

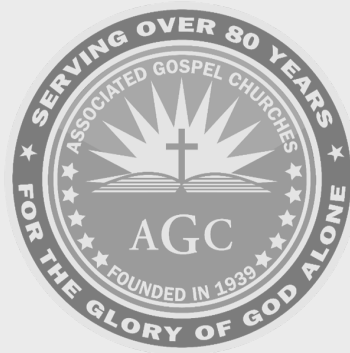
— The AGC —

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Rooted in the Great Commandment (*Matthew 22:36-40*) and the Great Commission (*Matthew 28:18-20*), and recognized by the federal government as an official ecclesiastical endorsing agency, the Associated Gospel Churches (AGC) exists to represent Biblically Christ-centered churches, for the purpose of recruiting, endorsing, educating and supporting ordained men to serve as chaplains—pastors in uniform—in publicly-restricted access institutions.

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FOR CHRIST AND COUNTRY

*υποφέρουν από δυσκολίες μαζί μου, ως καλός
στρατιώτης του Ιησού Χριστού*

– II Tim 2:3

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome back to the AGC Journal, a twice a year periodical which is produced as a means of telling the story of Bible believing Military and Civilian Chaplains working to give honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ through their ministry to those who serve our nation. Each Chaplain of our Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agency believes in the cardinal doctrines of the Christian Faith. Plenary, Verbal Inspiration of the Scriptures is essential to carry out the Great Commission, as well as a belief in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit through the forgiveness of our sins by the vicarious death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This journal is a means of conveying the current trends in military chaplain ministry, but also to function as a toolbox for ideas and resources for those serving the Lord and our nation's heroes. From the latest scholarly works in ethics, to the boots on the ground account of chaplains serving those in combat, this is the one stop shop for the broad spectrum known as Chaplain ministry. In this issue, we have some real treats for our readers. Men who are experts in their fields and who serve the Lord with passion and conviction.

Before introducing the articles though, this is an update for those interested in the teaching/training Chaplain ministry AGC has with the Zambian military chaplaincy. Last July, President Steve Brown, Dr. Kurt Johnson (an AGC member and retired Navy JAG and a member of the advisory board) and myself went to teach a course on chaplain ministry in Kitwe, Zambia. We were well received and after teaching two weeks of seminars to Zambian chaplains, we were fortunate to meet Dr. Rev., BGen Matifeyo, head of all chaplain ministries (military and civilian) in Zambia. During our meeting with him and the president and leadership of Central

African Baptist University (CABU our partners in Zambia for this ministry), AGC was called upon to help train men in chaplain ministry, so they in turn can teach others (II Tim 2:2) through seminars and advanced college courses. As a result, AGC will put out a call later for those who are interested in helping in this wonderful opportunity to spread the Gospel of Christ through African nations.

On a quick note: Yesterday, Voddie Baucham went to be with the Lord. Voddie was a stalwart Christian defender of the faith, and he will be sorely missed. He is with our Heavenly Father now. Please read the book review for more information on his life and ministry.

ARTICLES IN THIS JOURNAL

A Tribute to our Christian Heritage: Some Thoughts on George Washington and Religion by Jerry Newcombe.

One of the seminal works on the faith of George Washington is the book: *George Washington's Sacred Fire*. Written by Peter Lillback and Jerry Newcombe. By special request, Dr. Newcombe has graciously agreed to write some aspects of his research on the life and faith of George Washington. For instance, much has been said by secular historians that Washington was not a Christian because he never partook in communion. In this article, Dr. Newcombe addresses this falsehood, as well as give us insights into other wonderful things about the Father of our Country.

A Tribute to Those Chaplains Serving Our Military Heroes: Memorial Day Sermon 2025 by Ken Lawson.

Ken Lawson is the AGC's official Historian and in this article, he reflects on his time as an Army Chaplain and the historical importance of celebrating Memorial Day. Ken articulates as only Ken can about his time as a Chaplain while ministering to those who were injured during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars in the Global War on Terror. For those interested in a military chaplain ministry, this is an insider's experience on the dark side of helping those who are wounded or have paid the last full measure and that while it is intense, the Lord still always leaves a little of Himself to help those who need help.

A Tribute to Laying a Theological Groundwork for Armed Conflict: Ethics in War by Edward Erwin.

We are fortunate to have this treatise on the ethics of military chaplaincy by Edward Erwin, a faculty member of the Navy Schoolhouse in Newport, Rhode Island. One of the experts in this field for the Navy, Chaplain Erwin, shares his thoughts on military ethics. Of course, ethics in the western world has led to numerous agreements with all nations as how to wage war, there is a tension between war and peace for those who disagree. Ethics is the study of the search for truth and is based on the nature and character of God Himself, but for a lost and sinful world, this study is a must as nations search for a common ground. All Chaplains should be well versed in this subject because as Christians, they must deal with a world which does not know Christ. Studies in Ethics helps to give some information to the Chaplain in this regard.

A Tribute to Those Who Seek God's Will: Finding the Will of God by Kevin Bauder.

Dr. Kevin Bauder is the research professor for Central Theological Seminary and a past president. He is also on the advisory board of the AGC Journal due to his theological knowledge, as well as being a retired Civil Air Patrol Chaplain. He has written a topical series on the practical Christian Walk which are available for purchase through the seminary bookstore. This is an abridged version of his first work called “*Can I Know God's Will?*” Chaplain Bauder is a tireless servant of the Lord by using his life as a vehicle to write, pastor, lecture, teach and preach. In fact, he is coming to the next AGC conference in Feb, '26 to be our guest speaker. Enjoy this sample of his east to understand, but deep application of getting to know our Lord and Savior better through this article.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Chaplain's Toolbox on Current Affairs

Considering the busy schedules chaplains have, these book reports are here to help the chaplain find and read some of the most current books out there to lend support for ministry. They are here for a quick glance at what is being written in the last year or so to whet the appetite for the one who is wanting to read more on the particular subject.

If you would be interested in doing a book review for the Journal, contact me through the home office.

“*War and Political Theory*” by Brian Orend. Review by Edward Erwin.

Again, we are fortunate that our guest Dr. Edward Erwin (CDR, CHC, USN) has shared with us his insights and research concerning Ethics, especially in the Just War Theory category. In this review of Brian Orend’s book, *War and Political Theory*, (released in 2019), goes into the changes in modern thought of the Just War Theory as a result of taking an interdisciplinary approach. This means that beside theology, other disciplines like Political Theory, Military Strategy and International Law are brought into the discussion. All of that to say how the modern military chaplain should have some understanding of the discussions going on about the nature and character of modern warfare.

“*Fault Lines*” by Voddie Baucham. Review by Ken Lawson.

In our second book review, *Fault Lines*, by Voddie Baucham, Dr. Ken Lawson gives us some background and the importance of the life and ministry of Voddie Baucham, who as the previous editor’s note mentioned, has recently gone to be with the Lord. His Book goes over many of the problems of society through the lens of Scripture and is extremely helpful in coming up with strategies in how to deal with those things that many of our young Sailors, Soldiers, Marines and their families struggle with in seeing our modern culture. It is a good read and it is highly recommended.

If you have a comment or would like more information on something you may have read, feel free to write and contact me through the AGC.

For God’s Glory,

Bob Freiberg, editor

CDR, CHC, USN-ret, M.Div, Th.M, D.D., D. Min.

SOME THOUGHTS ON GEORGE WASHINGTON AND RELIGION

Jerry Newcombe

*Dr. Jerry Newcombe is the executive director of Providence Forum, a division of Coral Ridge Ministries, where Jerry also serves as senior producer and an on-air contributor. He has written/co-written 33 books, including (with D. James Kennedy), *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* and (with Dr. Peter Lillback), *George Washington's Sacred Fire*.*

GEORGE WASHINGTON WORSHIPED HERE

It used to be a joke to see signs in historic places boasting “George Washington slept here.” But I think in a very real sense, a handful of churches could legitimately have a sign proclaiming, “George Washington worshiped here.” His active Christianity reflects a key aspect of our nation’s founding—the importance of the Judeo-Christian tradition. George Washington was a committed churchgoer all his life, even when it was difficult to attend. His main church as a young man was Pohick in Lorton, Virginia, and as an older man, it was Christ Church in Alexandria. And there were others in between in other states.

At these churches, you can see the reredos—a wall or altar decoration with the words of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles Creed, and the Ten Commandments, so the worshipers could recite them aloud. I personally have visited many of these churches. Some people today claim that George Washington was not a Christian but a Deist. But the facts don't support that view.

With Dr. Peter Lillback, I co-wrote a 1200-page book on our founding father's faith, *George Washington's Sacred Fire*. The book documents beyond reasonable doubt that our first president was indeed an active Christian all his life. His adoptive daughter said that if you question his

Christianity, you might as well question his patriotism. But sadly, people do question his faith. One man sent me an email disputing my comments about the Christian faith of some of our founders, including Washington.

He wrote me: “George Washington stopped going to church when he was admonished by the vicar for not taking communion. That is very different than your story that he got out of the habit but continued to attend church. He stopped attending church, period.”

But he’s wrong.

You can visit Mount Vernon today and see the red “chariot” (buggy) in which he rode to and from church. You can also visit the church itself, which he attended regularly in the last years of his life. The building is still standing and in use. It’s Christ Church in Alexandria, an Episcopal church. That’s where his funeral was held. You can see and even sit in his box-pew, which he paid for, by subscription.

As noted, Pohick Church in Lorton, Virginia was Washington’s main church home as a young man. He served the church as a vestryman—like an elder and a deacon rolled into one person. To become a vestryman, you had to swear allegiance to the doctrines of the Anglican Church. Washington even chose the exact location for that church building as a surveyor. His recommendation beat out that of fellow church member and founding father, George Mason.

Other churches you can visit where Washington worshiped and see his own box-pew and the reredos include:

- ✦ Bruton Parish in Colonial Williamsburg, where he worshiped along with Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson when they served in the Virginia House of Burgesses.
- ✦ Trinity Episcopal Church in Newport, Rhode Island.
- ✦ Christ Church in Philadelphia, where he worshiped during the summer he presided over the Constitutional Convention; and
- ✦ St. Paul’s Chapel in New York City, near Wall Street.

After his inauguration on April 30, 1789, Washington led everyone over to St. Paul’s Chapel, where they participated in a two-hour Christian service—dedicating the new nation to the Lord. This service included Holy Communion. Eyewitnesses, such as Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, said Washington communed.

That leads me to the question of why he did not always attend communion? The answer is simple. He did at first. But during the war, as Dr. Lillback points out, Washington was leading the troops in a rebellion against the human head of the Church of England, i.e., King George III, and so he could not celebrate common faith with the king in good conscience. During the war, he worshiped at other places, such as the Presbyterian church in Morristown New Jersey. To this day, they have a stained-glass window showing him participating in the Lord's Supper there.

Washington indeed got out of the habit and did not attend the Lord's Supper on a regular basis during the few times a year they had it back then—but he did so on occasion. Eyewitnesses---such as Mrs. Alexander Hamilton---at the communion service at St. Paul's Chapel in New York City in 1789, testified that they saw him commune.

George Washington confessed his faith in Jesus Christ and His atonement throughout his life not only as a worshiper and communicant but also at various public times when he served as a vestryman, church warden, and sponsor in several baptisms. Why does this matter? I think there is a battle over history. I think it's important to recognize what made this nation great in the first place, and I believe if you dig a little deeper, you see the positive impact of the Christian faith in what is best in the creation of America and its freedoms.

To paraphrase President Woodrow Wilson: If we don't know what we were in the past, we don't know what we are in the present, and where we are going in the future.

GEORGE WASHINGTON AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

America was founded for religious liberty, but in our day that freedom is greatly under fire. However, George Washington said that he would not even have signed the Constitution, if he had known that someone would twist it to exclude religious freedom. In a letter to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia (May 10, 1789), he said precisely this: "If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed by the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical Society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it."

The founders did not want a national denomination. They did not want a federal state church "by law established," as existed, for example, in England. They wanted people to have freedom of conscience. (They even tolerated state

churches. There were a handful of states with state churches at the time of the First Amendment. These were never declared unconstitutional, but eventually they were abolished of their own accord.) Some people today don't like the idea of Thanksgiving as a national holiday because it is inherently religious. (Thanksgiving was indeed when the Pilgrims gave thanks to God.) But consider this fact: The same Congress that gave us the First Amendment (which is often twisted today to drive out any religious expression in public) suggested that the new president declare a National Day of Thanksgiving to celebrate the peaceful establishment of our government.

The president agreed, so on October 3, 1789, from the city of New York, George Washington issued a Proclamation of a National Day of Thanksgiving, in which he said:

“Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the Providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me ‘to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving’...”

Dr. Peter Lillback, with whom I had the privilege to co-write, “George Washington’s Sacred Fire,” noted that to his hearers, our first president mentioned Jesus in this line from that proclamation: “And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national... transgressions...”

Jesus is the Lord and Ruler of the Nations, as seen in Revelation 12 (based on Psalm 2). While Washington was the first president to declare a National Day of Thanksgiving, President Lincoln was the first one to make Thanksgiving an annual holiday. (And during FDR’s days, Congress fixed the date as the 4th Thursday of each November.)

GEORGE WASHINGTON DENOUNCED ANTI-SEMITISM

The recent shooting in Washington, D.C. of two Israeli diplomats, a couple that were soon to be engaged, shocked the nation---or portions thereof. It comes as anti-Semitism in America is exploding on college campuses and elsewhere. An American Jewish Committee survey last year found one-third of Jews in the U.S. were targeted by antisemitism in the previous 12 months. The alleged 31-year-old shooter told police, “I did it for Palestine. I did it for Gaza.” And he screamed out, “Free Palestine!”

America was largely created by Christians for the purpose of religious freedom. People of all religions or even no religion have been afforded sanctuary here. Jews who have suffered in various nations around the world have prospered and flourished here. Just as President Washington found time to send correspondence to various Christian groups and ecclesiastical societies, he wrote letters of encouragement to some of the Jewish houses of worship. These missives show how out-of-step anti-Semitism is with the founding of our nation. For example, on June 14, 1790, President George Washington wrote a letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Savannah, Georgia:

“Happily, the people of the United States of America have, in many instances, exhibited examples worthy of imitation.” America is a land of sanctuary to the Jews and the rest. Washington continued: “May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivering the Hebrews from their Egyptian Oppressors planted them in the promised land—whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation—still continue to water them with the dews of Heaven and to make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah.”

Washington knew his Bible and was grateful for Jews to flourish here in this land. In his August 18, 1790, letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Rhode Island, he again expresses his gratitude for the United States’ enlightened policy, “worthy of imitation,” allowing “liberty of conscience.” He pens, “For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.”

And he closes with a summary of his favorite Bible verse, Micah 4:4, which he saw as a picture of what America offers. Here “everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.” In short, George Washington renounced anti-Semitism. So should we. Of course, George Washington told us that we can never hope to be a happy nation unless we imitate “the divine Author of our Blessed Religion,” that is, Jesus Christ. (This was in his Circular to the States, written June 8, 1783.) Are we imitating Jesus today as a nation? I think the answer is “No.” Are we a happy nation? Again, I think the answer is, “No.”

MEMORIAL DAY SERMON 2025

Kenneth Lawson

After 34-plus years of army service as an enlisted soldier and an officer, Ken Lawson retired from the U.S. Army in 2018 as a chaplain with the rank of colonel. He is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force War College and earned a doctorate degree from Westminster Theological Seminary. He is now an adjunct college and seminary professor at several schools and serves as a part-time industrial chaplain and a volunteer fire department chaplain in Vermont.

Good morning and happy Memorial Day weekend. The 1861-1865 American Civil War was a national tragedy. Hundreds of thousands of men from the same nation fought against each other. During and after the war, as a sign of mourning and respect, communities in both the North and South held ceremonies to honor soldiers who had died, often decorating their graves with flowers and conducting religious services. Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, from the decoration of graves, officially began in the years following the Civil War to honor the fallen soldiers of that war. It was formalized in 1868 when General John A. Logan, the commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans, proclaimed a national day for decorating graves with wreaths and flowers. In 1868, General Logan proclaimed May 30 as a national day to decorate the graves of the fallen, specifically those who died in the Civil War.

In 1919, after World War I, Memorial Day evolved from honoring only Civil War soldiers to commemorating all those who died in service to the

United States, regardless of the war. Thereafter all deceased veterans are honored on Memorial Day. Memorial Day became an official federal holiday in 1971 and has been observed on the last Monday in May since then. After that, Memorial Day has grown to be a time when all deceased veterans, police and fire fighters, Border Patrol, first responders, Customs and Border Protection, and all public safety officials, the deceased from all these groups are honored and thanked for their service on this federal holiday.

Growing up in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, my family often took me to Memorial Day parades and cookouts. I was a restless and rebellious child, not interested in God or faith or Jesus. I lived an unfulfilled life of fast cars, loose girls, drug and alcohol use, and competitive sports. In high school my friend's dad took me aside and said, "Kenny, your life is going nowhere. If you keep this up you will wind up in reform school, or jail, or dead. I think you need to join the military." I was 17 years old and a wise guy, but I was not stupid. I signed up to enlist in the army at age 17, graduated high school, then went off to army boot camp.

Our text for this morning is from the second book in the Bible, Exodus chapters 3 and 4. Please join me there.

When I raised my right hand and swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic, I had no idea that I would serve for almost 35 years, and that I would become an officer and a chaplain. I have marched in many Memorial Day parades as a soldier, and I have spoken and prayed at numerous Memorial Day events over the years. But things were not always that way.

I first enlisted in the army in 1979. My first six years were as an enlisted soldier in a combination of active duty and reserve time. While a part-time reserve soldier I used my military benefits to enroll in college. I was the first in my direct family history to attend college. While in college as a 21-year-old freshman with military experience, I began to ask questions on this secular campus about who is God, what is reality, how can a person find inner peace? No one on campus had answers. One night I cried out saying, "God, I do not know you. I do not know what to call you, father or mother or whatever. But if you are real, please show yourself to me. I am ready and I am listening, and I want to learn. Amen." A couple of days later a person on campus I just met told me I looked miserable and that I needed Jesus. He gave me a New Testament and told me to read the gospel of John. Within a few days I was on my knees in tears repenting of my sin and celebrating the new life, the new birth I received as a gift in Jesus. When I was converted on December 7, 1982, I became a new creature in Christ. Everything changed. I knew then

that God called me into full-time vocational Christian ministry. So, I got practical training, went to bible school, got married, got more education, and began an adult life of church ministries and military chaplaincy.

A text that has always been helpful to me is Exodus 3:10-11. In the context of these verses, Moses has been called by God to lead the Jews out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land for the Hebrew people. The Lord appeared to Moses at the burning bush and gave him specific instructions on how God would free the Jews and Moses was to be their leader. But Moses resisted. The text says in Exodus 3:10-11:

“And now come, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”

This question of Moses has often been my question in military chaplain ministries all over the country and in different parts of the world. Who am I to do these things? Who am I to be a chaplain to these soldiers facing battle? How can I minister to wounded and dying soldiers in military hospitals? How can I have the strength to do death notifications and formal military funeral services in cemeteries in the United States and at overseas assignments? Moses said to God, *“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”* I asked myself over and over, who am I, Ken Lawson, to have the responsibilities of being a pastor to men and women in uniform who fight in wars, or who respond to natural disasters, or who struggle with the long-term mental and spiritual trauma that can come from serving in a war zone? And then I answered that question, who am I? I am a Christian. I am redeemed, adopted, transformed by the power of the Gospel. I am a new creation in Christ, I have the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, and the calling of God on my life. I can do all things God wants me to do because I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I can do what God calls me to do because He never asks me to do more than I can handle and that He will never leave me nor abandon me. That is who I am.

I was a chaplain in the army when the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States happened. I was assigned to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, about three hours from the attack sight in New York. I served as a chaplain to first responders at a rear location away from New York City. President George H.W. Bush sent troops overseas to fight the Al Queda terrorists in Afghanistan. I was sent to an army hospital in Germany to work

with the wounded who came from Afghanistan, and I was deployed five times to the Balkans to be a chaplain to troops that were rooting out Al Qaeda terror cells in Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia, and other nearby nasty places.

At times in the Balkans, I felt overwhelmed. Other times I felt empowered. Several times I was shot at, avoided thousands of land mines, and I slept at night in concrete bunkers surrounded by sandbags as our forward operating base came under mortar and small arms attack. I have seen firsthand the killing fields of the mass genocide in Srebrenica, Bosnia where thousands were raped, tortured, murdered, and buried in shallow mass graves. I was there as the United Nations was digging up bodies for identification to proceed with the war crimes trials. I had an awesome, overwhelming responsibility to provide church services, spiritual guidance and education in this volatile, blood-soaked part of the world. It was a challenging experience. That is why I can sympathize with Moses when he was reluctant to obey God and lead the Jews out of Egypt. The text in Exodus 3:10-11 says, *“And now come, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”* But Moses said to God, *“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”* When I think of Memorial Day, I remember how God has allowed me to do things that I could not do on my own, and how he protected me and empowered me beyond my own strength.

Memorial Day honors those who have died in military and public safety occupations to protect us. A few months ago, our community lost a Border Patrol agent named David Maland, age 44, who was killed by gunshot during a traffic stop on Interstate 91 a few miles from here. This is the first Memorial Day after his death for his family and his fellow officers at the nearby Newport Border Patrol station. This national holiday was intended to be a day of mourning and remembrance for those who died in the service of the people of the United States. Traditions such as parades and memorial ceremonies at cemeteries take place all over the country. Tomorrow there is a parade in Newport starting at 10 AM and a ceremony afterwards at Gardner Park. Are you planning to attend? A lot of people have cookouts and family activities but do not know or care about the meaning of Memorial Day.

When I think about Memorial Day, I consider the ordinary men and women who were called to do what was extraordinary. They had a purpose in their lives to be faithful, even unto death. This is a day to celebrate their lives as we respect and grieve their loss.

In our text for this morning, we are considering Moses and his reluctance to lead the Jews out of slavery. Eventually, Moses would become a great

military leader, commanding a large army in many victories in battle. But in Exodus chapters 3 and 4, he is hesitant. He is reluctant. In chapter three he doubted himself when he should have been trusting and obeying God. We have all done that.

Now we continue the account of Moses in Exodus chapter 4. In the context of chapter four, the Lord has told Moses that He will be with him, that He will equip Moses to lead the Jews out of slavery to a promised land flowing with milk and honey. Moses was to stand before the pagan god-king of Egypt, the pharaoh himself, and demand that he releases the Hebrew people to depart slavery for freedom in their own land. But Moses is doubtful. He stated in chapter 4:1, “But what if they do not believe me?” Then God gives Moses tangible, visible, miraculous signs to assure Moses that the Lord will give him strength for this overwhelming responsibility. Exodus 4:10-12 says,

Then Moses said to the LORD, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” But the LORD said to him, “Who has made the human mouth? Or who makes anyone unable to speak or deaf, or able to see or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now then go, and I Myself will be with your mouth, and instruct you in what you are to say.”

I have been where Moses is in this text. He is making excuses instead of following God’s leading. Perhaps we might think Moses is just being modest, but it appears he is simply afraid to do what he is supposed to do. God is sometimes pleased to take ordinary, everyday hesitant people and do remarkable things through them, so others will look to the Lord for deliverance. There were many times in my military service that I felt totally inadequate for what I was asked to do.

For example, I was assigned extra duties at the military hospital in Kaiserslautern, Germany in 2002 through 2004. The troops wounded in Afghanistan and later in Iraq were sent to US military medical facilities in Kuwait. The more serious cases were sent to Germany where I was a hospital chaplain. When the C-17 or C-130 aircraft landed I was part of the team that rushed onto the aircraft to greet the wounded and carry them on stretchers to the triage station. I would enter the rear of the airplane and immediately smell jet fuel, sweat, human waste, puss, and death. If a patient was awake, I would introduce myself as a chaplain and see what I could do for them. I offered to pray for them and visit them in their hospital room later. After one particularly long day of doing chaplain ministry to hundreds of wounded

troops at the airfield, I was asked to report for chaplain duty at the orthopedic ward. I had no idea what was awaiting me.

The orthopedic ward was the area where the wounded were treated who were missing limbs and needed to learn to use artificial arms and legs. The technology of these devices was amazing. The orthopedic wing had 50 rooms but there were over 200 wounded troops located there. There were so many wounded that they were crowded in rooms and lying on gurneys in the hallways. The sight of blood and the smell of sweat, puss, and the stink from human waste was overwhelming. The sounds of groans filled the hallways. I stood at the door of this orthopedics area, which was an area a little bigger than the size of this room with 200 wounded men. This was my mission field for the afternoon. I was already tired, my uniform was soaked with sweat and splattered with blood and other fluids from the troops we had been previously unloading from the aircraft. Now I had to be a pastor, a chaplain to 200 or so men that were total strangers to me, men who had been severely wounded in battle in Afghanistan. Men in pain, some suicidal, all missing limbs, some screaming, all discouraged by their life altering wounds. What was I to do? Who am I to help these men?

As I stood at the doorway overwhelmed at the responsibility facing me, I thought of Moses in Exodus 4:10 who complained to the Lord, saying that he was not eloquent, he was unable to speak to the leaders of Egypt to demand the release of the imprisoned Jews. The Lord responded to Moses in Exodus 4:11-12, saying, “*Who has made the human mouth?... Is it not I, the LORD? Now then go, and I Myself will be with your mouth, and instruct you in what you are to say.*”

Like all of us at times, Moses needed a theology reminder. Who made the human mouth so we can speak? God. Who made people who could speak or see? God. Who allows people to be deaf or blind? God. Since God made us to speak and told Moses who to speak to and what to say, Moses had no excuse to hesitate. But he did. I also hesitated before I went into the orthopedics ward and spent the afternoon counseling and praying and reading the Bible and handing out gospel tracts to these 200 or so severely wounded men. Sometimes we need a theology lesson. We need to be reminded about how great our creator God is, He who made us and sustains us and equips us to do things we might never be comfortable doing on our own. In Exodus 4:11, God gave Moses a brief theology lesson. The Lord is a great sovereign, a holy master, a divine ruler over all the affairs of the world He created. He is even Lord over the pagan god-king, the pharaoh of Egypt.

The original 12 Apostles of Jesus were ordinary men. None were trained orators or scholars. The Apostle Paul came later. Before Paul was a Christian he was trained and educated as a Jewish rabbi in their rituals and traditions. But when it came to talking about Jesus, Paul was an ordinary speaker. In II Corinthians 10:10, Paul's opponents said that his personal appearance was unimpressive, and his speech was ordinary and unremarkable. While some found his preaching and speaking only average, Paul effectively communicated the gospel message and founded numerous churches across a wide area. Like Moses, God empower Paul to teach and preach with remarkable results. And He can do the same with us.

This Memorial Day causes me to think of all the death notifications, memorial services, and military funerals I have been a part of over the decades. 193 at last count. Article One of the Code of Conduct for members of the armed forces of the United States says, *"I am an American fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense."* But then someone dies while in service. A chaplain like me with a casualty assistance officer (CAO) goes to the home of the next of kin and makes the death notification. The CAO will typically introduce themselves and the chaplain, confirm the identity of the next of kin, and deliver the news of the death with composure and empathy, often stating, "The Secretary of Defense extends to you and your family the deepest sympathy in your loss of your son, corporal so-and-so, who gave his life in the line of duty in defense of our nation." I often was at a loss for words as family members cried, screamed, or remained silent. Sometimes they hit me. At other times families wanted to know about heaven and hell and life after death, and I was happy to share that with them. Like Moses, I was never comfortable in these tense speaking moments. I hesitated. I questioned myself. But God got me through them all.

Today, Memorial Day is a somewhat overlooked holiday. Why? What happened? When the holiday originated it was to honor the Civil War dead by decorating their graves. Old black and white photographs show widows and children gathered around Civil War cemeteries to honor the dead. After World War I and World War II, Memorial Day was a big occasion for visiting cemeteries, planting flags on graves, attending patriotic parades, attending church services, and flying a flag at your home. But as these generations of veterans passed away, so have large Memorial Day celebrations. People have forgotten what others have done for them in the past. Only about six percent of all Americans living today are veterans. People today are too busy, or too lazy, or too indifferent to honor the true meaning of Memorial Day, to

respect the dead who died to protect us. As Jesus taught us, there is no greater love than that a person give their life for another.

Laying a wreath on a grave is a symbolic act of remembrance, respect, and honoring the deceased. Wreaths, particularly those made of evergreen branches, have long represented eternal life and victory over death, since the evergreen tree is always green and never loses its color. The circular shape of the wreath also symbolizes eternity, with no beginning or end.

I have often got comfort as a military chaplain from Exodus 4:12, when Moses hesitates about speaking and the Lord said, *“Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you should say.”*

What could I say to a mangled soldier facing death, as I hold his hand as he passed away? How could I speak to a soldier who was missing limbs in horrible pain and wished that he was dead? I am not the only one who needs God’s help is knowing what to say to people in distress. For example, Isaiah 50:4 says, *“The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of the learned, that I may know how to sustain him who is weary with a spoken word.”* Many times, I have sought a spoken word to a weary soldier. In Jeremiah 1:5-8 the prophet Jeremiah is reluctant to speak to the backslid people. He said, *“Ah, Lord God, Behold I cannot speak, for I am a youth. But the Lord said, “Do not say I am a youth, for you shall go to who all that I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.”* The 12 disciples of Jesus were reluctant to go and speak to the people. Jesus said in Matthew 10:19-20, *“But when they deliver you up, take no thought of how or what you will speak. For it will be given you at that time what you will speak. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks through you.”* And the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:19-20 a prayer request, *“that the power to speak may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.”* As we see in Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul, God is not looking for eloquence but availability.

As I spoke at various funerals for veterans over the years, I often struggled for what to say. How to honor the veteran and respect the family and point those present to Jesus all at the same time. Who am I to do such things? Some funerals were well attended and some were not. I have often felt helpless, vulnerable, and alone standing before a group of strangers to give last respects at a military graveside funeral with full rifle team and a formal flag folding and the presenting of the veteran flag to the next of kin. Moses said, *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel*

out of Egypt?” The answer, Moses learned, was that it was not about his qualifications but about God’s enablement.

While I was stationed at Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico, a CAO and I knocked on the door of a poor rural home. Her husband had been killed in Afghanistan. I did not know how to comfort her in her tears. There was a language barrier as I spoke a little Spanish, but she was emotional and talking fast and I could not follow all she was saying. But then I thought of Exodus 4:11, when the Lord said to Moses to go, and God would be with him to help him know what to say. After about an hour of me talking through an interpreter she prayed to receive Christ as her personal savior.

After the September 11, 2001, terror attack on America, I was assigned death notification duties. I and an assistant were responsible for making 13 death notifications in five days throughout Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. We had incomplete next-of-kin information. Some people had moved, some relatives had died, some parents had been divorced, and some listed their place of work but had changed jobs. Some next of kin greeted me with sorrow. Others greeted me with relief, that the status of their loved one was finally known. Some were open to hearing about Jesus and some were not. Some screamed at me and hit me. Some wanted the chaplain to pray, and others were not interested. After 13 death notifications in five days, I was spiritually and physically exhausted. Yet Exodus 3:11-12 proved to be true, as the Lord said to Moses, “*Go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.*”

Every year, Memorial Day reminds me of all these veterans and their families who have given up so much to keep us free and safe. But there is a greater and more lasting memorial that we celebrate at church every time we have communion. Jesus told us at the last supper to “do this in remembrance of me.” That is a memorial event that recognizes the one who died for us and is returning for us, to take us to heaven. This is the greatest memorial of all. Jesus lived, died, and is coming again. Amen. Happy Memorial Day.

“ETHICS MATTERS” A PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

Edward Erwin

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In the critically acclaimed TV series, *Madame Secretary* (2014–2019), the character Henry McCord is a professor at the National Defense University.¹ Spouse to Elizabeth McCord, Secretary of State, Professor McCord teaches military ethics with a background in comparative world religions. In a typical scene, military students grapple with the ethical dilemmas of using drones, cyber-attacks, the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), the justice of war, and other aspects of ethical warfare. Professor McCord facilitates back-and-forth discussion, examining the pros and cons of each ethical dilemma. Then after a robust dialogue, Professor McCord ends

¹ This article is the expanded version of an article previously printed with permission from the Navy Chief of Chaplains Office. See Edward Erwin, “Ethics Matters,” *North Star Newsletter*, Navy Chief of Chaplains Office (November 2024). Chaplain Erwin is writing on his own behalf, and the thoughts and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy, or the Navy Chaplain Corps.

the discussion by writing a pithy quote from a famous philosopher or theologian like Thomas Aquinas on the blackboard. After exploring all the nuanced implications of the insightful quote, the instructor then dismisses the class for further reflections.

For two and a half years, that was my role as an ethics instructor at the Naval Leadership and Ethics Center (NLEC) in Newport, Rhode Island without of course, all the glamor and glitter of Hollywood. The students at NLEC are Navy leaders from every stage of professional assignment and development. From that memorable experience, I reached several conclusions about the importance of ethics in the military. I also observed that some things that are “a blinding flash of the obvious” for chaplains are not seen as clearly by others in the military. We also acknowledge that many members of our command may be unlikely to have a biblical worldview. Even so, there are viable and valuable ethical norms by which they can serve. Among those are recognizing (as I concluded), that:

1) Ethics is about *principles*.

The Navy (and every military service) is replete with ethical documents that affirm the significance of noble principles. The Sailor’s Creed underscores the Navy’s core values of honor, courage, and commitment along with a devotion to fairness and excellence in a work ethic. Right beside the Sailor’s Creed, the Navy affirms in the Navy Ethos that “integrity is the foundation of our conduct.”² Integrity is intended to guide the choices and conduct of its members. In fact, one is hard pressed to find a Navy document that is not impacted by ethical considerations. Even *The Commander’s Handbook on the Law of Naval Operations (NWP 1-14M)* is permeated with ethical guidance on law, Just War Tradition, and the LOAC principles of military necessity, noncombatant immunity, proportionality, humanity, and honor. The Navy has scores of ethical creeds, ethos statements, codes, policies, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Rules of Engagement (ROE), not to mention, the legal requirements of the U.S. Constitution that are given as law or guidance. In addition to all the institutional values and standards, chaplains have the North Star of spiritual readiness and the Scriptures of our own individual faith perspectives to inspire character formation and

² U.S. Navy, *Navy Ethos*, Naval Sea Systems Command, accessed April 3, 2024, <https://www.navsea.navy.mil/Home/Shipyards/Norfolk/Leadership/The-Navy-Ethos/>.

exemplary behavior. Without the bedrock of moral principles, trust is eventually lost; without trust, leadership ultimately founders; and without trusted leadership, mission readiness rapidly disintegrates. The Navy and other services may not practice all these principles, but when errors occur, the military service holds itself accountable to those lofty standards and initiates a course correction.

2) Ethics is about *persons* who care about doing the right thing.

Based on ethics classes, with Navy leaders climbing the leadership ladder from Department Head to Major Commander or Chief to Command Master Chief/Chief of the Boat (CMC/COB), I have come to this unshakeable conviction. The overwhelming majority of our Navy leaders are highly intelligent individuals, extremely skilled warfighters, and ethical leaders who want to arrive at the most honorable and effective decisions possible. I hasten to add the same is true of the NLEC team members who conscientiously reinforce and nurture this transformative mindset. Although I discovered a variance in the level of ethical training among our students, I did not ascertain a variance in the desire of generally good people endeavoring to do what is good. Ethics is important to our leaders in terms of insuring mission success, caring for people within the command, protecting the Area of Responsibility (AOR), and serving the nation. Not the least of which is being able to look at ourselves in the mirror at the end of the day and agree with the legendary Stoic philosopher Cicero on the internal value of morality because it is intrinsically the right thing to do: “Deprive virtue of its proper rewards, yet it is soothed by many consolations, and firmly upheld by its own excellence.”³ Virtue may be instrumental in higher goods, but virtue is also inherently respected as an end in its own right.

3) Ethics is about *prudence* or *practical wisdom*—pursuing what is smart and savvy.

From the past to the present, we hear voices of moral wisdom to prompt our highest aspirations and honorable actions. After all, we are not ethical lone rangers; rather, we are part of an historic maritime community committed to educational advancement and leadership development. Even apart from Scripture, whether it is the normative schools of thought over

³ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Republic*, Book 3.4, trans. C.W. Keyes, accessed July 25, 2024, <https://www.attalus.org/cicero/republic3.html>.

thousands of years from the virtue-based ethics of Aristotle to the rule-based ethics of Immanuel Kant or the results-based ethics of Jeremy Bentham, individuals are not bereft of sage advice in making prudent decisions. Suffice it to say, I saw first-hand military leaders grapple with the current quandaries of AI, robotics, collateral damage, or even right vs. right choices on ranking boards among colleagues. Though I would not write my chicken scratch on the blackboard like McCord, I could always pull up on my laptop thought-provoking quotes from Helen Keller on strength in adversity, Marian Wright Edelman on the high calling of service, and Martin Luther King, Jr. on the content of our character rather than the color of our skin. When tempted to fudge numbers, gun-deck, slide on the slippery slope of ethical compromise, or turn a blind eye in a complicity of passive silence, service members have many counter examples of moral integrity to emulate. We have the classic example of Dwight Eisenhower, a one-time U.S. President and Army five star general, who asserted that integrity is the supreme quality of leadership⁴ or the example of other military leaders such as Medal of Honor recipient Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale who call us to deliver warfighting excellence with the highest standards of integrity. The famous retired football coach from the University of South Carolina, Lou Holtz motivates graduating students during college commencement addresses with the following maxim: “There is never a right time to do the wrong thing, and there is never a wrong time to do the right thing.”⁵ Great leadership involves the best of principles, persons, and practical wisdom in trying to do the right thing in the right way for the right reason in the quest for the right outcome because we hope to be the right kind of people in good times and even in bad times.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defined ethics not as the mere accumulation of knowledge but as the ideal of becoming better persons.⁶ In the process of becoming better persons, we become better spouses and parents, better chaplains, better leaders, and better servants. The Navy recognizes that spiritual readiness involves a journey of leadership and growth, connecting to the transcendent, involvement in a community of faith, sacrifices for the greater good, and the search for meaning, value,

⁴ Dwight Eisenhower, *Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Quotes on Integrity*, accessed October 20, 2024 https://www.azquotes.com/author/4403-Dwight_D_Eisenhower/tag/integrity.

⁵ Lou Holtz, Commencement Address, Franciscan University of Steubenville in 2015, accessed April 27, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNxp3v6oNXU>.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Martin Oswald, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Publishing, 1962), 35.

purpose spiritual readiness (OPNAVINST 1730.1F).⁷ Consequently, spiritual readiness in large measure contributes to character formation. Chaplains already know that to be true to our ministry entails working within our commands to enhance the spiritual readiness of every member of the command. That journey of spiritual readiness in its many applications was my job at NLEC, and that is still my job now at Naval Chaplaincy School. As Chaplains, this should be our role as an ethical and moral advisor wherever we are in the nation's service around the world; *Vocati ad servitium* (called to service)! You may never be that Professor McCord, and your spouse may never be that *Madame Secretary*, but you and I have a real responsibility to promote human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) and virtue (*arête*) in times of peace and war. We may not be formally enrolled at NLEC or any service school, but we are all involved in the leadership school of ethics every day as we aspire to become better human beings and thus better servant-leaders. And that's why ethics is so very important to the leaders of the Navy and every military service Wars are won, and peace is established through a warrior ethos and a profession of arms dedicated to principled and prudential discernment in decision-making.

Doing the right thing at every stage of war and peace is paramount in a day of pervasive social media, increasing global conflict, and scarce resources. Ethics is not an afterthought but a forethought in winning the hearts and minds of the AOR, keeping the hearts and minds of the American people, and preserving the hearts and minds of our military members ever susceptible to moral injury. Mission success, the health of the force, and the just conduct of war, all hinge on dynamic ethical leadership in the military. In *Ethics and Military Strategy in the 21st Century*, George Lucas, one of the most preeminent military ethicists today, reminds us: "Ethics is absolutely inseparable, indeed indistinguishable, from sound military and political strategy."⁸ In a word, ethics matters more than ever to our military leaders, and, for many compelling reasons ethics should matter just as much, if not more, to us as chaplains who are moral advisors to our commands. Every day is ethics day!

⁷ Andrew Haeuptle, "Religious Ministry in the Navy" OPNAVINST 1730.1F, November 9, 2022, accessed November 29, 2024, <https://www.secnav.navy.mil/doni/Directives/01000%20Military%20Personnel%20Support/01-700%20Morale,%20Community%20and%20Religious%20Services/1730.1F.pdf>.

⁸ George Lucas, *Ethics and Military Strategy in the 21st Century: Moving Beyond Clausewitz*, (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2020), 5.

FINDING THE WILL OF GOD

Kevin Bauder

Dr. Bauder is the research professor of theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis and a retired Chaplain with the Civil Air Patrol. This is an edited and abridged article from a book he wrote on the specific topic addressing aspects of the Christian Walk and is one of a series of many books. Special thank you to Central and Dr. Bauder for giving permission to use this as an exclusive article for the AGC Journal.

Sometimes Christians get quite confused while trying to discern the will of God. Some find themselves paralyzed by their search for a will of God that seems to elude them. They are so afraid of making a wrong decision and ending up outside God's will that they can't seem to make any decision at all. They fritter away weeks, months, and even years while they flounder in their uncertainty. Ironically, they would probably do more of God's will if they were less concerned about discovering what it was.

Others confuse God's will with some purely subjective sense or feeling. They make their choices because they "feel led" or "have peace" about it. This approach has led to a variety of unfortunate results. Sometimes it produces arrogance, as with the young man who announces to a young woman that God's will is for her to marry him. Sometimes it leads to folly, as with the husband and father who abandons a good calling and uproots his family so that he can experiment with some new job or lifestyle for which he is ill-prepared and unsuited. Sometimes this approach to God's will even leads people into sin, like a woman I knew who felt that God's will was for her to

divorce her husband and marry a different man. She couldn't understand why I wouldn't accept that choice as God's will for her life. For people like these, finding God's will does not really seem all that different from "going with your gut" or "following your heart."

Some Christians have reacted against these extremes by concluding that God has no particular will for His individual children, or, if He does, He keeps it hidden. They suggest that God's Word, the Bible, reveals sufficient wisdom for all of life's choices. As long as our choices do not contradict biblical precepts or principles, then they are within God's will. This approach has the advantage of eliminating a good bit of goofiness. As we shall see, God really does expect His children to employ wisdom in their choices. Several books of the Bible are called "wisdom literature" because they help us to understand how to make wise choices. Still, the wisdom-plus-nothing approach offers little help or hope to Christians who are struggling with truly difficult choices, especially when they acknowledge that those choices go beyond their limited wisdom. Believers have even despaired during dark hours because they believed that God was not willing to offer them guidance in making the most excruciating choices.

Is there a way to solve this problem? Can we avoid despair on the one hand but arrogance or paralysis on the other? Any solution will have to do two things. First, it will have to permit believers to seek genuine divine guidance for their decisions. Second, it will have to avoid treating this guidance as if it amounts to new revelation. I believe that such a middle way can be found—a way that honors the finality and sufficiency of Scripture while providing believers with help for choices that the Bible does not directly address.

I haven't written this little book for people who want to argue about God's will (or whether He has one). I've written it for people who are hoping that God can and will guide them when they have to make perplexing choices. If you are one of those people, then I hope to encourage you so that you can feel confident of God's guidance and blessing as you make decisions.

PROVIDENCE AND THE WILL OF GOD

The notion that God has a hidden or secret will is tied to the doctrine of Providence, which states that God is actively working in and through His created order. Sometimes God has worked miraculously, but Providence is different from miracle.

When God works miraculously, He works on nature from outside. Miraculous events have no natural explanations. When He works providentially, however, God works from inside nature. In other words, the doctrine of Providence requires double causation: every providential event has a natural cause, but it also has a divine cause.

Perhaps an example will help. Imagine some Christians who are living in a drought-stricken country. They begin to pray that God will send rain. Within days the sky clouds over and a thunderstorm drenches the parched fields. These believers give thanks to God for the rain, which they see it as a blessing from His hand. At the same time, a meteorologist claims that the rain is the result of a cold front that has been approaching for a week—even before the believers began to pray. Who is right? The meteorologist, who sees a natural cause for the storm, or the Christians, who see the storm as a divine answer to their prayers?

The doctrine of Providence says that both answers are correct, as long as neither excludes the other. The thunderstorm is a genuinely natural event, but it is also a divine answer to prayer. God worked through the chain of meteorological causes to respond to His children's prayers.

According to the doctrine of Providence, this kind of double causation works both with natural events and with human events. Behind every human action is a double intention. One is the intention of the person who acts. The other is the intention of God, who is working in and through the human act. On the one hand, people genuinely and freely make their own choices and act out of their own intentions. Sometimes their intentions are evil. On the other hand, behind these human choices is also a divine intention. God permits the evil acts of sinful human beings because He intends to use them to advance His plan and to bring good to His people.

Joseph the patriarch provides an especially clear example of double intention. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. That was an evil choice and an evil deed. The brothers intended to harm Joseph. Decades later Joseph had become the second most powerful person in the most powerful nation on earth. His brothers were terrified that he would try to get even. Joseph reassured them, saying, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20). The word *meant* (Hebrew *chashav*) is the same on both sides. Joseph's brothers had their intentions, which were bad—and Joseph never minimized their evil intentions. Nevertheless, Joseph recognized that God permitted their evil deed because He had His own intention, and God's intention was good. In the example of Joseph, we can see that even the evil deeds of sinful humans are under the providential control of God.

God knows not only every event that occurs, but also every event that will occur. Sometimes He causes those events directly. Other times He causes them indirectly by permitting bad things to happen. If He wished, He could prevent those bad events. Consequently, whatever happens is within His providential will. At some level we can say, “This is God’s will for me,” even when we are facing persecution or dreadful calamity. We are never outside of God’s providential will. We cannot be.

Providence, however, is hidden. We usually don’t see God’s intentions as quickly or as clearly as we see the events themselves. Under normal circumstances, we can’t perceive how those events—especially the calamitous ones—fit into God’s plan. That is why theologians often refer to God’s providential will as His *hidden* or *secret* will. Sometimes they also call it His *permissive* will, because He chooses to permit evil that He does not directly cause.

God’s providential will encompasses every event in the life of every believer. Everything that happens to us always occurs within God’s will, arranged by Him before the foundation of the world. These events always work together for good to those who love God, i.e., those who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). Because it is secret, however, this providential will of God cannot be known in advance. It is found only in events as they occur, and it may not be understood until we are finally living in the presence of God.

Still, we ought to rejoice that God has a providential will for us. He arranges the events of our lives, even the unpleasant ones. Everything that happens to us works together for good. The problem is that this secret will is exactly that: it is secret. It is not something that God tells us in advance. It gives us no help at all in making difficult choices, except perhaps to assure us that God is with us in our worst circumstances and that He intends to use even our bad choices to produce good for us (and that, to be sure, is no small thing to know). Nobody, however, can seek the secret will of God or use it for guidance.

SOME THINGS ARE CERTAIN ABOUT GOD’S WILL FOR US.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of God’s will are clear. God’s will is never for a believer to rob a gas station, murder an enemy, or abandon a spouse. God’s will never include envy, greed, bitterness, deceit, pride, or malice. God never wills His children to neglect their duties. God’s will always includes holiness,

justice, faith, hope, and love. Nobody whose conduct contradicts the teaching of Scripture can ever plead that she or he is doing God's will.

I believe that God has a specific will for each believer. Further, I believe that God is willing to provide direction or guidance to His children who seek it. On the other hand, I deny that following God's leading is a matter of additional revelation. I also deny that it is complicated or mysterious. The following chapters will outline how you or any believer can discern God's leading.

So How does One Seek after God's Will for Us? Here are some Biblical Principles:

1. Start with what you know to be true

If God is not granting further revelation beyond Scripture, then how can believers know His will for their lives? Specifically, how can they receive direction for their decisions without asking for additional revelation and consequently sacrificing the finality and sufficiency of Scripture? I have already commented that several components are involved in this process. I have also articulated the first component: God's will always be in accord with Scripture rightly understood. God never leads any of His children contrary to what the Bible teaches.

The second element in discerning God's will is closely related. It is simply that believers who want to *know* God's will must be prepared to *do* God's will. In other words, submission precedes knowledge. This principle shouldn't surprise anyone. It follows the pattern established in the book of Proverbs. In that book of wisdom, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7). God refuses to answer those who call upon Him without first seeking Him; the fact that they do not fear the Lord shows that they really hate knowledge (1:28–29). A person who understands the fear of the Lord is the one who finds knowledge (2:5). This fear of the Lord involves hating pride, arrogance, and the evil way (8:13). It is the beginning of wisdom (9:10), and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. The fear of the Lord gives His people strong confidence and is a fountain of life (14:26–27). This fear precedes instruction in wisdom, just as humility precedes true honor (15:33). It leads people to depart from evil (16:6). It tends toward life, results in settled satisfaction, and spares one from calamity (19:23).

These and similar verses imply that God's will is not something that we can know in the abstract. We do not have the privilege of placing God's will under scrutiny or of sitting in judgment over it. We are not permitted to find

out what God's direction is so that we can then decide whether we will follow it. If we are not genuinely interested in doing God's will, then God has no reason to help us discover His will. God directs those who are willing to obey. God is only interested in leading those who want to do His will. We demonstrate our intention to do God's will by obeying the part of His will that we already know. The part that we know is revealed in the text of Scripture. If we refuse to obey what we know the Bible teaches, then all our talk about doing God's will is mere pretense. The principle here is quite simple. If you want to know God's will, then you must begin by doing God's will. Your obedience to what you already know is the outward exhibition of a heart that genuinely wishes to follow God's leading.

2. Do all to the glory of God

When we are faced with a choice, and we genuinely want to do God's will, then we ought to make a choice that glorifies God. We should ask what our choices will mean, and if a particular choice carries overtones that conflict with our Christian principles, then we ought to reject it. Even if the thing is acceptable (like eating meat in the controversy about in the Corinthian church), the moment that it carries a negative meaning we ought to avoid it.

3. Know your Duties Before God

Any effort to discern God's leading for particular choices should begin with the question, "What are my duties?" Each of us owes multiple duties, and God will never lead us to neglect any of them. We cannot rightly plead God's will as an excuse to escape from the obligations that we owe.

Everyone has duties. Finding God's direction must begin by acknowledging these duties and seeking to fulfill them. Christians who develop a keen sense of duty and a determination to fulfill all duties often find that many seemingly-difficult choices simply vanish. Discovering God's leading will become a much simpler process.

4. Pray About It

The person who wishes to *know* God's will must be willing to *do* God's will, and this willingness is characterized by actual obedience to as much of God's will as is already known. God never wills His children to engage in an activity that has an anti-biblical message. God's will is always for Christians to fulfill their duties.

The remaining criteria are less straightforward. They are more subjective, though they can be quite as important as the objective criteria. Employing these criteria requires wisdom and a sense of balance. Consequently, those who wish to seek God's leading need to fulfill at least one prerequisite. That prerequisite is prayer. To receive wisdom from God we have to ask for it. If we ask, however, we will receive it generously (Jas 1:5). Since wisdom is necessary to discern God's will, the process of seeking God's direction must be bathed in prayer.

When we are perplexed we may spend days or even weeks in prayer over a serious decision. If it is a decision that affects our families, then we should ask our spouses and perhaps other family members to pray with us. We might solicit the prayers of our Christian brothers and sisters. Sometimes we will even commit ourselves to fasting so that we may give ourselves more fully to prayer. The prayer of a righteous person has great power (Jas 5:16). Nevertheless, prayer is not a magic formula to secure a personal revelation. We should not expect the answer to be written in the sky or to become audible to the ears of the soul. We should expect no signs, and we should trust no sudden, overwhelming convictions. Such things are too easily counterfeited—and powers other than God know how to produce them. The prayer for guidance will be answered through the exercise of wisdom, judgment, and discretion.

That is where the subjective criteria come in. Exercising wisdom requires us to appeal to several sources and to weigh several considerations. What these sources include will be the subject of the following chapters.

5. Inform yourself

Every kind of decision requires different information. No single rule can specify exactly what sort of information you must gather for any given choice. The only rule is to gain as much relevant information as possible before the choice has to be made. Informing yourself is necessary if you intend to exercise due diligence when making decisions.

I have heard Christian leaders dismiss the exercise of due diligence by denouncing it as “human wisdom.” They are half right. It *is* wisdom—but it is not merely human. It is the care that God expects His people to exercise before committing themselves to a course of action. Even Jesus thought that a man who was going to build a tower should not begin construction until he knew how much the project would cost (Luke 14:28). Too many Christian leaders have wrecked ministries—and people's lives—because they did not

bother to inform themselves before announcing some course of action and proclaiming it to be “God’s will.” Too many people have said, “I’m living by faith,” when what they meant was “I’m following an impulse and doing it blindly.”

Ignorance is not faith. Ignorance does not foster faith. Ignorance is not a substitute for faith. Ignorance is never a virtue. Instead, information is a tool that faithful people use whenever possible while seeking God’s direction. David trusted God to deliver him from Saul, but he also trusted the information that Jonathan brought him (1 Sam 20).

God places us in positions in which we have to make choices. In those choices He certainly knows what direction is best for us, but He does not simply tell us what to do. Instead, He uses those decisions as opportunities to grow us in maturity and wisdom. Maturity and wisdom involve the capacity for sound judgment. For that reason, seeking God’s leading usually requires the exercise of sound judgment. The simple truth is that informed judgments are usually sounder than uninformed ones.

6. Seek Godly Counsel

God promises that if we trust in the Lord and acknowledge Him, He will direct our paths (Prov 3:6). In the Bible, He often directed His people through special revelation. Sometimes He directed them in other ways. Of course, He still directs us through the revelation that is recorded in Scripture, but there is no particular reason to think that He cannot direct us in non-revelatory ways as well.

One of the ways in which God leads us to the right choices is through godly counsel. What Proverbs 11:14 says about nations is also true of individuals: without guidance we are in danger, but deliverance can be found in the abundance of counselors. Proverbs also teaches that where people fail to seek counsel, their plans are often frustrated, but counsel from multiple sources helps them to make good plans (Prov 15:22). Good counsel results in workable plans (Prov 20:18). Relying upon many counselors’ results in safety (Prov 24:6). *Not* seeking counsel is the mark of a fool (Prov 12:15). Clearly, God intends us to seek counsel. We may not need counsel for ordinary, mundane choices, such as whether we should wear the blue tie or the red one (though even here many men would do well to heed the counsel of their wives). When it comes to the big choices, however, we should not make a decision without gaining counsel.

If we want to get any help from counsel, we need to choose wise and careful counselors. Bad counsel can lead us seriously astray, as it did with Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1–23). Confronted by the people of Israel with his sinful excesses, Rehoboam took the counsel of foolish young men rather than wise older ones. That counsel brought disaster into his life. We should not expect to receive good counsel from people who are only going to tell us what we want to hear. We should also beware of counselors who only tell us what *they* want us to hear.

7. Understand the Peace of God

If God has an individual direction for His children, then they ought to be able to discern what that direction is. Yet how do we find God's leading without demanding some form of continuing, special revelation? How can we claim that we respect the sufficiency and finality of Scripture if God can somehow lead us while we are making decisions? Many Christians believe that the way to find God's will is to pay attention to a kind of subjective inner sense. Through this feeling or intuition God somehow communicates that He wants us to make one decision and not another. People who claim to experience this inner sense speak of it as a feeling of peace. For evidence that God provides this inner peace they appeal to Colossians 3:15, which commands believers to let the peace of God (or peace of Christ) rule in our hearts. The word *rule* is a term that means to *umpire* or *decide*. Consequently, these people conclude that God leads them through the sense of peace that He gives them. Others have objected that leading through such an inner sense would be equivalent to extra-Scriptural revelation. Many even reject the notion that God causes subjective impressions at all. They insist that believers must rely solely upon the written Word of God rather than upon inner impressions.

I see merit in that response. I agree that the written Scriptures must be the Christian's only source of spiritual authority. On the other hand, I think that this objection can be overstated and misapplied—and I am not alone. Most Christians in most places at most periods of church history have acknowledged that God can indeed cause subjective impressions that do not involve new revelation. I am willing to entertain the possibility that God can produce some sort of non-revelatory intuition in the conscience of the believer.

We have plenty of evidence that God does work subjectively within people. For one thing, the Spirit of God produces conviction of sin—and we

have all felt it at some point (John 16:7–11). For another, God’s Spirit also gives us an inner witness that leads us to welcome the Bible as God’s Word (1 Cor 2:12–16). Furthermore, the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom 8:15–16). All of these are points at which God creates subjective impressions within people, but these impressions are not new revelations outside of the Bible.

Many believe that this kind of impression is in view in Colossians 3:15. They believe that the command, “let the peace of God rule in your hearts,” shows how God leads us through an inner sensation. I disagree. My reason for rejecting this interpretation is that Paul immediately adds, “to which [peace] also ye are called in one body.” In other words, the peace that Paul writes about to the Colossians is not an inner sensation.

Nevertheless, while Scripture affirms that God can impress truths upon our hearts and guide us internally, it is important to distinguish between subjective impression and divine revelation. Not every inclination or feeling can be equated with God’s voice. The peace that is described in Colossians 3:15, for instance, must be understood in context: it is a peace rooted in the gospel, shaped by Christ’s work, and confirmed by His Word. It is not an isolated sensation, is connected from biblical truth or wise counsel.

We ought to be cautious, then, when interpreting our inner impressions. God’s peace does not contradict His Word, nor does it function as a substitute for thoughtful reflection, scriptural meditation, and communal wisdom. Rather, authentic peace emerges as our minds and hearts are shaped by the Spirit through the means God has provided—prayer, counsel, obedience, and reflection on Scripture. The mature Christian learns to submit subjective impressions to the authority of the Bible, seeking confirmation through godly counsel and the fruit of the Spirit, rather than treating inner sensations as stand-alone directives. It is an outward manner of relating to other believers in the church. This peace of God is to govern our hearts *as we carry out our Christian relationships*. While I believe that some intuitions or subjective impressions can come from God, I would not appeal to this verse to prove the point.

Indeed, believers who make this subjective, inner sense the chief or only way of discerning God’s direction are asking for trouble. Even if God *can* prompt inner sensations, He does not *promise* that He will guide us with those impressions. To rely upon something that God has not promised is simply presumptuous. It is a form of tempting God.

As I’ve already said, I believe that God is able to prompt certain kinds of sensations or subjective feelings within the believer. Some of these subjective

feelings are listed as fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), i.e., love, joy, and peace. Yet nothing in the text indicates that inner sensations are produced *only* by God's Spirit. We know as a matter of experience that subjective impressions come from sources other than God. Our inner sensations are affected by how tired or hungry we are, by what we eat, and by whatever stress we may be experiencing. We have no clear way of saying with certainty whether a particular sense of inner peace (or any other sense of leading) is coming from God or from too much cabbage.

Why, then, do I continue to grant subjective impressions a role in seeking God's leading? Further, how do I avoid seeing these sensations as new revelations from God? Let me explain. I'll tackle the second question first, and its answer will lead us back to the first question. I don't believe that inner impressions must constitute new revelations because God can act upon the conscience in the same ways that He acts upon the rest of the created order: either directly or indirectly. If God acts directly and immediately upon the created order, then we call it a *miracle*. If He acts indirectly through secondary causes, we call it *Providence*.

Since God can providentially produce effects within nature, I see no reason to deny that He can produce subjective impressions within the conscience in the same way. Indeed, God clearly does use secondary causes to prompt our consciences: one example is the conviction that we feel when we are rebuked for our sins. This conviction is not miraculous or revelatory, but providential. God can also move our consciences and shape our feelings through other secondary causes, some of which we have already discussed: Scripture, duties, counsel, circumstances, and so forth.

From the divine side, God can operate within our hearts and minds while not manipulating them directly. From the human side, much can be explained by the marvelous ways in which our minds work. The human mind is able to sift, combine, and evaluate complicated sets of factors very rapidly at a level beneath conscious deliberation. That's why we can sometimes fall asleep pondering a question and then wake up knowing the answer. It's also why we can sometimes intuit conclusions without really being aware of how we reach them.

These intuitions often give us a sense of the right answer. Working providentially, God can use these mental powers to prompt a sense of His leading within His people. This sense is not miraculous. It does not demand the direct action of God upon the soul. It is not revelatory. Instead, God leads providentially by prompting inner direction through secondary agencies.

Given these considerations, I do not believe that we should simply ignore all inner impressions when we are looking for God's leading. All the same, I must speak a word of caution. Since this leading is providential, it involves an element of human interpretation. Consequently, our inner sense of leading or peace must never be taken as infallible. As with other factors, our subjective sense of God's leading needs to be evaluated, weighed, and considered. We must not treat it as if it were a form of divine revelation.

The fact that this sense is not revelation also implies that we should not look to it as the primary key to God's leading. We should take inner impressions into account, but they should hardly ever be the determining factor when we are seeking God's direction. An inner sense of peace can help to assure us that we are on the right track, but it does not take the place of other factors. We ought to use these inner, subjective impressions to verify decisions that we are making primarily by weighing the other considerations. In other words, we should use the inner sense of peace for confirmation, not information.

One more thing. We are not all equally intuitive. We are not equally reflective. We are not equally aware of our feelings and inner states. We have not all enjoyed (or endured) the same experiences, and intuition tends to be sharpened by the variety of experiences. If you are a less intuitive person, then you may not feel a sense of leading or peace about a given decision. In fact, you may never experience such a sense. If you don't, that's fine. God is still able to lead you. Please don't insist, however, that the inner experience of others means nothing.

On the other hand, if you are a more intuitive person, you may need to be careful of overestimating your inner sense of peace and direction. You will need to compare it to the other criteria that we have discussed. Furthermore, you shouldn't look down upon people who never experience the same inner sensations that you do.

What I am trying to do is to stake out a middle ground on this issue. I think that it is wrong to ignore our subjective impressions about God's leading. For one thing, those feelings may come providentially from God. For another, they may simply be good intuitions. Nevertheless, we must not respond to those feelings as if they were a sure revelation of God's will, especially since they can also come from other sources. If we avoid both extremes, we can legitimately consider our subjective feelings, inner impressions, or intuitions as one factor among several when we are seeking God's leading. Nevertheless, we should take account of these subjective impressions only after we have carefully weighed all the other considerations.

CONCLUSION: BUYER'S BLUES

Years ago, I began an unsuccessful career in sales. When I started, my manager warned me that I would have to learn to help people get past what he called “Buyer’s Blues.” What is Buyer’s Blues? As my manager explained it, many people experience feelings of doubt, anxiety, panic, and guilt either immediately before or immediately after the decision to make a significant purchase. Part of my job as a salesman would be to coax people through their Buyer’s Blues so they would finalize the sale. Since then, I’ve noticed the same phenomenon in the lives of Christians who face big decisions. Sometimes they are so afraid of missing God’s will that they cannot bring themselves to make a choice. Other times they make the choice, but then they immediately regret the decision they’ve made. Buyer’s Blues can be exacerbated by circumstances. One of my friends accepted a pastorate in Alaska. Driving up the ALCAN Highway, his moving van blew a tire. The rental company took days to send help. Then the “help” overturned his moving van, spilling his possessions along the highway and damaging many of his goods. This was only one episode in a nightmare move. Finally, another friend told him, “It’s obvious that you’ve missed God’s will.”

My friend didn’t listen to that counsel, but others might. I’ve seen Christians who gauge their grasp of God’s leading by how well the decision works. If the going gets tough, they assume that they must have missed the will of God. If they have smooth sailing, then they assume that God approves their decision. When things don’t seem to work out well, does that mean we’ve blown it and landed ourselves outside God’s will? And if we have missed His will, is there any way back, or are we doomed to some permanent spiritual disability? I suggest the following by way of answer.

First, we are not always able to gauge what is working since we don’t always know what God is doing. What seems to work in the short run may be very different from what really works in the long run. People who are clearly following God’s will can sometimes experience very unpleasant consequences in the immediate aftermath of their decisions. For example, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison (Acts 16:16–24).

The book of Hebrews speaks of faithful believers who were cruelly mocked, whipped, chained, imprisoned, stoned, and killed, who had inadequate clothing and money, who endured suffering and even torment, and who were even left without a home. The text adds that the world was not worthy of them (Heb 11:36–38). Their decisions to follow God’s will resulted in extreme hardships, but God placed His approval upon them. Along that

same line, my friend who made that nightmare move to Alaska ended up spending decades pastoring there. He enjoyed a fruitful ministry. In fact, he retired from that church. The difficulties of the move were no indication of God's displeasure.

Second, God's leading is neither miraculous nor prophetic. God leads through Providence, and because His leading is providential, it does not yield certainty. Therefore, as long as we are following the precepts and principles of Scripture, God's leading is not a simple matter of obedience or disobedience. It is more akin to the exercise of wisdom and sound judgment. It is possible for us to make an apparently sound decision that turns out to be a mistake, at least from some points of view.

Third, God is quite capable of using our mistakes. In fact, since judgment and wisdom grow as we make decisions, and since making decisions involves making mistakes, God must intend that we make at least some mistakes. We learn to make good decisions through experience. We gain experience by making bad decisions. While we cannot blame our mistakes on God, we can trust Him to help us make the best of them.

Fourth, growth in character relies upon endurance, and endurance requires suffering (Rom 5:3–4). Whether we are in the will of God or not, some of our choices will result in unexpectedly difficult circumstances. The order in which God produces spiritual maturity is (1) suffering, (2) endurance, (3) character, (4) hope. His will is for His children to suffer enough to require them to show endurance, which will build up their character, eventually producing hope or anticipation. We cannot always judge whether our choice was according to God's leading by whether it leads to a rose-strewn future.

Fifth, every choice, whether mistaken or not, opens a new path in front of us. Once we are on that path, there is no point asking how we might have fared had we chosen a different path. God's will is always that we tread our present path in the best way that we can to bring glory to Him. Part of going forward includes "forgetting those things which are behind" (Phil 3:13). We have no true knowledge of what might have been. We never really know how things might have turned out had we chosen otherwise. Habitual second-guessing of our choices only makes us miserable now.

Sixth, our new choices often bring with them new obligations. These obligations will determine at least some part of God's will for the future. For example, the time to ask whether God is leading you to marry a particular person is *before* the nuptials. During the wedding you swear oaths that are lifelong and binding. God never wills that you violate your wedding vows.

Once you are married, you must never think that God's will was for you to marry someone else. God's will is for you to remain committed to your marriage and for that marriage to succeed.

Similarly, if you have run up debt on your credit cards, God's will is that you pay what you owe. You may decide that the charges were unwise and out of God's will (and they may have been), but that no longer matters. God's will is for you to fulfill your obligations, even if doing so means *not* doing some other things that you might once have thought were God's leading.

Seventh, sometimes we make choices that we later discover to be conspicuously bad. If nothing binds us to those choices, then we might be able to retrace our steps. Bad choices come from not paying attention to the criteria for good choices, such as those that we have discussed in previous chapters. Bad choices may not always be sinful, but they are choices for which we are obviously unsuited. When that happens, we should recognize the difference between endurance (which is a virtue) and obstinance in folly (which is a form of vicious pride). When we *can* correct a bad choice, then we *should* correct it.

Eighth, we must learn to be perplexed without despairing (2 Cor 4:8). We have no guarantee that we'll be able to make every choice with confidence. We have no assurance that every choice will work out well. After all, even with access to direct, divine revelation, the apostle Paul made choices that landed him in horrible circumstances. Some Bible teachers still question whether each of those choices really represented God's will for Paul's life. One even wrote a book entitled *The Blunders of Paul*.

What distinguished Paul was not necessarily that he made the right choice every time (though I disagree with the assertion that his ministry was filled with blunders). What distinguished him was that, even in the worst of circumstances, he kept pressing forward in the ways that matter most: seeking to minister the gospel, strengthen the saints, and glorify Christ. Indeed, the entire epistle to the Philippians is a testimony to this aspect of his life.

As far as I know, the Bible contains no promise that God will give us absolute certainty in our important choices. My personal testimony is that I have rarely experienced that degree of confidence. Often, I have had to make major decisions without even ninety or eighty percent probability. Sometimes I have made them with only the slightest inclination in one direction: fifty-one percent or less. I have made decisions that were followed by joyful excitement; I have also made decisions that were followed by shattering experiences with Buyer's Blues. That doesn't mean that those choices were out of God's will or that I didn't have His leading.

God doesn't seem to be interested in having us torture ourselves with regret. He doesn't want us constantly to be looking over our shoulder, wondering whether each choice that we made was "in His will." Yes, God does have a plan for each individual believer, and He does lead His children. If we are seeking to honor Him, if we are choosing within the bounds of Scripture, and if we are employing the canons of wisdom and careful choosing, then we can trust Him to guide us providentially into the choices that He wants us to make.

We can choose carefully. We should choose boldly. Amen.

Book Review:

WAR AND POLITICAL THEORY

By Brian Orend

Review by Edward Erwin

CDR Edward Erwin is a graduate of William and Mary with a B.A., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary with an M.Div., and Duke University with a Ph.D. in theology and ethics. Chaplain Erwin has taught and facilitated ethics classes within Naval Special Warfare, the Naval Leadership and Ethics Center, and the Naval Chaplaincy School. He has written numerous articles on military ethics for academic journals and professional magazines for the last decade. Chaplain Erwin presently serves as the lead instructor for the Intermediate Leadership Course for the Naval Chaplaincy School.

In the last decade there has been a resurgence of writing regarding the Just War Tradition and its applicability to contemporary and future warfare. Strong Christian authors such as Nigel Biggar, J. Daryl Charles, Marc LiVecche, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Eric Patterson, and others continue to build upon the thought of 20th-century authors such as Paul Ramsey and James Turner Johnson. Their works have done much to strengthen the Just War Tradition and to underscore the Christian foundations of it historically. Also known by many as Just War Theory (see Note 2). There has been a vast amount of writing on the subject from specifically Christian thinkers. However, there are also other voices adding to the literature of the tradition and strengthening it.

In a timely contribution to scholarship on warfare, Brian Orend, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Waterloo, released in 2019 his newest work on the tradition, *War and Political Theory*. (This book builds upon his earlier works *War and International Justice* (2000), *Michael Walzer on War and Justice* (2000), and *The Morality of War* (second ed. 2013).

Working in the field of applied ethics and international affairs, providing both a descriptive and prescriptive analysis of armed conflict helpfully informs and challenges his readership with profound insights.¹ The outcome of his study is a synthesis of seemingly dissimilar political theories that coalesce to help reinforce a revisionist Just War Theory, and this comparative overview of armed conflict suggests the subtle promise of revisionist Just War Theory for international relations amidst a day of technological revolution as well as theoretical reconceptualization of contemporary warfare.²

Orend admits that the purpose of his book is not so much to champion a particular theory but rather to craft an “excellent, detached understanding of the pros and cons of the most important theories, and the most meaningful factual contexts which make the theories come alive,” drawing upon the inter-disciplinary resources of political theory, military strategy, applied ethics, philosophy, international law, etc.³ Regardless of whether the reader judges that Orend has satisfactorily completed his task or not, the fair reader will undoubtedly conclude that *War and Political Theory* exhibits relative impartiality, in-depth subject matter expertise, and a daring spirit of discovery that makes reading the book a worthwhile investment of time and inquiry.

STRUCTURE, STYLE, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF OREND’S PROJECT

The structure of *War and Political Theory* begins with the ontology of war (the nature of war, its basic terminology, and presuppositions, along with its speculated causes) followed by the investigation of three leading theories about warfare: Realism, Pacifism, and Just War Theory. Orend investigates

¹This article contains portions of a much shorter review previously printed with permission from the *Naval War College Review*. See Edward Erwin, “War and Political Theory,” *Naval War College Review*, Volume 74, Number 1 (Winter 2021).

²Later in this article, I will discuss the issue of Just War *Theory* versus Just War *Tradition*, but for the majority of this article I will use the term Just War Theory because Orend does, though I prefer the term Just War Tradition for a number of reasons that I will examine later.

³Brian Orend, *War and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 2.

the classical political realism narrated by Thucydides in the *Melian Dialogue* and later espoused in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* in which the inclination of humankind is the "perpetual and ruthless desire of power"⁴ and winning is all that matters in war without regard for moral sensibilities. By contrast, the structural school of realism is embodied in George Kennan's containment policy of communism during the post-World War II era, a policy marked by kinetic restraint, diplomatic outmaneuvering, and prudent national security interests. From the pessimistic extreme of political realism, Orend turns to the optimistic extreme of pacifism, evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the peace tradition in the secular and religious versions of anti-war postures.

Orend considers the non-violent protests of Mahatma Gandhi as evinced by India's independence from Great Britain and the non-resistant tactics of the underground in the Scandinavian countries against Nazi Germany, e.g., blowing up strategic railway bridges. As a middle way between the two extremes, Orend studies the viability of classical Just War Theory and its sibling rivalry with the revisionist Just War advocates as exemplified in the three stages of warfare: *jus ad bellum* (justice toward war), *jus in bello* (justice in war), and *jus post bellum* (justice after war). Orend reasons that Just War Theory and its international ally in the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) represent a compelling alternative to pacifism's prohibition of war and realism's amoral pursuit of war, acknowledging that war can at times be ethical and wise and at other times wrong and irresponsible. Finally, in the last chapter of the book, Orend discusses the pluses and minuses of the latest technological innovations in the deployment of drones, swarms, killer robots, and cyber warfare and the challenges that they pose in a mixture of symmetric and asymmetric conflict. The recent technology by state and non-state actors tries the limits of classical Just War Theory/LOAC on issues of political sovereignty and territorial integrity avowed since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Another challenge to the Just War Theory is a proposal that dates to Immanuel Kant. The Republican/Democratic Peace Thesis first introduced by Kant and recently espoused by Michael Doyle presents a fascinating proposal

⁴Orend, *War and Political Theory*, 34. Hobbes' maxim *bellum omnium contra omnes*, translated as the "war of all against all," reflects the chaotic "state of nature" in the absence of a sovereign authority, without which there is no law of moral right and wrong, only endless fear and competition. In Hobbesian realism, politics trumps ethics, and so does war.

for “perpetual peace” that does, in fact, contest widely held assumptions within all three major political theories of warfare.⁵

Although the structure of Orend’s project is comprehensive and substantive, the methodological style of Orend’s writing is even more winsome and admirable. Orend avoids any caricatured portrayal of the three foundational theories of warfare in realism, pacifism, and Just War Theory/LOAC. Rather, Orend explores the philosophical underpinnings of each position with professional respect and open-mindedness that reaffirms the fair and dialogical approach characterized in *War and Political Theory*. Orend strives for an “illuminating interaction” between “the three big theories” of war and engages in a robust exchange between argument and counterargument, elucidating the assets and liabilities of each philosophy populated with historical and current proponents and policies.⁶

If the structure and style of *War and Political Theory* encourage a welcomed place in the reader’s library, the significance of Orend’s contribution to war literature is more than a primer in scholarly reflection but a judicious and relevant prompter for decision-making in national security policy. Given changing dynamics in international affairs with the jigsaw puzzle of emergent political alliances and technological advances, Orend upholds the Just War Theory/LOAC as the favored option to both realism and pacifism. For example, in describing the anti-consequentialist and the consequentialist elements of *jus ad bellum*, Orend makes this salient observation:

It is thus reasonable to believe that JWT [Just War Theory], and the associated LOAC, aspire to be comprehensive, ‘common-sensical,’ middle-of-the -road, accounts of warfare which blend two of the most fundamental approaches to morality and ethics: we need to evaluate armed conflict both from the *before-hand* perspective of rights, procedure,

⁵Orend, 181-185. Orend offers a profound critique of Kant’s proposal that republican forms of government will not engage in war with other republics. Therefore, according to Kant, if we increase the number of republics, it follows that we decrease the number of wars. Doyle changes Kant’s formula from republic to democracy. Yet Orend’s scathing critique of an unrealistic proposal that the increase of democracies will eliminate war renders Kant’s slogan of “perpetual peace” to “perpetual conflict.” Indeed, World War I might be propounded as a classic example of monarchical governments warring against one another from Kaiser Wilhelm to King Edward and other crowned heads of Europe who were all inter-related as family. Even when members of the international royal family would not have chosen war, the tide of nationalism swept the burgeoning democracies. Kings were reluctant to restrain the rampant enthusiasm for war lest they would be forced to abdicate.

⁶Orend, 33.

and fair first principles [anti-consequentialist], as well as from *after-the-fact* consideration of costs, causalities, and sufferings, and odds of success or failure [consequentialist].⁷

Though the third major theory of war seems most plausible, Orend submits the traditional Just War Theory/LOAC to the same degree of scrutiny as applied to realism and pacifism and insists that the third major theory needs revision as well. Therefore, Orend conducts a conversation with all three major theories but with subdued confidence depicting revisionist Just War Theory as the most convincing paradigm that integrates and addresses the main concerns of all the theories surveyed.

Adopting the latest political analysis of respected theorists, citing the traditional wisdom of ancient philosophers and theologians, illustrating germane principles with historical cases, and sustaining an honest and rigorous debate between polar theoretical opposites, all of these and more are just a few reasons why *War and Political Theory* is as poignant as it is persuasive and why Orend is one of the leading authorities on the ethics of war today.

JUS POST BELLUM AS A TEST OF REVISIONIST JUST WAR THEORY RESILIENCY

Orend demonstrates his pioneering expertise in the relatively new field of *jus post bellum* in Just War Theory with a sophistication of proposals matched only by his desire to reach common ground among the three major theories of war through an interplay of mutually acceptable goals. For that purpose, Orend references two measuring sticks of success for post-war reconstruction: a) security and b) economy. Citing Jim Dobbins's post-war formula for triumph, Orend offers two questions for consideration in the 10–15-year timeframe for the average citizen during post-war reconstruction: 1) "Am I safer than I was before the war?" 2) "Am I financially better off than I was before the war?" Positive responses are reliable indicators that *jus post bellum* policies were effective.

⁷Orend, 93. Orend's point is well taken that Just War Theory is the middle of the road alternative to pacifism (anti-consequential) and political realism (consequential). As Orend indicates, *jus ad bellum* integrates these twin emphases. *Jus ad bellum* does include deontological principles (legitimate authority, just cause, right intention), but it also includes the consequential calculations of reasonable hope of success, last resort, and proportionality of ends. The prudential element of Just War Theory need not hinge entirely on *jus post bellum*, but it is clearly earmarked in *jus ad bellum* criteria as well.

As well, Orend refers to the Eizenstat's Gaps Analysis in post-war reconstruction societies, claiming that insurgencies arise from gaps in security, capacity (economic prosperity), and legitimacy. The last category of legitimacy alludes to a freely elected government representative of the people and ensuring foundational human rights: 1) personal security from violence, 2) individual freedom, 3) material subsistence, 4) equality, and 5) recognition of persons as rights-bearers. All of these *jus post bellum* measures mirror a proactive and systematic plan to keep the peace won by the war.

Throughout defining the last phase of war, Orend assimilates the virtues of the three major theories of war to forge a win/win consensus that achieves success consistent with core values from each of the different philosophies under the auspices of revisionist Just War Theory in the following five ways.⁸ 1) Orend includes as part of a *jus post bellum* the important role of international authority in occupation laws and war crime trials, meeting the benchmarks of LOAC.⁹ 2) Orend compares and contrasts the thick theories of retribution and rehabilitation but proposes a thin theory of five common elements that bridge the chasm between the two clashing perspectives on justice, e. g., a) ceasefire, b) exchange of prisoners of war, c) public proclamation of war's conclusion, d) accountability in war trials, and e) proportionality with regard to war's cause and the terms of peace on issues such as border disputes.¹⁰ 3) By virtue of rebuilding a defeated power with investments, demilitarization, security, democratization, the victor increases the odds that these well-intentioned efforts will prevent future wars, which is the predominant objective of pacifists. 4) Orend cautions that an anticipated and planned post-war stabilization, security, transition, and reconstruction phase is the best way to secure the hard-won victories of any war, forging new

⁸Orend defines the last phase of war as the termination phase of hostilities or post-war justice stage. There are several military terms associated with the final phases of war: stabilize, enable civil authorities, or SSTR (Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction), to name a few.

⁹Orend, 143-148. A successful *jus post bellum*, Orend emphasizes, will incorporate war crime trials that will adjudicate all charges through an international tribunal (the International Criminal Court established by the Treaty of Rome in 1998) that strives to guard against not only a "victor's justice" but also a "loser's justice" in order to fulfill the role of punishment in satisfying at least in part the retributive aspect of justice.

¹⁰Orend, 149-160. Over and against the retributive definition of justice as dismally illustrated in the failed Versailles Treaty after World War I in which the Central Powers were charged with massive war reparations, Orend commonly supports by contrast the rehabilitative nature of justice. The post-World War II examples of Germany and Japan epitomize the productive outcome of re-building defeated countries in a rehabilitative approach to *jus post bellum*.

alliances and deterring future aggression.¹¹ This point incorporates the priority of a realist agenda, which is all about winning. If *jus post bellum* fails, then victors may have tactically won the war but strategically lost the peace. 5) Orend disputes the “mere adjunct thesis” maintained by traditional Just War Theory proponents.¹²

According to Orend, classic Just War Theory argues that *jus post bellum* is unnecessary because the final phase is implicit in *jus ad bellum* as the vindication of a just cause/right intention. Yet Orend rightfully points out that what is potentially implicit must be made practically explicit because traditional Just War Theory construals have overlooked pressing questions essential to any long-lasting peace. Pointedly, Orend forges a revisionist Just War Theory that emerges from a parlance with all the major theoretical players, assimilating the strengths yet transcending their original positions of weakness to form a viable international relations platform as introduced in the *jus post bellum* proposal. To Orend’s credit, the revisionist Just War Theory expressed in the *jus post bellum* chapter showcases a hearty resiliency and defensibility against the counterclaims of other competing theories.

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE

In terms of a constructive critique, several questions emerge in response to this recent addition to the political theories of war.

1) Is it only revisionist Just War Theory advocates who support *jus post bellum*?

Orend’s treatment of the “mere adjunct thesis” would suggest that a number of the traditional Just War theorists do not approve of the *jus post bellum*. Is it possible that Just War Theory proponents who generally support classical lines as charted by Michael Walzer can also subscribe to the merited

¹¹Orend, 156. To that end, Orend advances ten principles of rehabilitation for the victor to implement in a post-war reconstruction of the defeated country. One principle in particular that is most enlightening and reflects the heart of rehabilitation as opposed to a draconian course of retribution is principle number seven: “Forgo demanding compensation and imposing sanctions, in favour of investing in and rebuilding the economy.”

¹²Orend, 139.

value of *jus post bellum*?¹³ Is it conceivable that the innovation of *jus post bellum* is now the new orthodoxy as what was once contemporary is now part of the classic heritage in Just War Theory? For that reason, the usage of “tradition” rather than “theory” might be more appropriate, as argued by Daniel Brunstetter and Cian O’Driscoll: “The notion of just war as a tradition involves conceiving of it as a multiplicity of closely related but competing voices that, when combined constitutes a unified field of inquiry and practical judgment.”¹⁴ Just War *Tradition* embraces the dynamic of continuity and change as a repository of rich contributions over thousands of years of ongoing dialogue and contemplation from classical antiquity to post-modernity. James Turner Johnson contends that both the depth and diversity of Just War thinkers from Plato to Jean Bethke Elshtain provide “a reminder that the best way to think of the just war idea is as a developing historical tradition rather than a simple, unchanging theory.”¹⁵ Orend, even on Johnson’s terms, could arguably defend that modern *jus post bellum* applications are part and parcel of the “developing historical tradition” as once suggested by Socrates from ancient Greece and Kant during the Enlightenment.¹⁶

In sum on this point, classic Just War theorists can support *jus post bellum* both implicitly as part of Just War heritage and explicitly as part of a relevant

¹³George Lucas, *Military Ethics: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 44, 92. Lucas subscribes to the three stages of Just War and adds the fourth category of *jus ante bellum* (justice before war) as the preparation of military personnel in character formation and moral training. While this is an innovative move that might reasonably be regarded as a revisionist contribution, Lucas would also be labeled a traditionalist who upholds the Just War legacy as the customs of moral and religious conscience that formed the historical basis for the LOAC. See George Lucas, *Ethics and Military Strategy in the 21st Century: Moving Beyond Clausewitz* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2020), 99-102, 190-92.

¹⁴Daniel Brunstetter and Cian O’Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers: From Cicero to the 21st Century* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 2-4. Where tradition denotes both theory and practice as embedded in history, theory does not necessarily entail practice and could suggest a detachment from the concrete world of blood and battlefields, even though Orend’s work is not aloof in the realm of ideas but fully engaged in military history and international policy.

¹⁵James Turner Johnson, Foreword to *Philosophers on War*, edited by Eric Patterson and Tim Demy (Newport, RI: Stone Tower Books, 2017), 3. See Eric Patterson and Marc LiVecche, eds, *Responsibility and Restraint: James Turner Johnson and the Just War Tradition*, foreword by George Weigel (Middletown, RI: Stone Tower Publisher, 2020), 22-23. Consider James Turner Johnson, “Historical Roots and Sources of Just War Tradition” in *James Turner Johnson and the Just War Tradition: Selected Essays*, Eric Patterson, Gina Palmer, and Tim Demy, eds. (Middletown, RI: Stone Tower Publisher, 2023), 83-84.

¹⁶Lucas, *Military Ethics*, 90-92.

and evolving dynamic tradition. Just War *Tradition* is a more comprehensive, communal, and elastic term than Just War *Theory* and proves more inclusive in historical depth and current diversity of perspectives. Moreover, *jus post bellum* while recently advocated by Orend is not a radical innovation but the recovery of age-old principles to which the author has admirably contributed in the formation of modern-day programs that expand Just War discourse.

2) Orend in his section on *jus in bello* contends that Michael Walzer's concept of the moral equality of soldiers is unsubstantiated.

Orend believes that warriors can be held accountable not simply for the wrongful conduct of wars but for wars that are unjust from the very beginning. Typically, elected officials are culpable for crimes against peace and humanity under *jus ad bellum*, and military members are responsible under *jus in bello* for war crimes if they engage in combat operations that violate LOAC prohibitions. Orend avers that members of the Armed Services who fight in unjust wars cannot be morally justified but could be excused for their actions without facing legal repercussions. Is there a double standard in Orend excusing and pardoning those soldiers who fight in an unjust war and yet prosecuting criminal charges against political leaders who launched the war? Though addressed in the chapter on *jus in bello*, the controversy over "excuse" is addressed during *jus post bellum* war trials, and Orend asserts inconsistently retribution for political leaders but rehabilitation for warfighters. The discriminatory policy of punishment for some and forgiveness for others defies the notion of justice as blind and thus fair in the equal treatment of all (policymakers and warfighters alike), in which, according to Orend, both groups are guilty, but one more than the other.

Therefore, the inequality of combatants based on the unjust character of war, not simply war crimes, implicates in all fairness the punishment of warriors whose side was seemingly unjustifiable. Yet if the international community (policymakers, public servants, academicians, warfighters, etc.) is divided over war guilt and the causes of war, how can 18-year-olds grasp all the facts and theories of Just War by which to judge whether their nation is right or in the wrong? Orend presumes and expects too much ethical discernment and knowledge of world affairs to attribute fault to the average junior service member. Contrary to best intentions, the inequality of warriors can inflame military members to demonize their counterparts in a way that nullifies the mitigating effects of *jus in bello*. If there is no equality of combatants, does that not undermine both the proportionality of means and discrimination (prisoners of war treatment) of *jus in bello*, thus escalating the

horrors of war without any considerations of humanity by way of brutalizing the enemy combatant? Orend's intent to show charity and forgiveness toward military personnel involved on the side of an unjust war could actually backfire and increase war crimes and human suffering instead of minimizing the anguish of conflict, which is the very aim of the Just War Tradition.

3) Orend practices charitable empathy and intense engagement between Just War Theory/LOAC, realism, and pacifism.

Repeatedly, Orend furnishes a forum for an exchange of objection and counter objection, a debate that proves both riveting and equitable. Yet in the sibling rivalry between standard Just War Theory and revisionist Just War Theory, does Orend bring that same dialectical exchange of ideas with objections and counter objections? Would Orend's agenda of "detached understanding of the pros and cons of the most important theories" not be better served by underscoring greater debate between the classical Just War Theory side and the contemporary Just War Theory side? That is to say, Orend cites James Turner Johnson as an example of academic resistance to *jus post bellum* but does not exhibit his characteristic debate to represent Turner's original position or his potential rebuttal to Orend's charge. For instance, Turner might insist that *jus post bellum* proposals are unnecessary redundancies to what are already embedded criteria in the Just War Tradition. Meanwhile, Orend's "End-of-War" program might be viewed logically as the organic expansion of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* premises and the natural extrapolation of historic *jus post bellum* priorities as initially adumbrated by Kant in the six principles of perpetual peace and the definitive articles of peace as defended in *Toward Perpetual Peace*.¹⁷ So is *jus post bellum* a legitimate part of tradition or a recent trend that should not be placed on the same plane as those ideas which have survived debates for thousands of years in Just War Theory? Put another way, is *jus post bellum* a development of or a departure from the Just War Theory? Suffice it to say, the exchange between the two celebrated academics would undoubtedly be instructive as well as engaging.

Though Orend generally draws fair conclusions about political realism, pacifism, and Just War Theory, the most important debate, it would seem to me, is the discussion of differences between classic Just War Tradition and revisionist Just War Theory. Though pacifism stresses the ethics of the anti-war position, most would agree that extenuating circumstances and

¹⁷Orend, 181-185.

conditions justify a military response and responsibility to protect one's nation and neighbors against undeserved violence. Even though political realism underscores the rightful role of government to protect and advance national security objectives against adversaries, most would concur that Hobbesian and Machiavellian pursuits of power without moral limitations do not establish world order and global peace consistent with the internationally sanctioned LOAC. Whereas pacifism claims the moral high ground of ethics and realism champions the use of military force, it is the Just War Theory that most convincingly couples the ethics of military force into a cohesive formula of applied ethics and international affairs, calling for our most careful examination and highest moral scruples.

CONCLUSION

Despite lingering questions, these constructive criticisms do not detract from the originality, scholarship, or credibility of Orend's impact on the Just War Theory legacy. However, they only reveal the power of his ideas to stimulate further reflection and discussion for a topic that is pertinent and enduring. Faithful to his task of furnishing a detached analysis of the three major theories and true to supplying a descriptive and prescriptive evaluation of war, Orend authors his book based on a sympathetic engagement with divergent philosophies.

Notably, Orend initiates a productive conversation between three theoretical adversaries and points to the revisionist Just War Theory position as one that effectively applies their most important tenets to the changing landscape of war. Equally important, Orend maintains the distinct criteria of *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello*, and *jus post bellum* but asserts the interdependence of each for its logic and coherence. The inseparable connection of the distinct phases of Just War indicates the necessity of consistency between means and ends. Failure at any stage sabotages and undermines the validity of the *jus pax* (just peace) continuum: 1) an unjust cause regardless of how nobly executed will not culminate in a justly ordered peace after the war; 2) a war fought wrongly can bring into question the supposed just nature of its cause; and 3) a failed end-state dishonors the service and sacrifices of those who died fighting for a virtuous cause.

As one of the leading voices defending *jus post bellum* as an authentic part of the Just War Theory, Orend's scholarship is an inter-disciplinary storehouse of knowledge filled with philosophical, political, and theological concepts and practices that enlighten both student and scholar with an astute reading of

history and current affairs. In a word, Orend presents a promising revision of Just War Theory via *jus post bellum* for international relations that liaises with the best of the three major theories of war and advocates a reinvigorated ethical viewpoint that synergizes classical and contemporary thoughts in a compatible framework crucial for the 21st-century struggles of warfighting and peacemaking.

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Book Review:

**FAULT LINES: THE SOCIAL JUSTICE
MOVEMENT AND EVANGELICALISM'S
LOOMING CATASTROPHE**

by Voddie T. Baucham, Jr.

Review by Kenneth Lawson

After 34-plus years of army service as an enlisted soldier and an officer, Ken Lawson retired from the U.S. Army in 2018 as a chaplain with the rank of colonel. He is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force War College and earned a doctorate degree from Westminster Theological Seminary. He is now an adjunct college and seminary professor at several schools and serves as a part-time industrial chaplain and a volunteer fire department chaplain in Vermont.

Dr. Voddie Baucham is a conservative Christian educator, a widely published author, and a well-known speaker for traditional values and homeschooling. In 2015, he and his family departed the United States so he could become the dean of the school of divinity at African Christian University in Zambia, Africa.

Referring to the title of this book, Baucham sees “Fault Lines” meaning points of weakness, separation, and destruction within conservative protestant Christianity. This point of division is centered on the “Social Justice Movement,” which he sees as a misguided, race-based movement centered more on politics and race than on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This book is divided up into eleven chapters of even length. There are no maps or photographs in the text. There are several helpful charts that depict opposing viewpoints on various issues. There is no Index or Bibliography. There is an Appendix section in three parts. The text has copious footnotes.

The essence of the book is that Baucham, writing as a man of African descent, is very critical of ethnic tensions in the United States. He uses the phrase “ethnic tensions,” not “racial tensions,” since he advocates for humanity being one race, from Adam and Eve and then through Noah and his family. Baucham recognizes that there are ethnic tensions in America, but these problems are based on sin not on race (pp.3-5). He presents the “social justice movement” as a racist movement, discriminating against White people as those who allegedly lord power over Black people and who are determined to keep Black people oppressed (pp. 104, 222).

Baucham does not accept this theory at all. Instead, he places the blame for the problems of Black Americans mostly on the failure of many Black men to be godly leaders, resulting in the disintegration of the traditional family having at home a devoted father and mother (pp. 20, 158-161, 164-165). Again, Baucham sees Black crime, poverty, homelessness, poor educational results, and high rates of Black-on-Black crime as the result of the failure of the traditional family. Moral change is needed in Black America (p. 160).

He is critical of those Black Christians who see themselves as Black before they see themselves as Christians (p. 21). He uses various scriptures to defend this point, such as Colossians 3:11, which states, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” While Social Justice advocates see their identity first as Black, Baucham believes they should see themselves first as Christians (p. 22).

Baucham then addresses the so-called “Liberation Theology” prevalent within the social justice movement. He quotes a Liberation Theology scholar as saying that the job of Christians is not to liberate people from the power and penalty of sin, but “the job of the Christian is to liberate oppressed people from their oppressors” (p. 28). In this context, Baucham exposes the fraudulent nature and the corruption of the Black Lives Matter movement (pp. 217-225), and the godless agenda of LGBTQIA+ advocates (p. 31), both of whom support the Social Justice agenda. He states that biblical Christianity, not any social movement, is what can transform people and society (p. 38).

The Black Lives Matter movement receives special disdain from Baucham. He claims that the movement was founded on lies, half-truths, and a godless, anti-American agenda. Baucham presents the founders of the movement as pagans, spiritists who speak with the dead, practice witchcraft, and are homosexuals (pp. 217-219). They are militantly against the traditional family as described in the Bible, that being a man and a woman married for life, living monogamously (pp. 219-221).

Baucham believes the news media is lazy and promotes stories to gain attention and advocates the agenda of their liberal networks. He cites numerous examples of misinformation from news networks that illustrate alleged racial violence of Whites against Blacks, while ignoring the more prevalent violence perpetrated by White people against White people (pp. 86-88, 106-111). Violence by Whites against Whites does not fit their Social Justice agenda to redeem Blacks from supposed “White oppression,” so such stories of White-on-White violence are typically ignored (pp. 53-63). Black-on-Black murders are often ignored, not fitting their Social Justice narrative (pp. 163-167).

Warnings are prevalent in the book about the cult-like beliefs of the Social Justice movement (pp. 66-67). The movement, in promoting anti-racism, has created a religious doctrinal test for orthodoxy by promoting the virtue of Blackness as a life goal and worldview, instead of biblical Christianity which makes no distinction of ethnicity between believers in Jesus.

According to Baucham, a glaring problem in the Social Justice movement is their focus on systems and not on people. Their focus is on supposed racist practices, policies, and inequalities, even though since the mid-1960s there has not been single law that discriminates against racial minorities in the entire United States legal system. Social Justice advocates see contemporary racism as “institutional, structural, and systemic” (p.85), without addressing that racism is prejudice and biblically is a sin to be repented of through faith in Jesus Christ. Instead, they seek political change, which does not address the human heart.

A big mistake of the Social Justice philosophy is that they seem to think that there is only one Black worldview in America, and they have it. Blacks who do not see themselves as persecuted or oppressed by Whites are said to be misinformed or disloyal. Baucham states that there is no Black perspective that all Blacks share, and that to say so is Black-on-Black racism (pp. 93-94). Further, the idea of dividing people by ethnicity into wicked oppressors (Whites) against the virtuous oppressed (Blacks) is directly against biblical

teaching that all people are born in sin and are guilty before a holy God (p. 111).

Baucham believes that contemporary America is a place where Black people can reach their full potential and achieve the highest offices in the land. He cites U.S. President Barack Obama as an example of this, although Baucham did not vote for him. Baucham believes that more Bible and less secular social science is the key to Blacks in America being successful (pp.119, 124-127).

A special target of Baucham's criticism is the so-called reparations movement within the Social Justice agenda. Their idea is that White people in America are guilty of the racist sins of their ancestors and therefore must make financial, social, and political reparations to contemporary Black people. Baucham sees this as ridiculous, believing that such an idea will make Black people more dependent upon the government and have less incentive to work hard and be resourceful. He rejects the idea of "generational guilt based on ethnicity" as a racist worldview that is directly against biblical teaching of personal responsibility and accountability before God (p. 129). Less entitlements and more meritocracy! What the Social Justice movement cannot explain is how the sins of the past have a cause-and-effect relationship to the corruption, immorality, disfunction, high abortion rates, crime, and Black-on-Black violence that permeates Black America today (p. 157). They say it is systemic racism, but Baucham says it is poor choices and irresponsibility by many contemporary Blacks in America (pp. 162-163).

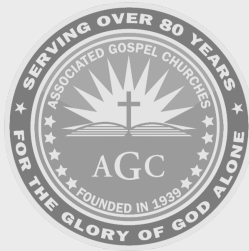
Baucham believes that the Social Justice agenda has done great harm to Black Americans. He states that a movement that tells "young black boys and girls that they are not smart enough, good enough, industrious enough, capable enough, and America is not fair enough for them to succeed," is pejorative and discriminatory against the very Black people they say they are trying to assist (p. 195). Their proposals seek to reengineer society rather than introduce Jesus Christ as the light of the world and the only hope for all humanity (p. 210).

The title of this book references a fault line in contemporary evangelicalism. Baucham sees this danger as a division within Christianity between those who believe that the Bible contains all that a person needs for life and godliness (II Peter 1:3), and those who believe a radical reorganization of political and social norms in America are needed. He urges Christians to expose this racist, social justice movement as corrupt, anti-biblical, and to separate from it. I recommend this book.

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