

Why Religion Often Doesn't Get It

On Being Whole Not Holy

By Rev. WILLIAM E. ALBERTS

Religion is automatically seen as inherently good for people, yet it often stunts a person's emotional, intellectual and multicultural growth. While there are important exceptions, it stresses believing over thinking, certainty over inquiry, conformity over diversity, entitlement over enlightenment. It emphasizes rightness of belief over one's right to believe as one chooses. It is about being right not one's right of being. It values uniqueness of faith not faith in everyone's uniqueness. Its priority is evangelizing people not ending inequalities. It has difficulty handling one's right to be different—and especially one's right to be wrong. It is far more about being an integral part of the status quo than about empowering those who are without economic and political status. It is much more comfortable with the way things are than with striving to make things the way they should be for the common good.

The intrinsic value of religion should not be assumed. It tends to repress and "straightjacket" sexuality, with its weapon of "sinfulness" warring against what is natural and human and varied. It alienates the individual from himself or herself and from people who think and act differently than *the believer*. It is about being "holy" not whole. Thus the passing of anti-gay measures, like California's Proposition 8, that deny loving and committed same sex couples the right to marry.

Religion should not be viewed as sacrosanct. It ignores so much that is human. It leads people to look to heaven rather than to earth for meaning. To look outward rather than inward for power. To look upward rather than around them for causes of conflicts and solutions. It is about dumbing down its god to fit the assumed infallible "Good Book," which is used by evangelists and doctrinaires to claim authority and thus gain power over people.

Religion is too often about folding one's hands rather than using them—and one's feet. And about closing one's eyes and looking the other way in the face of injustice. And not only looking the other way: in the words of liberation theologians, it is about religious leaders who are "chaplains to the oppressors"—rather than to the oppressed. It is about the sanctioning of, or muted protest or indifference to, a so-called "war on terrorism," launched by a "God"-mouthing president on the pretext of "protecting America's security." A war of terrorism that has brought death and injury and destruction and civil war and want and uprootedness to millions of innocent Iraqi citizens and tens of thousands of young American soldiers and their families-- and has created mounting economic insecurity and fear in homes throughout the United States and the world.

When it comes to risking, religion's moral judgment is more likely to be guided by public opinion rather than lead it. It is about religious leaders remaining silent rather than calling for the prosecution of former President Bush and Vice President Cheney

and members of the Bush administration for committing war crimes in our name: the unjustified invasion and occupation of non-threatening Iraq, the illegal apprehension, detainment and torture of human beings branded "terrorists," US drone airstrikes that have indiscriminately killed and wounded untold numbers of civilians in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and providing weaponry for and supporting Israel's inhuman aggression against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. *War crimes that will continue to fuel anti-Americanism and violence world-wide if they remain unprosecuted.* American might does not make right; it makes enemies-- and merely postpones the moral judgment of truth and justice.

Religion often doesn't get it. It is about being sheep rather than problem solvers. About people being made for the "Sabbath" rather than the "Sabbath" being made for people. That is, when put on the line, its institutional bottom line is more likely to be profits than prophets. It does not bite the faith-based initiatives' governmental hand that feeds it. It does not rock the boat for fear its own ship won't come in, and that members will jump ship and board other denominational vessels offering safe and certain harbors.

Religion should lead people to become more human not more "holy." Beyond our theologies and political ideologies is the human need to love and to be loved.

Therein is our common ground: our humanness. Religion—and politics—should be judged by the extent to which it teaches people to love themselves and to make room for and to value and love other persons for themselves.

The Golden Rule is a basic teaching of most religions, inspired by the widely held belief that "God is love." Surely, any god worthy of worshiping must be big enough to love all people *equally*, and to inspire them to do unto and love *all* other persons as they themselves would want to be honored and loved. Not that one needs to believe in a god to be legitimate and authentic and worthy and honored and loved. Our humanness makes all of us entitled. And our humanity enables us to transcend religious, political, racial and ethnic differences and make room for and live with each other.

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Code Word:

Code Words for Emerging Authoritarian Tendencies in Americans

By Rev. WILLIAM E. ALBERTS

President Bush knowingly lied to the American people to gain their support for his administration's unnecessary pre-emptive war against Iraq: by falsely accusing Saddam Hussein of possessing "mushroom cloud" threatening weapons of mass destruction, and of being involved with Al Qaeda in the 9/11 attack against America. In spite of all the evidence refuting his basis for war, a majority of Americans voted to re-elect him president particularly because of his faith-based "moral values."

During the presidential campaign, President Bush repeatedly tortured the truth in stump speeches to pre-screened, applauding, laughing and booing on cue Republican audiences: about his administration's having shared the same pre-war "intelligence" regarding Iraq's assumed weapons of mass destruction with Congress and his opponent, who also saw the "threat," about his then going "to the United Nations, and I did so because force is the last resort for America," and about Saddam Hussein continuing "to deceive the weapons inspectors" ("In West Virginia, President Bush Advocates for Education and Health Care Reform and Results," Aug. 17, 2004, www.georgewbush.com); "Raw Data: Bush Speech in Springfield," July 30, 2004, www.fox.com.) The emerging contradictory facts caught up with Bush's lies but evidently not with enough of the electorate: he was rewarded with "four more years" in office especially for his evangelical Christian "moral values."

A pre-election study revealed that, since the American-led March 2003 invasion, the lives of 100,000 Iraqi civilians, most women and children, have been *violently aborted*, mainly by US-led air strikes and artillery ("Iraqi Coalition Deaths Increase Dramatically After Invasion," Oct. 28, 2004, www.hgph.edu). A week later Americans voted to return President Bush to the White House notably because of his opposition to abortion, i.e. his religiously based "moral values."

The belief that President Bush's "moral values" helped him to win re-election has led certain political and theological pundits to conclude that the Democrats must "get religion" and bridge the "God gap" if they are to regain the presidency. They are being told to get a grip on God and morality and, like the Republicans, let their light of faith shine for all religiously-motivated voters to see if they are ever to achieve a political resurrection. Those who interpret the presidential election in these terms appear to miss a critical point: rather than faith-based "moral values," the election appears to reveal a growing morality gap in America. We may not be witnessing the ascendancy of "moral values" but the rise of authoritarian tendencies in Americans. It is this apparent phenomenon, and the moral and spiritual crisis it represents, that need to be examined and addressed.

Following World War II, social scientists conducted a landmark study of how great masses of supposedly enlightened, Christian people willingly tolerated the systematic oppression and extermination of millions of their fellow citizens and others (Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Black persons, mentally and physically-impaired people, and political dissenters). A related concern was how masses of other people, who profess freedom as a God-given birthright, could stand by for so long and allow such religious, racial, ethnic, ideological and homophobic hatred to continue. The aim of the study was to employ the scientific method to understand what in an individual causes him to be prejudiced, and to use the findings to help in seeking solutions to inter-group prejudice and hatred. The study revealed that authoritarian tendencies in an individual's personality make him receptive to anti-democratic propaganda and policies that target out-groups for discrimination and destruction. (*The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno, et al, pp v-viii, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1950).

The personality tendencies of the authoritarian-disposed individual were found to include:

--"*Desire for a strong leader*" [italics added] resulting in "submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the in-group" (*Ibid*, pp 231, 228);

--"*Cultural narrowness*" [italics added] seen in rigid acceptance of the conventional middle-class values of "the culturally 'alike'" and the tendency to reject and punish "the culturally 'unlike' . . . who violate conventional values." (*Ibid*, pp 102, 228);

--*Unreflective ethnocentric patriotic conformity*, rooted in the belief that one's own nation is superior and should rightly dominate and that other nations are inferior and threatening out-groups (*Ibid*, pp 107-109);

--*Negative stereotyped perceptions* of the members of "unlike" out-groups (*Ibid*, pp 228, 235, 236), rather than seeing them as individuals who also laugh and cry and love and hate, or who, in the words of Joseph Berger, "lived, laughed, cursed, fought, who did the things human beings do" ("At Holocaust Museum, Turning a Number into a Name," *The New York Times*, Nov. 21, 2004);

--*Anti-introspection*, i.e. resistance to self-understanding, to soul-searching, to cause-and-effect analysis of individual and group behavior, unable to tolerate ambiguity, belief in mystical, unexplainable phenomenon, disparaging intellectual attempts to perceive life's nuances and complexities (*Ibid*, pp 236, 235); and

--*Aggression*, involving "the ethnocentric need for an out-group" who represents "the intrinsic evil (aggressiveness, laziness, power-seeking, etc.) of human nature . . . [that] is unchangeable [and] must be attacked, stamped out, or segregated, wherever it is found, lest it contaminate the good." (*Ibid*, pages 232-234, 148).

If these characteristics of the individual with authoritarian personality tendencies sound familiar, there is more.

The post-World War II scientists found a positive relationship between individuals with authoritarian personality tendencies and religious practice. For example, they discovered that churchgoers especially tended to agree with authoritarian-laden statements: those calling for uncritical acceptance of conventional values and submission to their representative moral authorities, deep faith in a supernatural power whose dictates are to be obeyed without question, and those asserting that much of life is beyond human understanding and part of a spiritual realm to be revered and not reviewed. (*The Authoritarian Personality*, pp 218ff).

The findings of the above social scientists indicated that "belonging to a religious body in America today certainly does not mean that one thereby takes over the traditional Christian values of tolerance, brotherhood and equality. On the contrary," they state, "it appears that these values are more firmly held by people who do not affiliate with any religious group." Their measurement of anti-democratic tendencies in the groups studied led them to conclude, "People who reject organized religion are less prejudiced than those who accept it." (*Ibid*, pages 219, 220) That finding is believed to help make the critical point that after-election pundits miss in advising Democrats to become more "spiritually-minded" and "active" if they are to save their political souls.

The presidential election did not signal the growth of "moral values" in American life, but the widening of a morality gap. The parallels between authoritarian tendencies and "moral values" are readily seen.

"Moral values" did not propel President Bush to victory but hatred of other human beings—"the culturally unlike" gay and lesbian persons especially who defy conventional values. The Republicans made sure constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage were on the ballot in 11 states; and all easily passed, with Bush winning 9 of the 11 states. Afterwards, Karl Rove, his chief political advisor, reportedly said "that opposition to gay marriage was one of the most powerful forces in American politics today and that politicians ignored it at their peril." (" 'Moral Values' Carried Bush, Rove Says," by Adam Nagourney, *The New York Times*, Nov. 16, 2004)

Gay and lesbian persons and other Americans ignore Karl Rove's observation and sentiment *at their peril*. Those, mostly White, church-going Americans who voted to deny another group of Americans their indivisible constitutional rights actually reveal their own hatred of democracy itself. So they seek to use the freedom guaranteed by democracy to deny freedom to members of a perceived morally unfit out-group. The political process provides them with a "democratic" way to gain power over gay-and pro-choice-persons, and not to respect their beliefs and equal right to access and empowerment.

The issue here is power! *Therein lies the peril*. If such, predominantly White, correct-belief-centered Christians and their "self-avowed practicing heterosexual partners" acquire enough political power, what is now a "sin," to be checked by religious decree, may become a civil crime to be punished by imprisonment, or by a more severe measure—lest this "evil" *contaminate* the traditional institution of marriage and family life. It is the spiritual violence of many Christian denominations, with their institutionalized exclusionary policies, that not only sanctioned legal discrimination against gay and lesbian persons but also encourages physical violence against them as well.

What is perilous is the inability of a growing number of "moral values" voters to realize what should be obvious: the issue of same-sex marriage is not about the protection of traditional marriage and "the preservation of the family," but about the inclusion and honoring of *all* members of the family *born in those traditional marriages*. It is not an issue involving a majority's right to be heard and to vote but a minority's full right *to be seen* the "self-evident truth" of a minority's constitutional and divinely "endowed right" to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Nor is the issue of homosexuality about Christian theology regarding "loving the sinner and hating the sin." The issue is about introspection: overcoming culturally ingrained, unconscious homophobic fear that harms another person's identity, development, and fulfillment as a human being. "Loving the sinner and hating the sin" are actually code words used to inflict spiritual violence on gay and lesbian persons with a "straight" face.

Reacting with dismay to the flurry of amendments banning same-sex marriage, an Episcopal mother of a married lesbian daughter emphasized matter-of-factly, "It's (same-sex marriage) about love!" When a minister or politician or another person with "moral values" discovers his or her son or daughter is gay or lesbian, there is often the painful but deepening discovery that "it's about love!" It would seem that more personalizing and less theologizing about homosexuality is needed.

Jesus said it plainly: "Love your neighbor as yourself." He did not specify one's straight neighbor only. Yet, according to Karl Rove, 22% of "moral values" voters believe that is obviously what Jesus meant.

That which is obvious to many Christians, who voted their "moral values," is to be ignored at one's own peril. Karl Rove is quoted as summing up the perceived electoral victory for "moral values": "I think people would be well advised to pay attention to what the American people are saying" (*Ibid*) "*The American people?*" [italics added] Or those predominantly White, evangelical Christians for whom "moral values" were their homophobic call to arms to the voting booth? What are they really saying? Something believed to be far different from what a generalizing Karl Rove meant.

As indicated above, many evangelical, fundamentalist and "born again" Christians who voted for so-called "moral values" seem to be really saying that they cannot tolerate democracy: because it not only guarantees *their* freedom of belief and practice, but presupposes the legitimacy of the independent thought and belief and values others live by. The Christian beliefs of these churchgoers are actually authoritarian. They entertain, if not take for granted, the aspect of democracy that offers them the right to believe and worship and live as they choose, but they hate the fact that it offers the same freedom and rights to those with contrary beliefs and values. Thus, their commitment is not to respect the democratic rights of others but to use the democratic process to gain political power over them, to impose their superior, divinely-revealed "moral values" on others and society. They think of democracy in terms of the will of the majority, not also the rights of the minority.

Ironically, the "moral values" that helped to re-elect President Bush president were directed against people's rights not for them. They deny the constitutional right of "the pursuit of happiness" to gay and lesbian persons. Their intent also is to impose a "pro-life" will on other people that would deny their freedom to determine their own reproductive health. Or more specifically, impose their pro-*heterosexual*-life will.

These "moral values" seem not to be about correcting historic, institutionalized discrimination against Black persons, for example, and other people of color. These religiously-directed "values" appear to be oblivious to an ingrained White-controlled hierarchy of access to political and economic power that has perpetuated a job gap and thus an education and a health gap. Nor do such "moral values" appear to apply their "culture of life" to a recent survey "by Norwegian researchers, the United Nations and the Iraqi government," which "discovered the rate of acute malnutrition in Iraqi children under five years old shot up to 7.7 per cent from four per cent since the March 2003 invasion of Iraq." ("Iraq: children suffer most under US occupation: report," CBC News, Nov. 28, 2004, www.cbc.ca). Never mind the 12-year long US-controlled UN sanctions imposed against Iraq until the invasion that resulted in the deaths of some 500,000 Iraqi children under age 5. (UNICEF report on the devastation caused by the sanctions, Aug. 12, 1999).

An underlying critical need for security is believed to drive such "moral values"-possessed Christians. Their emphasis on "moral values"-that, in reality, discriminate against other Americans-is rooted in insecurity. For whatever reasons, they have a strong need for security, driving a search for certainty, which is met by their holding the right belief and belonging with other true Christians to the assumed superior faith in-group.

The very word "evangelical" means to spread the Christian gospel and convert nonbelievers. And the word "convert" implies that one's own faith is superior to all others and to be accepted. Here there is no recognition of another's right to live by his and her own truth because there is only one truth-*the evangelizer's* God-revealed, biblically-or church-based truth. Others are not seen as equal. The aim is to gain power over them "in Jesus name" and to punish those who refuse to conform to the religiously sanctioned conventional values of the in-group.

Those who have a need to impose their will on others and convert them are driven by correct theological belief not motivated by ethical behavior. Theirs is a personal, other-worldly destination, not an interpersonal journey with others-unless they are, or become like-minded. And it is here that faith-based "moral values"--crusading churchgoers actually reveal ethnocentric-like tendencies: in their uncritical submission to the absolute belief handed down through/by their religious leaders, in their interpreting (with negative stereotypes) rather than experiencing the reality of perceived "unlike" out-groups, and in their hierarchical view of relationships wherein their faith in-group possesses the true revelation of God and good and is therefore superior and should rightly impose their "moral values" on and dominate out-groups (*The Authoritarian Personality*, p 150)

Many White, evangelical churchgoers who were moved by "moral values" to vote for George W. Bush may actually be seen as "Christocentric." Since ethnocentrism is the belief that "one's own ethnic group, nation or culture is superior" (*Webster's New World College Dictionary*, fourth edition, Macmillan, 1999), these churchgoers appear to be "Christocentric" in their belief in Jesus as the only Son of God and savior of the world.

A favorite authoritative Bible passage is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The "world" means everybody, not just those Christians who hold this belief but all Christians, and not just all Christians but Jews as well as Muslims, Hindus, et al, *everyone*. "Only Son" means Jesus is the greatest revelation of God: born of a virgin, " 'his name shall be called Emmanuel' (which means God with us)" (Matthew 1:23). "Shall not perish but have eternal life" is the bottom line of this belief: God sent Jesus to die on the cross for the sins of the inherently evil *whole* world and *whoever* believes in his sacrificial act of atonement as the *only* Son of God, will not perish in hell but inherit eternal life. Confessing one's inherently sinful nature and accepting Jesus as one's personal savior is the only way hell-bent humanity can be transformed and escape the eternal damnation of an otherwise loving God.

"Christocentric" persons are not content to be saved in themselves, and to allow other individuals the right to a different pathway. Their salvation depends on the damnation of those who are not saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Their one true faith automatically divides people into superior and inferior in-groups and out-groups-and sets the psychic stage for evangelizing and domination "in Jesus name," or in the name of "freedom." A super religion displaying tendencies similar to Hitler's super race with its fascist ideology of superiority.

This is the "Christocentric" belief that led George W. Bush, in 1993, to tell a Jewish reporter, when preparing to run for governor of Texas, "Heaven is open only to those who accept Jesus Christ." ("Go to Hell: The Gospel according to George W." by Michael Kinsley, July 24, 1999, www.slatemsn.com). At a 2000 presidential campaign debate, it also was a "Christocentric" Bush who reacted when pressed to explain how his ideal "political philosopher" Jesus changed his life: "Well, if they don't know, it's going to be hard to explain."

The same rigid "Christocentric" mentality led Baptist evangelist Rev. Franklin Graham to give the following Invocation at President Bush's January 2001 Inauguration: ". . . We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen." This is the same pre-emptive war-supporting, Bible-waving evangelizing carpetbagger who later called Islam "a very evil and a very wicked religion" ("Anti-Islam," *Religion and Ethics*, Dec. 20, 2002, www.pbs.org) and whose

intent is converting Muslims to Christ. The very same Christian evangelist who was invited to lead the Good Friday services at the Pentagon on April 18, 2003.

"Christocentric" fervor also inspired United Methodist minister Kirbyson Caldwell's Benediction at the same January 2001 Inauguration of President Bush: "We respectfully submit this humble prayer *in the name that's above all other names* [italics added], Jesus, the Christ. Let all who agree say amen." How many Jews, Muslims and other citizens of different religions and of no religion, attending and watching the inauguration of the President of the United States, said "amen"? Access to power emboldens and blinds "Christocentric" believers, who may succumb to arrogance.

A Christian minister or priest, who is unaware, for example, of the Muslims and Jews in an audience before him (or her) is far more likely to be oblivious to the Muslims or Jews being oppressed around him-or beyond him by his government in his name.

Thus can an unquestioned President Bush say, "I pray daily . . . for peace," and two weeks later launch an unprovoked, costly war against non-threatening Iraq under false pretenses. And when no weapons of mass destruction are found in Iraq and no ties between Iraq and 9/11, this idealized moral Christian in-group leader in the White House can change his battle cry: by repeatedly challenging anyone to disagree that "the world is better off without [a brutal] Saddam Hussein in power," and then win reelection by cloaking his administration's crime against the Iraqi and American people as an act of God: "Freedom is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to every man and woman in the world." (Acceptance Speech to Republican Convention Delegates, *The New York Times*, Sept. 3, 2004) And thousands of 2004, mostly White, churchgoing Republican Convention delegates stood and gave their "strong leader" with clear "moral values" a standing ovation. "Let all who agree say amen," the United Methodist preacher had prayed.

Christian denominations are not only guardians of conventional values but sanctifiers of patriotism. In most churches, the Christian flag drapes one side of the altar and the American flag the other. A good Christian is believed to be a good citizen. God and country call forth strong allegiances and share a strong alliance. One provides freedom of faith and the other faith in freedom. And both are being exploited by an administration committed to empire and domination not to reverence for life and democracy.

The "ethnocentric" and "Christocentric" converge in the person of President Bush. He works both sides of the authoritarian personality. He reinforces the authoritarian need for certainty and supremacy over other groups by saying, "I want to remind the people of America, we're still the greatest nation on the face of the Earth." (weekly radio address, Sept. 22, 2001) He refuses to examine how United States' foreign policy contributes to the creation of enemies-as if the planes used in the horrific attack against America *came from out of the blue*. He stereotypes all who resist United States' military aggression, occupation and domination as "evildoers," "the evil ones," "killers," and "terrorists" who "hate our success [and] our liberty" ("George W. Bush's Insights on evil," Oct. 5, 2004, www.irregularartimes.com) and whom "you can't talk sense to." ("President's Remarks in Canton, Ohio," July 21, 2004, www.whitehouse.gov). He thinks in rigid terms about in-groups and out-groups: "This is a war between good and evil," and he made it clear to every nation, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." ("George W. Bush's Insights on evil," Oct. 5, 2004, www.irregularartimes.com; "You're with us or against us, Bush says," by Scott Fornek, Staff Reporter, Sept. 21, 2001, www.suntimes.com).

President Bush constantly reminds the American people of the threat of terrorism and that "it's my job as president to protect the American people." And many "moral

values"- professing Christians responded by voting for him because of his "strong leadership" and "clarity" and his sharing of their values of "Marriage. Life. Faith." (Moral Values Propelled Bush to Re-election, Nov. 4, 2004, www.newsmax.com; " 'Values' Helped Shape Bush Re-Election," by Kelley Beaucar Vlahes, Nov. 4, 2004, www.foxnews.com; "GOP Won With Accent On Rural and Traditional," by Paul Farhi and James V. Grymefdi, Nov. 4, 2004, www.washingtonpost.com).

Idealizing one's in-group as the truest and greatest, requiring uncritical submission to in-group authorities, stereotyping out-groups as "evil" and to be destroyed so they cannot "contaminate" the good, resistance to introspection regarding one's own behavior (i.e. inability to admit mistakes, relying on instinct not information, faith not facts, inspiration not insights) and willed obliviousness to the reality of out-groups-those are qualities of the current president of the United States. A president with an American flag always on his lapel and a custom-made "Commander in Chief" military jacket at the ready for appearances with his favorite audience.

A certain amount of deception and lip service are required to be authoritarian in a democratic society-especially as president. George W. Bush learned that, *even in Texas*, he could not get elected governor on a "Jesus only saves" platform no matter how big an evangelical base that may build-never mind becoming president of the most religiously diverse country in the world. Thus he evidently never publicly repeated his statement made to the Jewish reporter that only born again Christians and not Jews go to heaven. His belief obviously excluded not only Jews but everyone else as well, including liberal-minded Christians.

The political reality of diversity in America evidently led President Bush to undergo another kind of conversion. In his "journey to the White House," he describes a 1998 visit to Israel with an interfaith delegation, during which a critical "point was driven home" to him: "America is a great country because of our religious freedoms.

It is important for any leader to respect the faith of others." (Autobiography, *A Charge to Keep*, p. 138) Such code words allow him and his constituency to hide the very opposite tendencies-from each other, if not from themselves. And spreading "freedom" and "democracy" in the Middle East can be added to that vocabulary. A classic example of ritualizing code words is President Bush awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to three men who played instrumental roles in the invasion and occupation of Iraq: "General Tommy R. Franks, the overall commander of the invasion of Iraq; L. Paul Bremer III, the chief civilian administrator of the American occupation of the country; and George J. Tenet, the longtime director of central intelligence who built the case for going to war." Bush said, "Today this honor goes to three men who have played pivotal roles in great events. . . . and whose efforts have made our country more secure and have advanced the cause of human liberty." (*The New York Times*, Dec. 15, 2004) *The interpretation of reality is in the eyes of the beholders of power.* "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED."

Disguising reality with code words is seen in the militarizing of the 2005 Presidential Inauguration. The theme is "Celebrating Freedom. Honoring Service." And "this year's event will have one brand new addition, the Commander-in-Chief Ball," free to 2000 members of the military and their families, and featuring those just back from Iraq and Afghanistan, or about to be deployed there. ("Bush's inauguration to reflect nation at war," by Nina Bradley, Dec. 15, 2004, www.msnbc.msn.com).

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan evidently will not be invited to the Inaugural's Commander-in-Chief Ball. He has condemned the Bush administration's pre-emptive war against Iraq as "illegal," a violation of international law because it lacks UN Security Council approval. Rather than "celebrating freedom" and "honoring service,"

Annan says about President Bush's "advance of liberty" in Iraq, "Those who seek to bestow legitimacy must themselves embody it, and those who invoke international law must themselves submit to it." (*The New York Times*, Sept. 22, 2004). The Bush administration's unprovoked, widely condemned military aggression against Iraq is believed to underlie its deeply invested "staying the course" of determining reality.

A reality check is contained in the report of a Pentagon advisory panel on how America is viewed by the Islamic world. The report states that "Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,' but rather they hate our policies," that "when American public diplomacy talks about bringing democracy to Islamic societies, this is seen as no more than self-serving hypocrisy;" and that "in the eyes of the Muslim world, . . . 'American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq has not led to democracy there, but only more chaos and suffering.'" (*The New York Times*, Nov. 24, 2004).

Code words take different forms. Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice are believed to serve as unspoken code words. Their being Black gives the Bush administration the appearance of being committed to equality while continuing to push anti-affirmative action policies and individual responsibility for opportunity and poverty that deny and perpetuate a White-favored hierarchy of access to economic and political power in America.

The need to keep up the appearance of being democratic could lead President Bush to make sure that a Muslim Imam, Jewish Rabbi, or Catholic priest gives the Invocation or Benediction at his 2005 Inauguration. And if a Christian minister is chosen, any words about "the name that's above all other names, Jesus, the Christ" may be screened. At the very least, one may expect representatives of "the liberated" to be visible in the audience. Authoritarian tendencies in a democracy thrive in disguise; and what better disguise than appearances of freedom and inclusiveness and piety and so-called "moral values" that serve to camouflage contrary tendencies being acted out. The name of the game seems to be appearances and perception not authenticity and substance.

The presidential election was not about the rise of "moral values" in America but the emergence of authoritarian tendencies in Americans:

--A political opportunist who gained presidential power by courting a "Christocentric" religious base that is receptive to imposing "moral values" on all citizens here, and "freedom"-and Christ-as "God's gift to every man and woman in the world."

--"Strong leadership" creating a 9/11-like climate of fear of "terrorists," to control us and stay in power under the pretext of providing security to protect us.

--Unquestioning patriotism that offers up its sons and daughters on an ethnocentric altar of domination, to kill and maim and brutalize state-chosen enemies and to be killed and maimed and brutalized in return.

--An accommodating mainstream media that provide much news that's *print to fit*. That determine the limits of public debate with a weekly round of mostly "official Washington" guests on news programs. And that engage their own networks' "experts" who usually validate rather than challenge administration assertions and policies. A media apparently influenced by government control of licensing and of access to key newsmakers and news stories, and by the threat of advertising and readership boycotts. A media whose own corporate values may be represented by the administration in power. A media which need to fulfil their vital role of providing objective news coverage, a wide range

of views on issues, and factually-based, rather than predisposed, programming and editorializing, so that an informed citizenry can participate effectively in the democratic process.

--The politics of religion that keep religion out of politics-unless it is for a faith-based government handout that requires no prophetic administration-boat rocking and a kickback of loyalty at election time.

The Bush administration's faith-based initiative actually appears to be an attempt to redefine poverty, addictions, and other social problems as individual matters calling for self-help groups, rather than ingrained institutional issues demanding more effective government intervention to correct unequal access to educational and economic empowerment and inadequate social services. The discriminatory societal structures that hold people down are believed to be what is evil, not human nature.

Dr. Richard Lerner, professor of Applied Developmental Science at Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts writes of the "peril" represented by the emerging state-legitimized authoritarianism masked as "moral values": "I believe we are entering into an era of state-based definition of 'true' religion and of patriotism, one that admits of no legitimate dissension and that promises to be the only perspective framing public and political discourse." He continues, "Conformity, rigidity of thinking, intolerance, prejudice and ethnocentrism-the elements that Adorno, et al identified more than a half century ago as the defining features of the 'authoritarian personality'-are being embraced as the only truly American approach to our nation and the world. . . . the forces of pre-modernism and destruction of social justice and progress that, apparently, the majority of voting Americans have embraced" (personal communication, Nov. 7, 2004).

The apparently growing authoritarian tendencies in Americans are seen in a recently published nationwide poll of attitudes toward Muslim Americans. The study revealed that "nearly half of all Americans surveyed said they think the US government should restrict the civil liberties of Muslim Americans." Conducted by Cornell University, the survey "also found that *Republicans and people who describe themselves as highly religious were more apt to support curtailing liberties than Democrats or people who are less religious* [italics added]-a finding similar to that reported by the social scientists in their major study of prejudice and "the authoritarian personality" over 50 years ago.

An administration-accommodating mainstream media is cited as well in the Cornell University survey: "Researchers also found that respondents who paid more attention to television news were more likely to fear terrorist attacks and support limiting the rights of Muslim Americans. The researchers were "startled by the correlation [of curtailing civil liberties] with religion and exposure to television news." Said James Shanahan, communications professor and an organizer of the survey, "We need to explore why these two very important channels of discourse may nurture fear rather than understanding." ("44% in poll OK limits on rights of Muslims", by William Kates, Associated Press, *The Boston Globe*, Dec. 18, 2004)

It is believed that Americans and the world would benefit from another major study: the apparent emerging authoritarian tendencies in America. Such a study could focus on the kind of developmental family relationships and economic, political and religious forces in society that make the individual receptive to antidemocratic propaganda and discriminatory policies. A similar focus would be on the kind of family life and institutional forces that prepare the individual to respond positively to democratic appeals that encourage diversity, equality, and mutuality. A key concern would be to understand what in an individual attracts him or her to a religion of

"moral values" that seeks to control and gain power over people, or one committed to their freedom and self-empowerment and the common good.

Those who urge Democrats to learn from the election and let their own light of faith shine on the electorate appear to have learned little from the vote themselves. Jesus did not just say, "Let your light so shine before men." He continued, "*that they may see your good works* [italics added] (Matthew 5:16). Letting one's light shine is about "good works" not "moral values" that discriminate against and deny freedom to those who are different or live by other values. To Jesus, "good works" were about being "merciful" and thereby obtaining mercy, about being "peacemakers" and thereby becoming "sons of God" (Matthew 5: 7,9).

Why is it that certain Christians take to their *heart* Jesus' commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:25-37), and other Christians take to their *head* his saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)? It is assumed that love of one's neighbor depends on love of oneself: one's ability to experience one's own humanness and to embrace one's own worth and rights. It is also assumed that the need for one's "way" and "truth" and "life" to be authoritatively spelled out for everyone reveals a personal insecurity born not of self-love but of self-doubt-rendering one vulnerable to the "moral clarity" of "Christocentric" authority. It seems obvious, therefore, that our nation and other nations would benefit from another study of what in our traditional family relationships and in our society contributes to the emotional security provided by self-love and, conversely, to the insecurity of self-doubt.

The bottom line of religion is behavior not belief-just as the truth is reflected in what one does. Religion is about respecting people's right to be who they are, not about imposing "moral values" on them. It is about empowering people not gaining power over them. About calling them by their own names. About experiencing their reality not interpreting it. It is about loving one's neighbor as oneself. The more one is in touch with and accepting of oneself, the better prepared one is to experience and accept other persons as themselves. "It's about love!"

This article is dedicated with gratitude to the memory of Dr. Daniel J. Levinson, a co-author of The Authoritarian Personality, who was the consultant for Rev. Alberts' doctoral dissertation on authoritarian and supportive attitudes of ministers toward juvenile delinquency and youth offenders, and for his post-doctoral research on the problem areas of the work of Methodist ministers.

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War on Terrorism:

"Specks" and "Logs" and 9/11

America's War on Terrorism Should Begin at Home

By Rev. WILLIAM ALBERTS

The horrific attack against America on September 11, 2001 offered us citizens an opportunity to engage in serious national self-examination about our government's foreign policy in our name, and whether it contributed to such violent aggression. But the Bush administration was not about to engage in or encourage any soul-searching. Instead of introspection, we got projection. We got knee-jerk, flag-waving, distraction-inducing unreflective patriotism. "No threat, no threat," President Bush immediately reacted, "will prevent freedom-loving people from defending freedom. And make no mistake about it," he emphasized, "this is good versus evil. These are evil doers. *They have no justification for their actions* [italics added]. There's no religious justification, there's no political justification. The only motivation is evil." ("International Campaign Against Terror Grows," Remarks by President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan in Photo Opportunity," The White House, Sept. 25, 2001)

Self-examination is fundamental to our individual and national security. A healthy response to any personal or nation-wide tragedy or loss includes asking how our own behavior may have contributed to it. Self-examination is one of life's first and most essential lessons: learning from our mistakes and misfortunes and misconduct by being open to our own possible involvement in helping to bring them about. Being guided by cause-and-effect is critical to assuming responsibility for our behavior and becoming responsible, democratic social beings. Self-examination leads to self-understanding and thus helps prepare us to understand, respect and live with other persons in our society and in the world. Conversely, anti-introspective tendencies, i.e. resistance to examining one's own behavior in conflict and crisis, may lead to self-justification with its denial of any personal responsibility and projection of blame on others, dooming a person or nation to repeat and intensify destructive self-defeating behavior.

The fifth anniversary of the violent 9/11 attack on our country is an especially important time for us Americans to engage in self-examination. It can lead us to identify and thus protect ourselves from the "evil doers" close to home.

Since religion stresses soul-searching, one assumes it would be an integral part of the behavior of a self-professed man of prayer and piety like President Bush. When asked during a 2000 presidential campaign debate, "what philosopher or thinker" he most identified with and why, he replied, "Christ, because he changed my heart." ("George W. Bush," *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia) Bush's "change of heart" involved recognizing that he was a "sinner." In a 2000 campaign interview, he stated that awareness of himself as a "sinner" influenced how he approached government. "I treat people with respect. I don't feel I'm better than anyone

else . . . I respect other people, and that's what's needed in Washington, D.C. right now." (*Beliefnet.com*, editor-in-chief Steven Waldman's interview with Bush, Oct. 2000)

During the 2000 presidential campaign, President Bush stressed the importance of soul-searching in his "walk" with his god. "I've got a lot of imperfections like anyone else," he told *Beliefnet* editor-in-chief Steven Waldman. "And the more I get into the Bible, the more the admonition 'Don't try to take a speck out of your neighbor's eye when you've got a log in your own' [Jesus' admonition] becomes more and more true, particularly for those of us in public life. . . . You see," Bush explained, "if you believe that we're all sinners, as opposed to you're a sinner and I'm not, then I think it helps you. . . bring people together, and that's what is needed on some very practical issues that the country faces." (*Ibid*)

President Bush repeated the same teaching of Jesus on self-examination in another 2000 campaign interview. "A Bible verse that is important to me," he said, "is one that says I shouldn't try to take a speck out of someone else's eye if I have a log in my own. I like that verse," Bush continued, "because it reminds me that we're all sinners. When you admit you're a sinner, it is recognition that there is a need. And that need, for me, was met through Christ." ("God and the Governor," *Charisma Magazine* interview, Aug. 29, 2000)

President Bush's religious soul-searching was apparently motivated by political vote-getting. Winning the presidency in 2000 evidently proved to be a far more "transforming" experience than his self-professed "we're all sinners," "I don't feel like I'm better than anyone else," humble, "walking the walk with Christ"-*on the campaign trail*. With the violent wake-up call of 9/11, national soul-searching was thrown overboard and self-justification took over to "stay the course" of the ship of state. Bush became so blinded by the "logs" in many "neighbors" eyes that he declared an unending "global war on terrorism," rather than lead us Americans in examining any "log" in US foreign policy. Evidently the understanding of others he gained from his own "Christ"-inspired conversion as a "sinner" applied only to [voting] neighbors across the street not to neighbors around the world.

The president diverted attention from soul-searching even any national "speck" of our own by telling us Americans how great we are. On September 11, 2001 he said, "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon of freedom and opportunity in the world." ("Test of Bush's address," *CNN.com/US*, Sept. 11, 2001) In his September 22, 2001 radio address, Bush continued to turn our attention away from any national soul-searching with, "I want to remind the people of America, we're still the greatest nation on the face of the earth, and no terrorist will ever decide our fate."

President Bush repeatedly reminded us Americans how great and thus how "speck"-free our nation is. In September of 2002, he continued to take our minds off any self-examination with, "We differ from our enemy because we love. We not only love our freedoms and love our values, we love life, itself. . . . I believe we can cross any hurdle, climb any mountain because this is the greatest nation on the face of the earth, full of the most decent, hard-working, honorable citizens." ("President Bush Calls on Congress to Act on Nation's Priorities," The White House, Army National Guard Aviation Support Facility, Trenton, New Jersey, Sept. 23, 2002) Similarly, in an address to the staff of the newly created Homeland Security Department, resistance to any national introspection continued to be reinforced by Bush: "There is no doubt in my mind that this nation will prevail in this war against terror, because we're the greatest nation, full of the finest people on the face of this Earth." ("President Bush Addresses New Homeland Security Workers," *CNN.com*,

Feb. 28, 2003) Not even a "speck" here. If we citizens are this great, obviously our political leaders must be great, too.

President Bush saw only "logs" in his apparent attempt to prevent us Americans from becoming aware of the oppressive foreign policy his administration continued to do unto far-away "neighbors" in our name. He quickly discouraged any discussion of what may have motivated the 19 Muslim men to hijack the four passenger jets and use them as missiles to kill nearly 3000 people. In his September 20, 2001 address to a joint session of Congress, he said "Americans are asking 'why do they hate us?'" Bush knew why, without identifying who "the terrorists" and their supporters were or ever talking with any of "them," nor presumably talking to anyone else who has talked to them. "They hate our freedoms," he answered rhetorically, "our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other." ("Transcript of President Bush's address," Sept. 20, 2001)

The importance of us American people asking, "Why do they hate us," and entering into a real national discussion was immediately shot down, and still remains in the ruins of 9/11, a victim of stereotyping and demonizing and mindless patriotism. Throwing any cause-and-effect out the window, President Bush declared, "The people who did this act on America, and who may be planning further acts are evil people. . . . They are flat evil. That's all they can think about, is evil." He then further discourage any national soul-searching: "And as a nation of good folks, we're going to hunt them down, and we're going to find them, and we will bring them to justice." ("President: FBI Needs Tools to Track Down Terrorists," Remarks by the President to Employees at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Headquarters, The White House, Sept. 25, 2001)

President Bush stifled any effort to really entertain the question, "Why do they hate us?" He warned, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." ("Address to a joint session of Congress and the American people," The White House, Sept. 20, 2001) He cautioned, "If you harbor a terrorist, if you aid a terrorist, if you hide a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorists." ("International Campaign Against Terrorism Grows," Remarks of President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan, The White House, Sept. 25, 2001)

The president's threatening "either . . . or" rhetoric appears to have intimidated many in American mainstream media from investigative studies and reporting on who the so-called "terrorists" really are and the reasons *they give* for hating us that may have contributed to 9/11. The fact that US government-identified enemies often show up as "terrorists" in newspapers and on the airwaves of mainstream media has helped the Bush administration to use the tragedy of 9/11 to gain support for a "global war on terrorism," which precludes any real national soul-searching and thus prevents us Americans from seeing any "specks" and "logs" in our government's foreign policy in our name, the knowledge of which provides the necessary basis for justice and peace-making. President Bush's constant stereotyping and demonizing of other human beings, and ensuing fear-and-war-mongering in the name of "freedom" and "peace," are believed to indicate that he is the one who "hates our freedoms."

"Why do they hate us?" A reality check is contained in the 2004 report of the Pentagon's own advisory panel, the Defense Science Board on Strategic Communications. The report states that "Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,' but rather they hate our policies" including America's "one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and the long-standing, even increasing support for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan and the Gulf States." Thus "when American public diplomacy talks

about bringing democracy to Islamic societies, this is seen as no more than self-serving hypocrisy." The report cautions about seeing only "logs" in the "eyes" of these "neighbors": "In the eyes of the Muslim world, . . . American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq has not led to democracy there, but only more chaos and suffering." (*The New York Times*, Nov. 24, 2004; "They hate our policies, not our freedom," *Canadian Content*, Aug. 19, 2006)

Columnist Helen Thomas picked up on the Pentagon's advisory panel's report, revealing its invitation to national soul searching which apparently threatened President Bush's 2004 re-election campaign. Thomas noted that former President Clinton's advisor Sidney Blumenthal was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying "the 102-page report was not made public in the presidential campaign but instead was 'silently slipped on to a Pentagon web site on Thanksgiving eve.'" ("Insurgents Hate Our Policies, Not Our Freedoms," *WCVB-TV Boston 5 ABC*, Dec. 17, 2004)

Helen Thomas pointed out the "log" in President Bush's eye, represented by the Pentagon's advisory panel's report: "The administration got it all wrong, the report indicated, since the Arabs were not yearning to be liberated except from the authoritarian regimes that the United States is supporting." She continued, "It's silly for Bush to keep saying 'they hate freedom,' referring to the insurgents in Iraq. It makes me think he's looking for a new rationale for the war, his earlier reasons having been discredited." She said that "Bush has played into the hands of the radical jihadists by trying to tie the attacks on the World Trade Center to Iraq." And she ends by encouraging soul-searching: "The reality is that the Iraqis hate the conquest and occupation of their country, *just as any people with pride in the world would* [italics added]. (*Ibid*)

"Why do they hate us?" Another "log"-revealing response is presented by Michael Scheuer, a 22-year CIA official who, from 1996 to 1999, headed the bin Laden unit at the Counterterrorist Center, and authored "Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America." Interviewed by Ken Silverstein, Scheuer was asked if the US were "safer or more vulnerable" as "the five-year anniversary of 9/11 attacks" approaches. Scheuer answered, "In the long run, we're not safer because we're still operating on the assumption that we're hated because of our freedoms, when in fact we're hated because of our actions in the Islamic world."

Michael Scheuer revealed the need for national self-examination: "There's our military presence in Islamic countries, the perception that we control the Muslim world's oil production, our support for Israel and for countries that oppress Muslims such as China, Russia, and India, and our support for Arab tyrannies." He stressed, "Publicly promoting democracy while supporting tyranny may be the most damaging thing we do. . . . We use the term 'Islamofacism'-but we're supporting it in Saudi Arabia, with Mubarak in Egypt, and even Jordan is a police state." He concluded by emphasizing the importance of introspection: "We don't have a strategy because we don't have a clue about what motivates our enemies." ("Six Questions for Michael Scheuer on National Security," by Ken Silverstein, *Harper's Magazine*, Aug. 23, 2006)

"Why do they hate us?" President Bush would have us Americans believe that "we are different from our enemy because we love . . . life, itself." He seems so oblivious to the 12 years of US-controlled UN economic sanctions imposed on Iraq, until the invasion, that resulted in the deaths of some 500,000 Iraq children under the age of 5 between 1991 and 1998 alone. (UNICEF report on the devastation caused by the sanctions, Aug. 12, 1999) Then there is the unprovoked, lies-based invasion and report of ensuing deaths of at least 100,000 Iraqi civilians, mostly women and

children, in the first 18 months of the war. ("Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey," by Les Roberts, Riyadh Lafta, Richard Garfield, Jamal Khudhairi, Gilbert Burnham, *The Lancet*, Oct. 30, 2004) And the US occupation and resulting widespread sectarian violence bordering on civil war, which was recently verified by a Pentagon report and denied by Bush. ("Warning issued on sectarian violence: Pentagon says threat is growing," by Robert Burns, Associated Press, *The Boston Globe*, Sept. 2, 2006) And Bush recently allowing Israel's air force to devastate Lebanon, even speeding up delivery of precision-guided bombs to Israel, under the guise of holding out for a "sustainable peace."

"A Bible verse that is important to me is one that says I shouldn't try to take a speck out of someone else's eye if I have a log in my own. I like that verse because it reminds me that we're all sinners." These are the words of a president who resists admitting making a mistake never mind being a "sinner."

"Islamic fascists." Evil doers." "All they can think about is evil." "Flat evil." "Killers." "Murderers of women and children." "Terrorists." Lenin and Hitler" types. A never-ending "global war on terrorism." "They want to create a unified totalitarian Islamic state and destroy the free world." "A struggle for civilization." These are the words of a man driven by projection not guided by introspection.

Similar judgments may be made about President Bush and his administration's policies. In his Hitler-like case, "the big lies" are sanctions-weakened, defenseless, non-threatening Iraq's "mushroom cloud"-threatening weapons of mass destruction and ties to the 9/11 attacks against America. In his case, it is the use of the invaders' "shock and awe" bombs which led to the resistance's use of roadside improvised explosive devices. In the case of many of his evangelical fundamentalist supporters, it is their *Christocentric fascism* that led them to support the invasion, seeing it as an opportunity to convert Muslims to "Christ." And in his case, it is the use of "freedom" and "democracy" as code words to disguise, for public consumption, spreading American imperialism "to the darkest corners of the world." In his case, we may well be fighting "enemies in the streets of our own cities" precisely because his administration committed state terrorism in invading and occupying "the streets of Baghdad."

In President Bush's case, it is appealing to "a higher Father." As he planned his administration's pre-emptive war against Iraq, he prayerfully said, "We go forward with confidence because this call of history has come to the *right country* [italics added]." He proclaimed that "the liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity." (*The New York Times*, Jan. 29, 2003) The war-mongering calling of "a higher Father." Bush continued to declare, "Freedom is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to every man and woman in the world" to justify his administration's war of choice against and occupation of Iraq. (Acceptance Speech to Republican Convention Delegates, *The New York Times*, Sept. 3, 2004) Bush used his god for self-justification and not for soul-searching. And we Americans are far less safe because of the enemies our government continues to create in our name.

President Bush is "walking the walk" with "Christ"? Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) *Tragically, Bush is waging war in the name of peace.* Jesus said, "Love your enemies . . . so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good; and sends his rain on the just and the unjust." (Matthew 5:44, 45, RSV and NRSV). Bush has so demonized our country's enemies that it is almost impossible for many Americans to see them as human beings who, as columnist Helen Thomas wrote, "hate the conquest and occupation of their country, *just as any people with pride in the world would.*" [italics added]

The fifth anniversary of the horrible national wound of 9/11, and our own security, call for examining the "logs" in our government's foreign policy in our name. The greater struggle we Americans face is not about "good versus evil" but about "overcoming evil with good." (Romans 12:21) America's war on terrorism should begin at home. The most dangerous enemies we face are those who would have us sell the soul of our humanity for a mess of "national security" potage. It is time to see the "logs" in the eyes of our country's own fear-and-war-mongers and remove them from office-for the sake of our children and grandchildren and all children and grandchildren *everywhere*.

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Jesus...

Time to Stop Evangelizing and Start Liberating

Jesus, the Theological Prisoner of Christianity

By Rev. WILLIAM E. ALBERTS

Jesus was a Jewish martyr not a Christian saviour. Like numerous other Jewish "insurgents" of his time, he sought to liberate the Jewish people from the Roman Empire's brutal occupation of their country. He did not die on a Roman cross for "the sins of the world" but to rid the Jewish people's world of the sins of the Roman Empire, which violated their nationality, occupied their country, and crucified would-be messianic liberators, like Jesus, for political sedition, and countless by-standers. (see "Report of the Ad Hoc Scholars Group Reviewing the Script of *The Passion*," Dr. Mary C. Boys, SNJM, et al, May 2, 2003, (PDF/Adobe Acrobat-View as HTML) *Jesus died as a liberator not as an evangelizer*. His quoted mission was to empower people not gain power over them. To revive the living, not resurrect the dead. (Luke 4:18)

When early Christianity became the religion of the state and gained power under Roman Emperor Constantine some 300 years later, there was no need for Jesus' mission and model of liberator. In fact, Christians joined the Roman Empire in oppressing the very Jews Jesus sought to liberate and, ironically, they did it "in Jesus name." And, ironically today, descendents of the persecuted Jews are brutally oppressing the Palestinians in the name of "Israeli security." Oppression is often about religious-and political-entitlement licensed by power.

When the Roman state legitimized and favored Christianity, Jesus' model of liberator obviously became dangerous and had to be redefined and concealed. It was now about authority and power: "spreading the gospel"-in the imperialistic wake of state power. The liberator became the evangelizer. Salvation was re-interpreted as an individual matter, apart from institutionalized political and economic realities that greatly determine who, in the gospel words of Jesus, were "poor" and "oppressed" and in need of "good news" and "liberty." (*Ibid*) "The Kingdom of God" shifted from society to the soul, from this life to a future life, from earth to heaven and hell. With Jesus' "love your neighbor as yourself"-ethic applied mostly to like-minded people and those to be "harvested."

The bottom lines of institutionalized Christianity became and, to a large extent, remain authority and power. For Catholicism, it is reported to still be about possessing the keys to the kingdom: "Pope Benedict XVI reasserted the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church, approving a document released yesterday that says other Christian communities are either defective or not true churches and Catholicism provides the only true path to salvation." ("Pope reasserts salvation comes from one church," by Nicole Winfield, Associated Press, *The Boston Globe*, July 11, 2007) For United Methodism, it is about "the conversion of the world. All, of every age and station, stand in need of the means of grace which it [the church] alone supplies." (*The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 1992, page 106) For various hierarchical and "bibliarchical" churches, it is about maintaining and advancing their institutions as they are. And not surprisingly, the greatest threat to their existence as ends in themselves is *the historical Jew, Jesus himself*.

Thus the liberator has been transformed into an evangelizer, and confined behind hierarchical and theological walls, in prayerful solitary confinement. His torturous "extra-theological rendition" from liberator to evangelizer, is especially seen in the careful protests of Catholic and United Methodist leaders against the Bush administration's criminal invasion and brutal occupation of Iraq.

The most powerful Christian leader to oppose the Bush administration's looming preemptive war against Iraq was Pope John Paul II. Mainstream media covered his opposition from beginning to prayerful end. John Paul sent an emissary to meet with President Bush in an attempt to avert the war. The emissary, Cardinal Pio Laghi, described as "a friend of the president's father and the Vatican's first ambassador to Washington," was also believed to have "brought to the White House the moral authority of the Roman Catholic Church." He and Bush met privately for 40 minutes on Ash Wednesday, while back in Rome the Pope "called on Roman Catholics worldwide to fast and pray for peace." ("Pope's Emissary Meets with Bush, Calls War Unjust," by Johanna Neuman, *The Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 6, 2003; "Bush meets with Vatican envoy," *Associate Press*, *cnn.com*, Mar. 5, 2003)

Before the meeting, Cardinal Laghi was quoted as saying "that the two most important things to the Vatican were 'avoiding a war and finding a peaceful solution to the problem of Iraq's disarmament.'" ("Bush meets with Vatican envoy," *Ibid*) Laghi gave President Bush "a letter in which the pope urged Bush to listen carefully to the Vatican envoy. Neither the letter nor the envoy specifically urged Bush to avoid war," according to an administration official. (*Ibid*) *The Los Angeles Times* reported that "the cardinal said the president told him he appreciated the pope's effort to find a peaceful way out of the conflict," which evidently pleased Laghi who was quoted as saying, "We are not at the end yet," and added, "I'm going away with hope." ("Pope's Emissary Meets with Bush, Calls War 'Unjust,'" by Johanna Neuman, Mar. 6, 2003)

The "end" came 15 days later: President Bush ordered 21,000-pound "mother of all bombs" and hundreds of cruise missiles to reign "shock and awe" on Baghdad and other Iraqi cities. Bush's expressed "appreciation" for "the pope's effort to find a peaceful way out of the conflict" was obviously for public prayerful consumption.

The following year, President Bush visited Pope John Paul II at the Vatican and presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. During this White House-initiated occasion, the pope reportedly "firmly reminded the president of the Vatican's opposition to the invasion of Iraq last year," and said the country's "sovereignty" needs to be restored and its "situation normalized" quickly, with active UN involvement, "in conditions of security for all its people." ("Pope Expresses Concern about Continuing Unrest in Iraq," by John Thavis, *Catholic News Service*, www.catholicherald.com, 6/3/04)

The accommodating media coverage of the seemingly scripted event appears to reveal that both Pope John Paul II and President Bush were more concerned about appearances than reality. The Associated Press reported, "Seated next to the Pope, Bush promised his nation would work for 'human liberty and human dignity,' without making any references to Iraq." ("Bush Meets with Pope at Vatican," Associated Press, *Fox News.com*, June 4, 2004) Then came the papal blessing: a Catholic News Service story stated, "At the end of his talk, the pope assured the president of his *prayers* [italics added] and invoked upon him God's blessings of wisdom, strength and peace." ("Pope Expresses Concern about Continuing Unrest in Iraq," by John Thavis, 6/3/2004) The pope must be rolling over in his grave and his god having a fit in heaven-as Bush continues to "pray daily for peace." While even now saying, the "US can still win in Iraq."

Two powerful leaders appearing to play a game for public consumption to protect the authority and power and special interests of their respective institutions and constituents. Rather than accepting the often merit-less, bribery-serving Presidential Medal of Freedom and assuring President Bush of his prayers, Pope John Paul II could have led a timely global interfaith peace pilgrimage to Iraq. Morally powerful also might have been a papal edict calling on Catholics to not support or participate in a life-aborting war against Iraq. Just as Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis reportedly "forbade" 2004 presidential candidate John Kerry "from taking communion while campaigning in the area" for supporting a woman's constitutional right to decide whether to have an abortion. ("Kerry's Communion Controversy," by David Paul Kuhm, CBS News.com

Chief Political Writer, *CBS NEWS*, April 6, 2004) Instead of real moral protest, Pope John Paul II took the pathway of prayer, which is often a tried-and-true silent *legitimizing escape-hatch* of accommodation and complicity. For a more detailed study of Pope John Paul's opposition to the war, and that of other Christian denominations as well, see Alberts, "Mainstream Religious Leaders in Bushtime: Guardians of the Status Quo," *CounterPunch*, Sept. 19, 2005)

Pope Benedict XVI appears to be following in Pope John Paul II's prayerful footsteps. "Celebrating his first Easter as pontiff," a news story reported "he prayed today for peace to prevail over relentless violence in Iraq." ("Pope prays for peace in Easter sermon," BREAKING NEWS.ie, April 16, 2006) "In his Easter message this year," Benedict's publicized reference to Iraq apparently consisted only of "lament[ing] that 'nothing positive comes from Iraq torn apart by continual slaughter as the civilian population flees.'" ("Pope Tells Bush of His Concern About Safety of Iraq's Christians," by Michael A. Fletcher, *washingtonpost.com*. June 10, 2007)

In his recent, assumed 30-minute meeting with President Bush, Pope Benedict was quoted as "express[ing] concern about 'the worrying situation in Iraq,' especially the

deteriorating plight of Christians there." Bush told reporters afterwards that "the pontiff was worried that Christians in Iraq were being 'mistreated by the Muslim majority.'" (*Ibid*) A classic example of blaming the victims instead of the criminality of the Christian-professing invaders and occupiers. Bush was also quoted as calling "his meeting with the pontiff 'a moving experience. I was talking to a very smart, loving man,' he said." It also was reported that "the Vatican has been critical of the US-led invasion of Iraq, but both sides said they did not dwell on those differences Saturday." (*Ibid*)

The pope and the president exchanged gifts with Bush giving Benedict a " 'Moses stick' that was hand-carved by a former homeless man from Dallas." It is "identical to one Bush owns [and] engraved with the Ten Commandments." (*Ibid*) A few weeks later Pope Benedict proceeded to give Jews the short end of the "Moses stick": he authorized greater use of the old traditional Latin Mass, which includes a Good Friday prayer calling for the conversion of the very people who gave Christians the Ten Commandments. An obviously outraged Anti-Defamation League president, Abraham H. Foxman, was quoted as saying, "We are extremely disappointed and deeply offended that nearly 40 years after the Vatican rightly removed insulting anti-Jewish language from the Good Friday Mass, that it would now permit Catholics to utter such hurtful and insulting words by praying for Jews to be converted." ("Pope Eases Restrictions on Wider Use of Latin Mass," by Ian Fisher, *The New York Times*, July 8, 2007)

Prayer as an instrument of liberation or of evangelism? Prayer as an avenue to power or an escape route of passivity? Prayer as a means to speaking truth to power or a way of leaving it up to one's god. Prayer as concern or as cover? Two weeks before unleashing his war of choice against Iraq, President Bush said at his March 6, 2003 press conference, "I pray daily. I pray for guidance and wisdom and strength. . . . I pray for peace. I pray for peace." (*The New York Times*, March 7, 2003) Prayer as a way of confronting or conforming to oppressive institutional political or religious powers? Prayer as complicity?

The aim here is not to denigrate prayer but to show how it is used to avoid risk and thus serve personal and institutional self-interests and advancement. Prayer can lead to action against and not accommodation to the oppression of people. It is a universal means by which people find comfort, grace, the will to affirm their lives, to achieve, to overcome, and empowerment to contribute to a just, inclusive society and world.

But prayer is often another way of folding one's hands and doing nothing, while giving the legitimizing appearance of being involved, which is probably its greatest attraction to Christian institution-builders, whose priority is evangelism not being "peacemakers." Thus Jesus' risky liberation model is often kept in solitary confinement by prayer. It is much easier and safer, *and far more conducive to denominational empire-building*, to evangelize and then control people than to join in liberating them and empowering their right to believe as they choose and be who they are.

Just as much is expected of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI because of their great moral authority, United Methodists have a special obligation to speak truth to power because President Bush and Vice President Cheney are Methodists. Sadly, as with Catholicism, the theological prison confining Jesus is also seen in the United Methodist Church's *measured* protests against Bush and Cheney's criminal invasion and occupation of Iraq.

In November of 2005, 96 United Methodist bishops issued a belated carefully-worded "Statement of Conscience" subtitled "A Call to Repentance and Peace with Justice."

Their generalized opening words were theologically correct: "As followers of Jesus Christ, who named peacemakers as blessed children of God, we call on The United Methodist Church to join us in repentance and renewed commitment to Christ's reign of compassion, justice, reconciliation and peace."

The 96 bishops flirted with telling it like it is: "We repent of our complicity in what we believe to be the unjust and immoral invasion and occupation of Iraq." But vagueness took over: "In the face of *the United States Administration's* rush toward military action *based on misleading information*, too many of us were silent." [italics added]

The bishops were appropriate: "We confess our preoccupation with institutional enhancement and limited agendas while American men and women are sent to Iraq to kill and be killed, while thousands of Iraqi people needlessly suffer and die, while poverty increases and preventable disease is entrenched." But prophetic vagueness continued: "Although we value the sacrifices of the men and women who serve in the military, we confess our betrayal of the scriptural and prophetic authority to *warn the nations* [italics added] that true security lies not in weapons of war, but in enabling the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized to flourish as beloved daughters and sons of God."

The bishops evidently could not help slipping in an evangelistic note: "We confess our failure to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to be people that welcome and love all those for whom Christ died."

Cautious, Biblically-inspired, preachy generalities make up these United Methodist bishops future commitment:

Pray daily for the end of war in general and the Iraq war specifically; . . . for *the leaders of the United States* [italics added] that they will turn to truth, humility, and policies of peace through justice.

Reclaim the prophetic authority that calls *nations, individuals and communities* [italics added] to live faithfully in the light of God's new creation where all people know their identity as beloved children of God; where justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream; . . .

Commit ourselves to peacemaking as an integral component of our own Christian discipleship, which means . . . modeling an end to prejudice toward people of other faiths and cultures; confronting differences and conflicts with grace, humility, dialogue and respect *without being so cautious in confronting evil that we lose our moral authority* [italics added].

The bishops then issued a call to "all United Methodists," which included, "*Let us object with boldness when governing powers offer solutions of war that conflict with the gospel message of self-emptying love.*" They ended on a myopic note: "Let us work toward unity in a world of diversity, that *all peoples* will come to know that we belong to one another and that *in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us* [italics added] (2nd Corinthians 5:19)." (The above quotes are from the January 31, 2006 revision of the 96 bishops' November 8, 2005 "Statement of Conscience.")

The United Methodist bishops' "Statement of Conscience" offers a lesson in evasiveness. "Let us object with boldness when *governing powers* offer solutions of war that conflict with the gospel message of self-emptying love." Which "*governing powers?*" "In the face of the United States Administration's rush toward military action based on misleading information . . ." Which "*United States Administration?*"

What "*misleading information*?" "We confess our betrayal of the scriptural and prophetic authority to warn the nations that true security lies not in weapons of war." Why "which nations" when only "*the United States Administration*" is so blatantly culpable? "*Commit ourselves to peacemaking . . . without being so cautious in confronting evil that we lose our moral authority.*" What "evil"?

Most revealing is the fact that those 96 leaders of the United Methodist Church cannot even bring themselves to name the two men most responsible for the unjust, horrific death and destruction visited upon the people of Iraq and America: *their own church members, President Bush and Vice President Cheney.*

Why such a safe, generalized "Statement of Conscience?" *United Methodist bishops had to say something.* Their church members rightly expected prophetic leadership from them. Their *Book of Discipline* contains a long-cherished belief on "War and Peace We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. . . . We insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them." ("Social Principles," pages 123,124)

The bishops were expected to say something in the face of President Bush and Vice President Cheney launching a falsely-based, unnecessary pre-emptive war against sanction-weakened, non-threatening Iraq. A fear-mongering war based on lies: Saddam Hussein had no "mushroom-cloud" threatening weapons of mass destruction nor ties to the horrific 9/11 attack against America as Bush and Cheney repeatedly charged, while belittling and then aborting the work of the UN weapons inspectors by invading Iraq. A war and occupation devastating Iraq's life-sustaining infrastructure, killing hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians, triggering a massive deadly civil war, forcing over four million Iraqis to become refugees inside and outside their country, destroying and crippling the lives of tens of thousands of Americans, and wasting greatly needed national resources. A war of choice Bush even justified by saying, "Freedom is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to every man and woman in the world." ("Acceptance Speech to Republican Convention Delegates," *The New York Times*, Sept. 3, 2004) A war for oil and empire not freedom. A war protested world-wide and condemned as "illegal" by UN Secretary General Kofi Anan because it lacked UN Security Council approval.

The 96 United Methodist bishops had to say something about a war President Bush even now says, "I believe we can succeed in Iraq, and I know we must." ("White House Press Conference on Iraq: Bush Warns Terrorist Threat to U.S. Will 'Outlast my Presidency,'" CQ Transcripts Wire, *washingtonpost.com*, July 12, 2007) And, "If we fail in Iraq," he warns, "the enemy will follow us home." ("President Bush Discusses Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors, War on Terror at American Legion," Renaissance Hotel, Washington, D.C., *The White House* Mar. 6, 2007) An immoral war driving Bush to "stay the course," for "failure" in Iraq would result in *his criminality following him home to the White House.* A war crying out for "A Statement of Conscience" especially from Bush and Cheney's own United Methodist hierarchy.

But why such a safe statement from President Bush and Vice President Cheney's own church leaders? Perhaps the 96 United Methodist bishops obvious evasiveness is partly due to the pride certain bishops must have felt after meeting months earlier with Bush and reporting him saying, "I'm proud to be a Methodist." ("United Methodist bishops meet with president, open door to future," Tim Tanton, *United Methodist News Service*, May 3, 2005) Another corrupting influence may be the apparent anticipated prestige and power underlying the movement within United Methodism to house the George W. Bush library at Southern Methodist University.

A primary reason for the 96 bishops' laboriously cautious "Statement of Conscience" may be their attempt to control the consciences and anti-war protests of morally outraged United Methodists. It is here that Jesus' model of liberator and call for "peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9) is believed to be confined: behind the bishops' and United Methodism's own *hierarchical walls*.

United Methodism's hierarchical structure is assumed to keep the consciences of its ministers-including its bishops. The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* states that the Church's ministers are to "offer themselves *without reserve* to be appointed and to serve, after consultation, *as the appointive authorities may determine*." [italics added] (p. 230).

The placement and promotion of United Methodist ministers are determined by the "appointive authorities" over them, i.e. their district superintendent and bishop. This hierarchical power over ministers' appointments and advancements is believed to exert considerable influence over their consciences and greatly determine their social action behavior. Ministers usually get ahead by getting along. And those most effective in getting along and maintaining and advancing the institution as it is often become bishops and district superintendents-with important exceptions. The priority is often evangelism not equality, membership not morality, building the church not human community, gaining power not the empowerment of people. Thus bishops may be tentative about rocking the Bush administration's ship of state, fearing constituents will abandon their ship and board the deck of more evangelical churches. Similarly, ministers may hesitate to become involved in controversial issues that would rock the denominational boat, fearing constituent or community complaints to their "appointive authorities" could prevent their own ship from coming in. With presidential candidates rushing to embrace the same prayerful religiosity dictating the behavior of the chaplains of the status quo. It is the politics of religion that keeps religion out of politics-out of risky political issues. One cannot have a hierarchy without a lowerarchy. And such hierarchies are assumed to have an inherently corrupting influence. Jesus' model of liberation and justice-doing is believed to often languish behind such conscience-compromising hierarchical walls and related "preoccupation with institutional enhancement."

A case in point may be Jim Winkler, head of United Methodism's General Board of Church and Society, the international public policy and social justice agency of the Church. While not a minister, Winkler is perhaps the key peace and justice leader in the denomination. A strong early critic of President Bush, Winkler was reported as having "launched a scathing attack on his preparations for war against Iraq, saying they are 'without any justification according to the teaching of Christ.'" Winkler was also quoted as saying, "his church was 'keenly aware' that it counted the President and his deputy among its members, and that he was therefore 'frequently encouraged by others to be very careful about how I say things.'" (*Guardian Newspapers United*, Oct. 20, 2002)

Unlike the 96 United Methodist bishops, Jim Winkler was not "very careful." Less than six weeks after their updated "Statement of Conscience," Winkler gave the keynote address at an ecumenical gathering in Arlington, VA, in which he said, "*Impeach*

President Bush" [italics added] He then spoke truth to power: "*Yes I said it*." [italics added]. The attack on Iraq was sold to our people on lies and the war itself was an illegal war of aggression." Winkler continued, "The NSA spy program is unconstitutional. These are actions far more serious than a failed land deal on the White River or a sexual indiscretion with a White House intern." Winkler was not through: "This is a president who says quote, 'I'm the commander, I don't need to

explain why I say things. . . . Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation." (General Board of Church and Society, www.umc-gbcs.org/timeline - *GBCS Web site*.)

Jim Winkler evidently spoke truth too clearly to power for the United Methodist hierarchy to handle. Three weeks later he muted his call to "impeach President Bush," saying "I regret making that statement." He then explained, "Regardless of my personal opinion on the matter of impeachment, the call for it in the context of that address was unnecessary. . . . It has drawn quite a bit of attention . . . about 40 e-mails, mostly negative." Not that "the volume of e-mails" determines Winkler's stand. But that "the call for impeachment is a distraction from the task at hand-finding an alternative to the 'war on terror.'" ("Faith in Action," Weekly Digest from GBCS, General Board of Church and Society, Word from Winkler, "Regrets: Some things are better left unsaid," *GBCS Website*, June 12-18, 2006)

Many local and state political bodies, peace organizations and anti-war activists, some members of Congress, certain other politicians and government officials, political and social scientists, members of the media and an ever-increasing number of Americans and many in the world community believe impeaching President Bush and Vice President Cheney *is* "the task at hand." Impeachment is the way of stopping their war of terrorism, and thus exposing the so-called "war on terrorism" for what it is: a cover to justify eliminating resistance to the imperialistic policies of the Bush administration and its allies.

Jim Winkler referred to himself as an "obscure church bureaucrat" who, along with "millions of people around the world . . . saw and warned of the disaster ahead." (Word from Winkler, "For Five Years," Faith in Action, General Board of Church and Society, *GBCS Website*, June 18, 2007) Winkler was far from an "obscure church bureaucrat," which is why the United Methodist hierarchy and lowerarchy apparently "encouraged" him to be more "careful about how I say things."

Obscurity may become Jim Winkler's problem. He and other Christians, Muslims and Jewish leaders are "call[ing] on all our communities of faith to draw now on fasting as a pathway toward inner spiritual transformation and outward social transformation." And they will also "encourage local communities to be in prayer for peace and to take specific actions through Thanksgiving weekend to stand together against the war in Iraq and against all the ways in which violence is destroying our communities." (*Ibid*)

The word that is believed to strike fear in the Bush administration's heart is not fasting or prayer but *impeachment*. Jim Winkler had spoken truth to power, and probably paid a heavy price for freeing Jesus for a fleeting moment from hierarchical walls. It is past time for United Methodist leaders and their congregations, and other peoples of faith, to censure and call for the impeachment of the very two United Methodists who are the most dangerous terrorists in the world. The world knows and is watching. Our children and grandchildren will know. It is time to unlock Jesus' theological prison and set him free by becoming justice-doers and "peacemakers." Time to call for the impeachment of President Bush and Vice President Cheney before they start a war with Iran in an attempt to distract us from their criminality in Iraq. Time to stop evangelizing and start liberating other people-and ourselves.