otherwise, will be educated in our public schools. Misinformation or political spin should not be allowed to shape our opinions or our decisions about education in the voting booth. The parties involved are not neutral. Although many have the best interests of the children at heart, power and money also play a major role in educational policy making.

Notes

1. Joe Williams, *Cheating Our Kids* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7.
2. Jay P. Green, *Education Myths* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 24.
3. Ibid., 26.
4. Ibid., 72.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 79.
7. Ibid., 82.
8. Ibid., 83.
9. Ibid., 147.
10. See chapter 13 of *Education Myths* for an explanation.
11. *Education Myths*, 170.
12. Ibid., 172.
13. Ibid., 173.
14. Jeremiah 29:7

Ten Commandments in America

June 27, 2005

The Supreme Court has spoken and has essentially stuttered. How any sane person can make any sense of their two rulings on the Ten Commandments is beyond me. A divided court struck down displays in two Kentucky courthouses, but ruled a Ten Commandments monument on state government land in Texas was acceptable.

So why was a six foot granite monument on the grounds of the Texas Capitol constitutional? Perhaps they saw it acceptable because it is one of seventeen historical displays on the twenty-two-acre lot. So five justices determined it to be a constitutional tribute to the nation's legal and religious history.

On the other hand, what is unconstitutional are copies of the Ten Commandments in Kentucky courthouses hanging alongside documents such as the Bill of Rights, the Star-Spangled Banner, and a version of the Congressional Record declaring 1983 the Year of the Bible. Anyone looking for a clear line of constitutionality will not find it in this confused muddle of court cases.

And anyone who doesn't think the members of the court are openly hostile to religion need only read just a few lines of the opinion rendered by Justice John Paul Stevens. He couldn't even accept the Texas Ten Commandments monument placed there over forty years ago by a secular institution. The monument is not a work of art and does not refer to any event in the

history of the state, he wrote. The message transmitted by Texas chosen display is quite plain: This state endorses the divine code of the Judeo-Christian God.

Fortunately, other justices noted that one monument among many others is hardly an endorsement. You can stop to read it, you can ignore it, or you can walk around it. Chief Justice William Rehnquist argued that the monument's placement on the grounds among secular monuments was passive, rather than confrontational. But that logic seemed lost on many of the justices.

The Supreme Court's inconsistency in this case shows that many of the justices have clearly lost their way. Justice Antonin Scalia addressed the lack of any clear principle in this case in his scholarly dissent. He declared, "What distinguishes the rule of law from the dictatorship of a shifting Supreme Court majority is the absolutely indispensable requirement that judicial opinions be grounded in consistently applied principle."

In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled against the posting of the Ten Commandments in the public schools in the case of *Stone v. Graham*. They ruled that the preeminent purpose for posting the Ten Commandments on schoolroom walls is plainly religious in nature. At least in 1980 we knew where the court stood on posting religious symbols in public places. This time they confused an already complex issue. According to Justice David Souter, the liberal justices were trying to establish official religious neutrality.

Justice Scalia listed various ways in which higher beings are invoked in public life, from "so help me God" in inaugural oaths to the prayer that opens the Supreme Court's sessions. He asked, "With all of this reality (and much more) staring it in the face, how can the court possibly assert that the First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality? Perhaps trying to mandate neutrality is the problem."

When we look at the Founding Fathers we see they were anything but neutral when it came to addressing the influence of the Ten Commandments on our republic. For example, twelve of the original thirteen colonies incorporated the entire Ten Commandments into their civil and criminal codes.[{1}](#)

John Quincy Adams stated, "The law given from Sinai was a civil and municipal [code] as well as a moral and religious code. These are laws essential to the existence of men in society and most of which have been enacted by every nation which ever professed any code of laws." He added that "Vain indeed would be the search among the writings of [secular history] . . . to find so broad, so complete and so solid a basis of morality as this decalogue lays down."[{2}](#)

Notes

1. Matthew Staver, *The Ten Commandments Battle Continues To Gain Steam*, *National Liberty Journal*, December 2001.
2. John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams, to His Son, on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), 61.
3. George Washington, Farewell Address (Philadelphia), September 17, 1796.
4. William Holmes McGuffey, *Eclectic Reader* in D. James Kenney, *Whats Happening to American Education in Robert Flood, The Rebirth of America* (Philadelphia: Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, 1986), 122.

On September 19, 1796, in his Farewell Address, President George Washington said, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."[{3}](#)

William Holmes McGuffey, considered the Schoolmaster of the Nation, once said, "The Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus are not only basic but plenary."[{4}](#)

It is more than just a little ironic that the Supreme Court

that ruled against posting the Ten Commandments in public places actually has its own display of the Ten Commandments. Engraved in the stone above the head of the Chief Justice are the Ten Commandments with the great American eagle protecting them. Moses is included among the great lawgivers in the sculpture relief on the east portico. And sessions begin with the invocation, "God save the United States and this honorable court."

So what can Christians do? First, we should be in prayer about this important issue and pray for future Supreme Court justices who will someday replace those who made these rulings.

Second, we should express our opinions by talking to friends, writing a letter to the editor, and educating people around us about the importance of the Ten Commandments in America.

Third, we should encourage Congress to pass the Constitutional Restoration Act which uses Article III, Section 2 of the Constitution to limit the appellate jurisdiction of the federal courts in areas like the Pledge of Allegiance and the Ten Commandments. Congress has the power to remove power from judges.

Judges who use their power to remove the Ten Commandments should have their power removed from them. Passing this legislation will accomplish that purpose.

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Separation of Church and

State

Wall of Separation

When Thomas Jefferson first used the phrase “wall of separation,” it is certain that he never would have anticipated the controversy that surrounds that term two centuries later. The metaphor has become so powerful that more Americans are more familiar with Jefferson’s phrase than with the actual language of the Constitution.[\[1\]](#)

In one sense, the idea of separation of church and state is an accurate description of what must take place between the two institutions. History is full of examples (e.g., the Inquisition) of the dangers that arise when the institutions of church and state become too intertwined.

But the contemporary concept of separation of church and state goes far beyond the recognition that the two institutions must be separate. The current version of this phrase has come to mean that there should be a complete separation between religion and public life.

At the outset, we should state the obvious: the phrase “separation of church and state” is not in the Constitution. Although that should be an obvious statement, it is amazing how many citizens (including lawyers and politicians) do not know that simple fact.

Since the phrase is not in the Constitution and not even significantly discussed by the framers (e.g., *The Federalist Papers*), it is open to wide interpretation and misinterpretation. The only clear statement about religion in the Constitution can be found in the First Amendment and we will look at its legislative history later in this article.

Thomas Jefferson used the phrase “separation of church and

state” when he wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802. Then the phrase slipped into obscurity. In 1947, Justice Hugo Black revived it in the case of *Everson v. Board of Education*. He wrote that the First Amendment “was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and State.” He added that this wall “must be kept high and impregnable.”^{2}

The wall metaphor revived by Justice Black has been misused ever since. For example, the wall of separation has been used to argue that nearly any religious activity (prayer, Bible reading, moment of silence) and any religious symbol (cross, creche, Ten Commandments, etc.) is impermissible outside of church and home. Most of these activities and symbols have been stripped from public arenas. As we will see, it doesn’t appear that Jefferson intended anything of the sort with his metaphor.

It’s also worth noting that six of the thirteen original states had official, state-sponsored churches. Some states (Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and South Carolina) even refused to ratify the new Constitution unless it included a prohibition of federal involvement in the state churches.

History of the Phrase (part one)

So what was the meaning of “separation of church and state” and how has it changed? Some history is in order.

The presidential campaign of 1800 was one of the most bitterly contested presidential elections in American history. Republican Thomas Jefferson defeated Federalist John Adams (who served as Vice-President under George Washington). During the campaign, the Federalists attacked Jefferson’s religious beliefs, arguing that he was an “atheist” and an “infidel.” Some were so fearful of a Jefferson presidency, they buried their family Bibles or hid them in wells fearing that

President Jefferson would confiscate them.^{3} Timothy Dwight (President of Yale College) even warned a few years before that if Jefferson were elected, “we may see the Bible cast into a bonfire.”^{4} These concerns were unwarranted since Jefferson had written a great deal in the previous two decades about his support of religious liberty.

In the midst of these concerns, the loyal Republicans of the Danbury Baptist Association wrote to the president congratulating him on his election and his dedication to religious liberty. President Jefferson used the letter as an opportunity to explain why he did not declare days of public prayer and thanksgiving as Washington and Adams had done so before him.

In his letter to them on New Year’s Day 1802, Jefferson agreed with their desire for religious freedom saying that religious faith was a matter between God and man. Jefferson also affirmed his belief in the First Amendment and went on to say that he believed it denied Congress (or the President) the right to dictate religious beliefs. He argued that the First Amendment denied the Federal government this power, “thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.”

It appears that Jefferson’s phrase actually came from the 1800 election. Federalist ministers spoke against Jefferson “often from their pulpits, excoriating his infidelity and deism.”^{5} Republicans therefore argued that clergymen should not preach about politics but maintain a separation between the two.

We might add that a century and a half before Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptists, Roger Williams erected a “hedge or wall of separation” in a tract he wrote in 1644. Williams used the metaphor to illustrate the need to protect the church from the world, otherwise the garden of the church would turn into a wilderness.^{6} While it might be possible that Jefferson borrowed the metaphor from Roger Williams, it appears that Jefferson was not familiar with Williams’ use of the

metaphor. [{7}](#)

Jefferson used his letter to the Danbury Baptists to make a key point about his executive power. In the letter, he argued that the president had no authority to proclaim a religious holiday. He believed that governmental authority belonged only to individual states. Essentially, Jefferson's wall of separation applied only to the national government.

History of the Phrase (part two)

Although the Danbury letter was published in newspapers, the "wall of separation" metaphor never gained much attention and essentially slipped into obscurity. In 1879 the metaphor entered the lexicon of American constitutional law in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The court stated that Jefferson's Danbury letter "may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effects of the [First] Amendment thus secured." [{8}](#) Although it was mentioned in this opinion, there is good evidence to believe that Jefferson's metaphor "played no role" in the Supreme Court's decision. [{9}](#)

In 1947, Justice Hugo L. Black revived Jefferson's wall metaphor in the case of *Everson v. Board of Education*. He applied this phrase in a different way from Thomas Jefferson. Black said that the First Amendment "was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and State." He added that this wall "must be kept high and impregnable." [{10}](#)

Daniel Dreisbach, author of *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State*, shows that Black's wall differs from Jefferson's wall. "Although Justice Black credited the third president with building the 'wall of separation,' the barrier raised in *Everson* differs from Jefferson's in function and location." [{11}](#)

The wall erected by Justice Black is "high and impregnable."

On the other hand, Jefferson “occasionally lowered the ‘wall’ if there were extenuating circumstances. For example, he approved treaties with Indian tribes which underwrote the ‘propagation of the Gospel among the Heathen.’”[{12}](#)

There is also a difference in the location of the two walls. Whereas Jefferson’s “wall” explicitly separated the institutions of church and state, Black’s wall, more expansively, separates religion and all civil government. Moreover, Jefferson’s “wall” separated church and the federal government only. By incorporating the First Amendment nonestablishment provision into the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Black’s wall separates religion and civil government at all levels—federal, state, and local.[{13}](#)

Jefferson’s metaphor was a statement about federalism (the relationship between the federal government and the states). But Black turned it into a wall between religion and government (which because of the incorporation of the Fourteenth Amendment could also be applied to state and local governments).

First Amendment

How did we get the wording of the First Amendment? Once we understand its legislative history, we can understand the perspective of those who drafted the Bill of Rights.[{14}](#)

James Madison (architect of the Constitution) is the one who first proposed the wording of what became the First Amendment. On June 8, 1789 Madison proposed the following:

“The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext, infringed.”

The representatives debated this wording and then turned the task over to a committee consisting of Madison and ten other House members. They proposed a new version that read:

"No religion shall be established by law, nor shall the equal rights of conscience be infringed."

This wording was debated. During the debate, Madison explained "he apprehended the meaning of the words to be, that Congress should not establish a religion, and enforce the legal observation of it by law, nor compel men to worship God in any manner contrary to their conscience."

Representative Benjamin Huntington complained that the proposed wording might "be taken in such latitude as to be extremely hurtful to the cause of religion." So Madison suggested inserting the word "national" before the word "religion." He believed that this would reduce the fears of those concerned over the establishment of a national religion. After all, some were concerned America might drift in the direction of Europe where countries have a state-sponsored religion that citizens were often compelled to accept and even fund.

Representative Gerry balked at the word "national," because, he argued, the Constitution created a federal government, not a national one. So Madison withdrew his latest proposal, but assured Congress his reference to a "national religion" had to do with a national religious establishment, not a national government.

A week later, the House again altered the wording to this:

"Congress shall make no law establishing religion, or to prevent the free exercise thereof, or to infringe the rights of conscience."

Meanwhile, the Senate debated other versions of the same amendment and on Sept. 3, 1789, came up with this wording:

“Congress shall make no law establishing articles of faith or a mode of worship, or prohibiting the free exercise of religion.”

The House didn't like the Senate's changes and called for a conference, from which emerged the wording ultimately included in the Bill of Rights:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

As we can see, Congress was attempting to prevent the establishment of a national religion or a national church with their drafting of the First Amendment.

Separation, Sponsorship and Accommodation

How should the government relate to the church? Should there be a separation of church and state? Essentially there are three answers to these questions: separation, sponsorship, and accommodation.

At one end of the spectrum of opinion is strict separation of church and state. Proponents of this position advocate the complete separation of any religious activity (prayer, Bible reading) and any religious symbol (cross, Ten Commandments) from government settings. Richard John Neuhaus called this “the naked public square” because religious values are stripped from the public arena.[{15}](#)

Proponents of this view would oppose any direct or indirect benefit to religion or religious organizations from the government. This would include opposition to tuition tax credits, education vouchers, and government funding of faith-based organizations.

At the other end of the spectrum would be sponsorship of religious organizations. Proponents would support school

prayer, Bible reading in public schools, and the posting of the Ten Commandments in classrooms and public places. Proponents would also support tuition tax credits, education vouchers, and funding of faith-based organizations.

Between these two views is accommodation. Proponents argue that government should not sponsor religion but neither should it be hostile to religion. Government can accommodate religious activities. Government should provide protection for the church and provide for the free expression of religion. But government should not favor a particular group or religion over another.

Proponents would oppose direct governmental support of religious schools but would support education vouchers since the parents would be free to use the voucher at a public, private school, or Christian school. Proponents would oppose mandated school prayer but support programs that provide equal access to students. Equal access argues that if students are allowed to start a debate club or chess club on campus, they should also be allowed to start a Bible club.

We should reject the idea of a “naked public square” (where religious values have been stripped from the public arena). And we should also reject the idea of a “sacred public square” (where religious ideas are sponsored by government). We should seek an “open public square” (where government neither censors nor sponsors religion but accommodates religion).

Government should not be hostile toward religion, but neither should it sponsor religion or favor a particular faith over another. Government should maintain a benevolent neutrality toward religion and accommodate religious activities and symbols.

Notes

1. Barbara Perry, “Justice Hugo Black and the Wall of Separation between Church and State,” *Journal of Church and*

State 31(1989): 55.

2. *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S., 16, 18.

3. Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, vol. 3, *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), 481.

4. Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis*, reprinted in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1991), 1382.

5. Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 111.

6. Roger Williams, "Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered," in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams* (Providence, RI: Providence Press, 1866), 1:392.

7. Edwin Gaustad, *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B Eerdmans, 1996), 72.

8. *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145, 164.

9. Robert M. Hutchins, "The Future of the Wall," in *The Wall between Church and State*, ed. Dallin H. Oaks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 17.

10. *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S., 16, 18.

11. Daniel Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 125.

12. Derek H. Davis, "Wall of Separation Metaphor," *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 45(1), Winter 2003.

13. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson*, 125.

14. The details of the debate on the First Amendment can be found in the Annals of Congress. *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*. "History of Congress." 42 vols. Washington, D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1834-1856.

15. Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984).

See Also:

- ["I Have Some Questions on the Separation of Church and State"](#)

Grading America's Schools

Introduction

I recently received a phone call from a somewhat frantic radio station producer asking if I would be available for an interview on a noontime call-in program the next day. I'm always a bit amazed when anyone wants to interview me or get my opinion on an important subject, but before I could get too excited about the offer I discovered that the original guest had just cancelled and that they were looking desperately for a last minute fill-in.

The topic of the program was "Who Dumbed-Down American Education." I accepted the offer and the next day I called the station just before noon. The program host was a bit surprised when I started the show by voicing my discomfort with the intended topic. I told him that the topic implied that someone or some group is intentionally causing our children to perform poorly in school, and that I didn't think that anyone was capable or even motivated to dumb-down American education. My experience with both public and private schools tells me that the vast majority of teachers and administrators have the best intentions for their students and community.

The educational enterprise in America is far too complicated for a single person or organization to purposefully undermine its successful operation. Public schools are influenced by a

remarkable number of organizations both inside and outside of government. State legislatures, local school boards, the Department of Education, teacher's unions, textbook publishers and numerous other interest groups take part in shaping both the purpose and practice of schooling in America. Although it might be tempting to reduce the problems of public education to one cause, it is highly unlikely that such is the case.

However, this is not to say that Americans are complacent about the performance of our schools. Evidence continues to suggest that our students do not learn as much as those from other countries. A recent international comparison of fifteen year olds found our students stuck in the middle of thirty-two nations on reading, mathematics, and scientific knowledge.[\[1\]](#) But the public's dissatisfaction with government-sponsored schools goes back to their inception in the mid 1800's. After a trip to a local New York school in 1892 Joseph Mayer Rice wrote that it was "the most dehumanizing institution that I have ever laid eyes upon."[\[2\]](#) But while American's usually agree that our schools have problems, they often differ as to what those problems are and on how to fix them.

Although there is no perfect schooling environment, we can highlight some of the factors that detract from the successful educational progress we would like all of our children to experience. Since the educational system in America is complex, the problems are complex. Here we will

consider a host of problems facing education in America and suggest alternatives that might offer the hope of a good education to more of our children.

Progressive Education

First we will consider the consequences of progressive educational philosophy.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century there have been

two prevailing educational philosophies that have competed for dominance in our school systems. Traditional educational philosophy, also called the teacher-centered approach, argues that teaching should focus on the accumulated knowledge and values of our culture. Students should learn from teachers who have acquired a significant amount of that knowledge and who can model the habits and discipline necessary to become a learned person. This view assumes that most students are able to learn but that learning can be difficult and that the joy that comes from learning is often delayed until after the fact. The learning process is the responsibility of both the teacher, who breaks topics down into digestible chunks and the learner who must bring a certain amount of self-motivation to the table. The ultimate goal is the production of mature and responsible adults.

The other educational philosophy that has grown in popularity over the last hundred years is known as progressive educational theory or the student-centered approach. The progressive educational view argues that children are by nature both morally good and eager to learn. Learning is a source of pleasure to children and that given the freedom and opportunity all children will learn what they need to know. The teacher's role is mainly that of a facilitator. If too direct of an approach to learning is forced on the student such as memorization or unnecessary repetition, students will lose interest in the process. Learning is natural and should proceed in a natural organic manner.

These two educational theories begin with conflicting views of human nature. The traditional view would have much in common with the Christian theologian Augustine, who in the fourth century described his own personal sin nature in his *Confessions*. His depiction of human nature is that we are born fallen or marred by sin. Education of the right kind can play a role in ameliorating the effects of sin but never erase it. The progressive view looks back to the writings of Jean

Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey for their point of view. Rousseau, in his work *Emile*, argues that children are good by nature and only need nature itself to guide their instruction. Dewey believed that children were neither good nor sinful, but rather highly malleable, making the educational process all the more important.

Rousseau and Augustine cannot both be right concerning human nature. Neither can traditional and progressive educational philosophy. Perhaps one problem with our schools is to be found in the most basic assumption of what it means to be human.

Truth

Let's investigate how the changing way that our society views truth has changed both what and how we teach our children.

Just as progressive education philosophy has slowly found a home in our educational institutions so has a new view of truth. Prior to the twentieth century, education focused on helping students to discover and value truth and the good life that resulted from honoring it, a tradition that goes back to Greek philosophers and Judeo-Christian thought. Many educators limited this search for truth to what science alone could provide and may have valued reason above what is provided by faith and authority. However, the quest was to acquire and teach truth that applied to all people everywhere for all time. Teachers often viewed themselves as dispensers of knowledge, possessors of a grand tradition known as Western Civilization and participants of what is sometimes called the Great Conversation between pagan and Christian thought. These ideas mattered because they were part of a debate over the essence of things. How one viewed human nature, God, ethics, and the natural world were dependent upon which side was favored.

A new view of truth has emerged since the last world war to

contest both the purpose of schooling and the role of the teacher. By the end of the twentieth century influential thinkers were arguing that the search for essences or the meaning of life have become useless endeavors. In fact, they argue that language itself is incapable of communicating truth that is true for all people everywhere and for all time. They hold that truth is itself a human invention and that those who possess power in a given culture produce it. In the past teachers might have argued that knowledge is power, today it is often held that power produces knowledge. As a result, all education is viewed more as a political endeavor rather than a quest for universal truth.

Truth is seen as a social construct, something created by a culture that enables people to cope with the world they live in. Since no one can step out of their own culture and evaluate other cultures in an unbiased way, all cultures and their corresponding truths must be treated as equally useful or true. Some cultures are not quite as equal as others. The culture of white males of European descent is almost universally seen as an oppressive one by instructors and textbooks.

The result of this change in our view of truth has been that learning facts about the key events and people of Western culture are downplayed, and coping mechanisms and self-esteem becomes the primary purpose of the educational enterprise.

Decline of the Family

So far we have considered the impact of progressive education philosophy and the postmodern view of truth on our schools. Now we will turn our attention to changes in the American family and how they have affected our classrooms.

One consistent finding of educational research is that family life matters. Students tend to do better in school, and schools are generally more effective when families mirror

certain attributes. The most important indicator is the socioeconomic status of the family represented by the occupation, income, and education of the parents. However, other factors play a role as well, such as the presence of two parents in the home and the amount of encouragement given by fathers to go on to college.

Unfortunately, family in America has changed dramatically over the last few decades. Between 1960 and 1999, the percentage of births out of wedlock increased by 523 percent. In 1999 alone, 68.8 percent of births to black mothers, 42.1 percent of births to Hispanics and 22 percent of births to white mothers were to unmarried women.[{3}](#) This trend directly impacts the socioeconomic status of families. In 1998, only 9 percent of children suffered from the effects of poverty if their parents were married. On the other hand 46 percent of children lived in poverty if a female headed the family.

The lack of a stable family influence and the presence of a father can be especially devastating for boys. Recent statistics reveal that starting at the elementary school level, girls get better grades than boys and generally fair better in school.[{4}](#) Although girls have all but eliminated the much-discussed math and science gap with boys, boys' scores in reading and writing have been on the decline for years. At the end of eighth grade, boys are held back 50 percent more often, and girls are twice as likely to say that they want to pursue a professional career.[{5}](#) Boys are twice as likely to be labeled "learning disabled" and in some schools are ten times more likely to be diagnosed with learning disorders such as A.D.D. Boys now make up two thirds of our special education classes and account for 71 percent of all school suspensions.[{6}](#) There is also evidence that boys suffer from low self-esteem and lack confidence as learners.[{7}](#)

Men as mentors for boys are not only missing in our homes but they are missing in our schools. The vast majority of our

teachers, close to eighty percent, are women, many of them just out of college and with little experience with young boys. This lack of male leadership is one of the many reasons we are less than pleased with the performance of our schools.

Summary

Let's conclude by focusing on what changes might help our schools do their job better.

In her recent book on the history of progressive education Diane Ravitch argues that:

Schools must do far more than teach children "how to learn" and "how to look things up"; they must teach them what knowledge has most value, how to use that knowledge, how to organize what they know, how to understand the relationship between past and present, how to tell the difference between accurate information and propaganda, and how to turn information into understanding. {8}

The reason that this kind of learning does not happen as often as we like is that we agree less and less about what knowledge has the most value and what constitutes accurate information vs. propaganda. The recent battle over multicultural sensitivities in the curriculum has caused textbook writers to water down history books fearing that some group might be offended. The strident political agenda of teachers' unions on issues ranging from homosexuality to the environment has caused parents to question teachers' objectivity and their suitability as role models for their children.

As our society becomes more and more diverse, the "one model fits all" public school system is causing more and more tension. Administrators respond to critics by adding more and more levels of bureaucracy to schools so that many districts now have more employees outside of the classroom than inside.

The current response of government has been to encourage curriculum standards and high stakes testing for all publicly funded schools, but it has avoided the one reform that might make a significant difference. Private schools, with less bureaucracy, more focused academics, and a traditional approach to learning have proven themselves successful in even the most difficult inner city areas. Giving parents, teachers and students real choice in the kinds of schools they want to learn and teach in, via a voucher or tax credit program would generate true diversity and, I believe greater learning for many more of our children. If we are concerned about the general welfare of our people it makes sense to give our poorest students the benefit of private schooling in our worst districts.

Over the last decade Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Cleveland, Ohio have taken bold steps to offer real school choice. So has the creation of a large and growing private voucher program. Soon we will have enough data to evaluate its impact on students. The question of the constitutionality of voucher programs has reached the Supreme Court. Its decision could destroy school choice or greatly encourage it in the future. I hope they don't miss this opportunity.

Notes

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2. Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000), 21.
3. "The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators 2001" (Empower.org).
4. William Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998),

15.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. xxiii.

8. Ravitch, 17.

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American Government and Christianity – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at how a Christian, biblical framework operated as a critical force in establishing our constitution and governmental system. The founders views on the nature of man and the role of government were derived from their biblical foundation.

America's Christian Roots

The founding of this country as well as the framing of the key political documents rests upon a Christian foundation. That doesn't necessarily mean that the United States is a Christian nation, although some framers used that term. But it does mean that the foundations of this republic presuppose a Christian view of human nature and God's providence.

In previous articles we have discussed "The Christian Roots of the Declaration and Constitution" [on the Web as ["The](#)

[Declaration and the Constitution: Their Christian Roots”](#)] and provided an overview of the books [On Two Wings](#) and [One Nation Under God](#). Our focus in this article will be to pull together many of the themes of these resources and combine them with additional facts and quotes from the founders.

First, what was the perspective of the founders of America? Consider some of these famous quotes.

John Adams was the second president of the United States. He saw the need for religious values to provide the moral base line for society. He stated in a letter to the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts:

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. [{1}](#)

In fact, John Adams wasn't the only founding father to talk about the importance of religious values. Consider this statement from George Washington during his Farewell Address:

And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. [{2}](#)

Two hundred years after the establishment of the Plymouth colony in 1620, Americans gathered at that site to celebrate its bicentennial. Daniel Webster was the speaker at this 1820

celebration. He reminded those in attendance of this nation's origins:

Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.[{3}](#)

Religion, and especially the Christian religion, was an important foundation to this republic.

Christian Character

It is clear that the framers of this new government believed that the people should elect and support leaders with character and integrity. George Washington expressed this in his Farewell Address when he said, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

Benjamin Rush talked about the religious foundation of the republic that demanded virtuous leadership. He said that, "the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid on the foundation of religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments."[{4}](#)

He went on to explain that

A Christian cannot fail of being a republican . . . for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy. . . . A Christian cannot fail of being useful to the republic, for his religion

teaches him that no man "liveth to himself." And lastly a Christian cannot fail of being wholly inoffensive, for his religion teaches him in all things to do to others what he would wish, in like circumstances, they should do to him.[{5}](#)

Daniel Webster understood the importance of religion, and especially the Christian religion, in this form of government. In his famous Plymouth Rock speech of 1820 he said,

Lastly, our ancestors established their system of government on morality and religious sentiment. Moral habits, they believed, cannot safely be trusted on any other foundation than religious principle, nor any government be secure which is not supported by moral habits. . . .Whatever makes men good Christians, makes them good citizens.[{6}](#)

John Jay was one of the authors of the Federalist Papers and became America's first Supreme Court Justice. He also served as the president of the American Bible Society. He understood the relationship between government and Christian values. He said, "Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers."[{7}](#)

William Penn writing the *Frame of Government* for his new colony said, "Government, like clocks, go from the motion men give them; and as governments are made and moved by men, so by them they are ruined too. Wherefore governments rather depend upon men, than men upon governments. Let men be good, and the government cannot be bad."[{8}](#)

The founders believed that good character was vital to the health of the nation.

New Man

Historian C. Gregg Singer traces the line of influence from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century in his book, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*. He says,

Whether we look at the Puritans and their fellow colonists of the seventeenth century, or their descendants of the eighteenth century, or those who framed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, we see that their political programs were the rather clear reflection of a consciously held political philosophy, and that the various political philosophies which emerged among the American people were intimately related to the theological developments which were taking place. . . . A Christian world and life view furnished the basis for this early political thought which guided the American people for nearly two centuries and whose crowning lay in the writing of the Constitution of 1787. [{9}](#)

Actually, the line of influence extends back even further. Historian Arnold Toynbee, for example, has written that the American Revolution was made possible by American Protestantism. Page Smith, writing in the *Religious Origins of the American Revolution*, cites the influence of the Protestant Reformation. He believes that

The Protestant Reformation produced a new kind of consciousness and a new kind of man. The English Colonies in America, in turn, produced a new unique strain of that consciousness. It thus follows that it is impossible to understand the intellectual and moral forces behind the American Revolution without understanding the role that Protestant Christianity played in shaping the ideals, principles and institutions of colonial America. [{10}](#)

Smith argues that the American Revolution “started, in a

sense, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenburg.” It received “its theological and philosophical underpinnings from John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and much of its social theory from the Puritan Revolution of 1640-1660.[{11}](#)

Most people before the Reformation belonged to classes and social groups which set the boundaries of their worlds and established their identities. The Reformation, according to Smith, changed these perceptions. Luther and Calvin, in a sense, created a re-formed individual in a re-formed world.

Key to this is the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer where each person is “responsible directly to God for his or her own spiritual state... The individuals who formed the new congregations established their own churches, chose their own ministers, and managed their own affairs without reference to an ecclesiastical hierarchy.”[{12}](#)

These re-formed individuals began to change their world including their view of government and authority.

Declaration of Independence

Let’s look at the Christian influence on the Declaration of Independence. Historian Page Smith points out that Thomas Jefferson was not only influenced by secular philosophers, but was also influenced by the Protestant Reformation. He says,

Jefferson and other secular-minded Americans subscribed to certain propositions about law and authority that had their roots in the Protestant Reformation. It is a scholarly common-place to point out how much Jefferson (and his fellow delegates to the Continental Congress) were influenced by Locke. Without disputing this we would simply add that an older and deeper influence – John Calvin – was of more profound importance.[{13}](#)

Another important influence was William Blackstone. Jefferson drew heavily on the writings of this highly respected jurist. In fact, Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* were among Jefferson's most favorite books.

In his section on the "Nature of Laws in General," Blackstone wrote, "as man depends absolutely upon his Maker for everything, it is necessary that he should, in all points, conform to his Maker's will. This will of his Maker is called the law of nature."[{14}](#)

In addition to the law of nature, the other source of law is from divine revelation. "The doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine law, and they are to be found only in the Holy Scriptures." According to Blackstone, all human laws depended either upon the law of nature or upon the law of revelation found in the Bible: "Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend all human laws."[{15}](#)

Samuel Adams argues in "The Rights of the Colonists" that they had certain rights. "Among the natural Rights of the Colonists are these: First, a Right to Life; second, to Liberty; third, to Property; . . . and in the case of intolerable oppression, civil or religious, to leave the society they belong to, and enter into another. When men enter into society, it is by voluntary consent."[{16}](#) This concept of natural rights also found its way into the Declaration of Independence and provided the justification for the American Revolution.

The Declaration was a bold document, but not a radical one. The colonists did not break with England for "light and transient causes." They were mindful that they should be "in subjection to governing authorities" which "are established by God" (Rom. 13:1). Yet when they suffered from a "long train of abuses and usurpations," they believed that "it is the right of the people to alter or abolish [the existing government] and to institute a new government."

Constitution

The Christian influence on the Declaration is clear. What about the Constitution?

James Madison was the chief architect of the Constitution as well as one of the authors of the *Federalist Papers*. It is important to note that as a youth, he studied under a Scottish Presbyterian, Donald Robertson. Madison gave the credit to Robertson for “all that I have been in life.”[{17}](#) Later he was trained in theology at Princeton under the Reverend John Witherspoon. Scholars believe that Witherspoon’s Calvinism (which emphasized the fallen nature of man) was an important source for Madison’s political ideas.[{18}](#)

The Constitution was a contract between the people and had its origins in American history a century earlier:

One of the obvious by-products [of the Reformation] was the notion of a contract entered into by two people or by the members of a community amongst themselves that needed no legal sanctions to make it binding. This concept of the Reformers made possible the formation of contractals or, as the Puritans called them, “covenanted” groups formed by individuals who signed a covenant or agreement to found a community. The most famous of these covenants was the Mayflower Compact. In it the Pilgrims formed a “civil body politic,” and promised to obey the laws their own government might pass. In short, the individual Pilgrim invented on the spot a new community, one that would be ruled by laws of its making.[{19}](#)

Historian Page Smith believes, “The Federal Constitution was in this sense a monument to the reformed consciousness. This new sense of time as potentiality was a vital element in the new consciousness that was to make a revolution and, what was a good deal more difficult, form a new nation.”[{20}](#)

Preaching and teaching within the churches provided the justification for the revolution and the establishment of a new nation. Alice Baldwin, writing in *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*, says,

The teachings of the New England ministers provide one line of unbroken descent. For two generations and more New Englanders had . . . been taught that these rights were sacred and came from God and that to preserve them they had a legal right of resistance and, if necessary a right to . . . alter and abolish governments and by common consent establish new ones. [\[21\]](#)

Christian ideas were important in the founding of this republic and the framing of our American governmental institutions. And I believe they are equally important in the maintenance of that republic.

Notes

1. John Adams, October 11, 1798, in a letter to the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts. Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author, Notes, and Illustration* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1854), Vol. IX, 228-229.
2. George Washington, Farewell Address (September 19, 1796). Address of George Washington, President of the United States, and Late Commander in Chief of the American Army. To the People of the United States, Preparatory to His Declination.
3. Daniel Webster, December 22, 1820. *The Works of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1853), Vol. I, 48.
4. Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," Early American Imprints. *Benjamin Rush, Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and Samuel F. Bradford, 1798), 8.

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7. John Jay, October 12, 1816, in *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, Henry P. Johnston, ed., (New York: G.P Putnam & Sons, 1893; reprinted NY: Burt Franklin, 1970), Vol. IV, 393.
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9. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1964), 284-5.
10. Page Smith, *Religious Origins of the American Revolution* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 1.
11. Ibid, 2.
12. Ibid., 3.
13. Ibid, 185.
14. William Blackstone, "Of the Nature of Laws in General," *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Book 1, Section II.
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16. Samuel Adams, "The Rights of the Colonists" (Boston, 1772), *The Annals of America*, Vol. II, 217.
17. John Eidsmoe, *Christianity and the Constitution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), 94.
18. James H. Smylie, "Madison and Witherspoon: Theological Roots of American Political Thought," *American Presbyterians*
19. *Smith, Religious Origins*,
20. *Ibid.*, 4
21. Alice M. Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1928), 169.

The Psychology of Prisoner Abuse

Those Awful Pictures

Do you remember how you felt as the Iraq prisoner abuse scandal began to unfold in spring 2004? Maybe you saw the disturbing pictures when they were first aired on CBS television's *60 Minutes II*. Soon they were transmitted around the globe. They greeted you on the front page of your morning newspaper and on the evening news. The stream seemed endless.

You saw naked Iraqi prisoners in various stages of humiliation: hooded, naked men stacked in a pyramid; others lying on the floor or secured to a bed; one in a smock standing on a box with his arms outstretched and wires attached to him. In some of the photos, male and female American soldiers grinned and pointed. In one picture, a female soldier stood holding a leash around the neck of a naked male prisoner. In others, soldiers grinned over what appeared to be a corpse packed in ice.

What feelings did you experience? Shock? Anger? Rage? Disgust? Maybe you felt embarrassed or ashamed. "How could they do such degrading things to other human beings?" you might have wondered. Perhaps you feared how the growing storm might affect the life of your friend or family member serving in Iraq. Or wrestled with how to explain the abuse to your children.

Finger pointing began almost as soon as the story broke. High-ranking military and government officials announced that these were aberrations carried out by a few unprincipled prison guards. Accused military police claimed they were merely following orders of military intelligence officials to soften prisoners up for interrogation. Others insisted soldiers had a

moral obligation to disobey orders to do wrong. The accused countered that the harsh techniques were in place before they arrived for duty at the prison. Ethical arguments surfaced that the war on terror demanded tough methods to help prevent another 9/11.

What factors prompt people to abuse others in such degrading ways? What goes on inside the minds of the abusers? Are there special social forces at work? While this article won't attempt to analyze specific cases in the Iraq prison scandal, it will consider some fascinating psychological experiments that reveal clues to the roots of such behavior. The results - - and their implications -- may disturb you. A biblical perspective will also offer some insight.

The Stanford Prison Experiment

CBS News correspondent Andy Rooney said the Iraq prisoner abuse is "a black mark that will be in the history books in a hundred languages for as long as there are history books."[\[1\]](#)

Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo was not surprised by the Abu Ghraib prison abuse. He had observed similar behavior in his famous 1971 experiment involving a mock prison in the basement of the Stanford psychology building.[\[2\]](#) The experiment showed that otherwise normal people can behave in surprisingly outrageous ways.

Zimbardo and his colleagues selected twenty-four young men considered from interviews and psychological tests to be normal and healthy. Volunteers were randomly assigned to be either "prisoners" or "guards." Guards wore uniforms and were told to maintain control of the prison and not to use violence.

On the second day, prisoners rebelled, asserting their independence with barricades, taunting and cursing. Guards suppressed the rebellion. Zimbardo reports that the guards

then “steadily increased their coercive aggression tactics, humiliation and dehumanization of the prisoners.”[{3}](#) He says the worst abuse came at night when guards thought no psychology staff were observing.[{4}](#) Zimbardo remembers that the guards “began to use the prisoners as playthings for their amusement... They would get them to simulate sodomy. They also stripped prisoners naked for various offenses and put them in solitary for excessive periods.”[{5}](#) They dressed them in smocks, chained them together at the ankles, blindfolded them with paper bags on their heads, and herded them along in a group.[{6}](#) Sound familiar?

It was Berkeley professor Christina Maslach, Zimbardo’s then romantic interest whom he later married, who jolted him back to reality. On Day Five, she entered the prison to preview the experiment in preparation for some subject interviews she had agreed to conduct the next day. Shocked by what she saw, she challenged Zimbardo’s ethics later that evening – screaming and yelling in quite a fight, she recalls. That night, Zimbardo decided to halt the experiment.[{7}](#)

Zimbardo feels that prisons are ripe for abuse without firm measures to check guards’ lower impulses.[{8}](#) He recommends “clear rules, a staff that is well trained in those rules and tight management that includes punishment for violations.”[{9}](#)

An old Jewish proverb says, “Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked man ruling over a helpless people.”[{10}](#) Unfettered prison officials -- or most anyone -- can yield to their baser natures when tempted by power inequalities.

The Perils of Obedience

What about those who say they were only obeying authority? How far will people go to inflict harm under orders? In the 1960s, Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted classic experiments on obedience.[{11}](#) (Ironically, Milgram and Stanford psychologist Philip Zimbardo were high school

classmates.{12})

At Yale, Milgram set up a series of experiments “to test how much pain an ordinary citizen would inflict on another person simply because he was ordered to by an experimental scientist.” He writes, “Stark authority was pitted against the subjects’ strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and, with the subjects’ ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won more often than not.”{13}

Milgram’s basic design involved a volunteer “teacher” and a “learner.” The learner was actually an actor who was in on the deception. The learner was strapped to “a kind of miniature electric chair” with an electrode on his wrist. The teacher sat before an impressive-looking “shock generator ” with switches indicating voltages from 15-450 volts.{14}

The teacher asked test questions of the learner and was instructed to administer increasingly large shocks for each incorrect answer. (You say you’ve known some teachers like that?) The machine here was a fake -- no learner received shocks -- but the teacher thought it was real.

In the initial experiment, over 60 percent of teachers obeyed the experimenter’s orders to the end and punished the victim with the maximum 450 volts. Milgram found similarly disturbing levels of obedience across various socioeconomic levels. His conclusions after hundreds of experiments were chilling:

...Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.{15}

Why did they obey? Milgram offers several possibilities. Fears

of appearing rude, desires to please an authority, aspirations to do one's best, and lack of direct accountability can all cloud judgment. But could there be something deeper, something in human nature that influences abuse? A famous novel illustrates how the dark side of human nature can affect group behavior.

Lord of the Flies

Prisoner abuse shows what can happen when power inequalities and inappropriate devotion to authority distort one's moral compass. Nobel laureate William Golding's short novel, *Lord of the Flies*,[{16}](#) illustrates through a fictional story how similar flaws can manifest in society. A film version of the book helped inspire the popular television series *Survivor*.[{17}](#)

Lord of the Flies opens on a remote, uninhabited island on which some British schoolboys, ages six to twelve, find themselves after an airplane crash. An atomic war has begun, and apparently the plane was evacuating the boys when it was shot down. The island has fresh water, fruit, and other food. The setting seems idyllic. Best of all, the boys discover, there are no grownups (the plane and its crew presumably have washed into the sea).

Four central characters soon emerge. Ralph is elected leader. Piggy, an overweight asthmatic and champion of reason, becomes Ralph's friend. Simon is a quiet lad with keen discernment. Jack becomes a hunter.

At first, the boys get along without much conflict. Soon, though, fears envelop them, and they debate whether an evil beast might inhabit the island. Jack and his followers kill a wild pig and, in frenzied blood lust, dance to chants of "*Kill the pig! Cut her throat! Bash her in!*"[{18}](#) When Ralph criticizes Jack for breaking some tribal rules, Jack replies, "Who cares?" His hunting prowess will rule.[{19}](#)

One night, some boys see a dead parachutist, which they mistake for the “evil beast” and flee. Jack posts a pig’s head onto a stick in the ground as a gift for the beast. The decaying, fly- covered pig’s head soon becomes for Simon the “Lord of the Flies,” a sort of personification of evil.[{20}](#) Later, Simon discovers that the feared “beast” is only a human corpse. Running to tell the group this good news, he encounters their mock pig-killing ritual. The crazed boys attack Simon and kill him. Nearly all the boys follow Jack and, acting like savages with painted bodies and spears, kill Piggy and hunt down Ralph. Only the surprise appearance of a British naval officer, drawn by the smoke from a fire, halts the mad pursuit. Ralph and the boys dissolve in tears. Ralph weeps, as Golding writes, “for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart....”[{21}](#)

Lord of the Flies is filled with symbolism, both biblical and from Greek tragedy. But Golding’s stated purpose was “to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature.”[{22}](#) Could his point that darkness lurks in the human heart help explain the prisoner abuse?

Animal House Meets Lord of the Flies

Prisoner abuse is a sad reality in the U.S. and abroad.[{23}](#) The Iraq prisoner abuse scandal smacks of fraternity hazing on steroids, *Animal House* meets *Lord of the Flies*. Consider from this sad episode some lessons for both prison reform and society in general:

- *Establish clear rules for prison staff; train them well and punish them for violations*, as Stanford psychologist Philip Zimbardo recommends.
- *Educate against blind conformity*. Some of Milgram’s experimental subjects found the strength to resist abusive authority.[{24}](#) Some psychologists feel that strong moral values and experience with conformity can

strengthen moral courage. {25}

- *Involve external observers and critics.* Often outsiders, not emotionally swept up in a project or event, can through their psychological distance more clearly assess ethical issues. For example, Christina Maslach, Philip Zimbardo's friend and colleague who challenged the ethics of his prison experiment, credits her late arrival on the scene with facilitating her concern. The experimenters who had planned and had been conducting the experiment for five days were less likely to be startled by the developing misconduct, she maintained. {26}
- *Realistically appraise human nature's dark side.* Again, Golding said *Lord of the Flies* was "an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature." {27} Jesus of Nazareth was, of course, quite clear on this point. He said, "From within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within..." {28}

Some dismiss as simplistic any analyses of human suffering that begin with alleged defects in human nature. They would rather focus on changing social structures and political systems. While many structures and political systems need changing, may I suggest that a careful analysis of the human heart is not simplistic? Rather it is fundamental.

Perhaps that's why Paul, a leader who agreed with Jesus' assessment of human nature, {29} focused on changing hearts. Paul was a former persecutor of Jesus' followers who zealously imprisoned them {30} but later joined them and became a prisoner himself. {31} Paul eventually claimed that when people place their faith in Jesus as he had, they "become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is

gone. A new life has begun!"^{32} Could this diagnosis and prescription have something to say to us amidst today's prisoner abuse scandals?

Notes

1. Andy Rooney, "Our Darkest Days are Here," CBS 60 Minutes, May 23, 2004, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/05/20/60minutes/rooney/main618783.shtml>.

2. Kathleen O'Toole, "The Stanford Prison Experiment: Still powerful after all these years," Stanford University News Service, January 8, 1997, <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/pr/97/970108prisonexp.html>.

A slideshow presentation of the experiment is at www.prisonexp.org. See also W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Third Edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 447; Claudia Wallis, "Why Did They Do It?" TIME.com, posted May 9, 2004 (from *TIME* magazine, cover date May 17, 2004), <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101040517/wtorturers.html>; John Schwartz, "Simulated Prison in '71 Showed a Fine Line Between 'Normal' and 'Monster'," *New York Times*, May 6, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/06/international/middleeast/06PSYC.html?pagewanted=print&position=>.

3. O'Toole, loc. cit.

4. Ibid.

5. Wallis, loc. cit.

6. O'Toole, loc. cit.

7. Ibid.

8. Schwartz, loc. cit.

9. Wallis, loc. cit. The words are Wallis'.

10. Proverbs 28:15 NIV.

11. Stanley Milgram, "The Perils of Obedience," *Harper's*, December 1973, 62-66, 75-77. (The article is adapted from Milgram's book, *Obedience to Authority* [Harper and Row, 1974]). See also Neuman, loc. cit.; O'Toole, loc. cit.; Schwartz, loc. cit.; Wallis, loc. cit.; Anahad O'Connor, "Pressure to Go Along With Abuse Is Strong, but Some Soldiers Find Strength to Refuse," *New York Times*, May 14, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/14/international/14RESI.html?ei=5059&en=854c94250243f62d&ex=1084593600&partner=AOL&pagewanted=print&position=>.

12. O'Toole, loc. cit.

13. Milgram 1973, op. cit., 62.

14. Ibid., 62-63.

15. Ibid., 75- 76.

16. William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (New York: Perigee, 1988). This "Casebook Edition" includes the 1954 novel plus notes and criticism edited by James R. Baker and Arthur P. Ziegler, Jr.

17.

<http://www.cbs.com/primetime/survivor8/show/episode14/s8story3.shtml>.

18. Golding, op. cit., 69; emphasis Golding's.

19. Ibid., 84.

20. Many have noted that the phrase "lord of the flies" translates the word "Beelzebub." See, for instance, E.L. Epstein, "Notes on Lord of the Flies," in Golding, op. cit., 279: "'The lord of the flies' is, of course, a translation of the Hebrew Ba'alzevuv (Beelzebub in Greek) which means

literally 'lord of insects.'" Theologian Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., commenting on Matthew 10:24 ff. says, "Beelzebub (the Gr. has Beezeboul) was a name for Satan, the prince of the demons, perhaps derived from Baal-Zebub, god of the Philistine city of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2). 'Beelzebub' means 'lord of the flies,' and 'Beezeboul' or 'Beelzeboul' means 'lord of the high place.'" (In "Matthew," John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* [Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985], Logos Research Systems digital version.) Biblical references to Beelzebub include Matthew 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18, 19. In a 1962 interview, Golding himself referred to "the pig's head on the stick" as "Beelzebub, or Satan, the devil, whatever you'd like to call it..." (James Keating, "Interview with William Golding," in Golding, op. cit., 192.)

21. Golding, op. cit., 186-187.

22. Epstein, op. cit., 277-278. The words are Golding's.

23. For example, see "Missouri 'Rain' Leads to Toilet Duty," *Inside Journal: The Hometown Newspaper of America's Prisoners*, 14:7, November/December 2003, 5. Inside Journal publisher Prison Fellowship, www.pfm.org, and its affiliates seek to help rehabilitate prisoners and promote restorative justice.

24. Milgram 1973, op. cit., 63-64.

25. O'Connor, loc. cit.

26. O'Toole, loc. cit.

27. Epstein, loc. cit.

28. Mark 7:21-23 NLT.

29. For detailed information on Jesus and evidence to support His claims, see www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com.

30. Acts 8:3; 22:3-5 ff.

31. E.g., Acts 16:19-40.

32. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT.

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