DISCLAIMER SHEET

Religion in American History
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We conclude our Reader with three documents from modern America. Each represents a different vein of activism by religious leaders in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

The essay by Reverend Joseph J. Johnson, Presiding Bishop of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Shreveport, Louisiana (a small African-American denomination when he published this essay in 1970), exemplifies the turn to “liberation theology” by African-American ministers in the 1960s and 1970s. The essay is all the more interesting because Johnson is at pains to bring the full array of theological exegesis to bear on his argument, ranging from work by Rudolph Bultmann and Emil Brunner to the great nineteenth-century Danish theologian, Søren Kierkegaard. Yet Johnson also forcefully criticizes “white theologians” for ignoring the black religious experience. In doing so, and by concentrating on the “comfortable,” Johnson believes that too many preachers and theologians missed the essence of Christ’s mission—to liberate men and women from “their most distressing problems,” which the African-American experience in America exemplified in abundance. As Johnson writes, “The church building must be a point of departure, a departure into the world, into the dirty here and now.”

The statement by the U.S. Catholic bishops on religion and economic policy represents the high point of liberal social activism within the twentieth-century U.S. Catholic Church. Like Johnson’s essay, the statement is careful to place its principles about the morality of economic life in the context of Catholic teaching generally, including “traditional” teaching about family, morality, and the sanctity of society. The statement came at a unique time in the history of the American bishops, who exhibited more conservative viewpoints in previous decades and who returned to them as Pope John Paul XXIII appointed more conservative bishops in the next decade.

Finally, the excerpt from Jerry Falwell’s *Listen Americal* captures the emergence of conservative Protestant evangelical activism in the aftermath of liberal activism in the 1960s. Falwell was the leader of the “Moral Majority” movement of the 1970s.
and 1980s, a movement that exerted its principal political influence within the Republican Party and that helped elect Ronald Reagan President in 1980 and 1984 and George Bush in 1988 (a decline in evangelical support led to Bush's defeat by Bill Clinton in 1992). In Listen America! Falwell offers an intriguing rationale for political activity by religious conservatives. Like the essays by Johnson and the U.S. Catholic bishops, Falwell lodges that rationale within a broader understanding of religion's purposes, but one that offers a far different vision of religion, politics, and America.

What assumptions do these religious leaders share about relations between religion, society, and politics? What role do they believe government should play, if any, amidst public conflicts over religious, moral, and secular values? Using the analytical and methodological tools you have learned from this Reader, construct an essay highlighting one, or more than one, in the form of a debate.


Joseph A. Johnson, Jr.  Jesus: The Liberator

Paul, in I Cor. 1: 18–24, speaks about the doctrine of the cross. To some, this doctrine is sheer folly; to others, it is the power of God. Some thought the doctrine of the cross was weakness, but to the believers it is a revelation of the power of God,

the wisdom of God and the love of God. Jesus Christ is the subject of the gospel. Paul writes:

This doctrine of the cross is sheer folly to those on their way to ruin, but to us who are on the way to salvation it is the power of God. Scripture says, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the cleverness of the clever.' Where is your wise man now, your man of learning, or your subtle debater—limited, all of them, to this passing age? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. As God in his wisdom ordained, the world failed to find him by its wisdom, and he chose to save those who have faith by the folly of the Gospel. Jews call for miracles, Greeks look for wisdom; but we proclaim Christ—yes, Christ nailed to the cross; and though this is a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Greeks, yet to those who have heard his call, Jews and Greeks alike, he is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

I Cor. 1: 18–24 N.E.B.

Jesus, the Liberator, is the power of God, the wisdom of God and the love of God. Paul knew first hand of the operation of these qualities, wisdom, power and love. He could never quite understand this new wisdom, this new power and this new love which he had experienced in Jesus, the Liberator. It was a queer kind of wisdom and love that had chosen him, one who had been a persecutor of the Church and now summoned to be a messenger of the crucified-risen Lord. He could never comprehend this kind of love that had permitted Jesus, God's only son, to die on the cross for the salvation of men. Paul is astonished and amazed at this new revelation of love:

While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Romans 5: 6–8

Paul's new life had been determined by this encounter with Jesus, the Liberator. This new life which was God given was the life of grace and he shouts "By the grace of God, I am what I am." The experience of this wisdom, power and love, Paul defines as "the power of God unto salvation." It was a new kind of power, a power that had granted him freedom to life, righteousness, peace and joy, and also freedom from sin, from the law and from death. The liberating power of Jesus had emancipated him and set him free. He exhorts his fellow Christians: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5: 1

Jesus, the Liberator, had given to Paul not only freedom but also a new self-understanding. This new self-understanding, according to Bultmann, is bestowed with faith and it is freedom through which the believer gains life and thereby his own self. Paul discovered that he who belongs to Jesus, the Liberator, and thus to God has become master of everything. He declares to the Christians at Corinth that this grace-freedom event which they had experienced in Jesus, the Liberator, placed the whole world at their disposal:
Jesus: The Liberator

So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s. 1 Cor. 3: 21-23.

Jesus is the Liberator. He is the revelation of the wisdom, the power and the love of God. This was the message which the early Christian preachers were commissioned to proclaim. This message was called the Kerygma. We preach Christ, Paul shouts. At the heart of the Kerygma lies this fundamental Christological affirmation: Jesus is the Liberator! Jesus is the Emancipator!

Nineteen hundred years have passed since these stirring words were written by Paul and various interpretations of Jesus the Liberator have been presented. These interpretations range all the way from Jesus as the Son of God, of Paul, the writers of the Synoptic Gospels, John and Hebrews to the Jesus of Barth, Brunner, Bonhoeffer, Tillich and S. Kierkegaard.

The tragedy of the interpretations of Jesus by the white American theologians during the last three hundred years is that Jesus has been too often identified with the oppressive structures and forces of the prevailing society. His teachings have been used to justify wars, exploitation of the poor and oppressed peoples of the world. In His name the most vicious form of racism has been condoned and advocated. In a more tragic sense this Jesus of the white church establishment has been white, straight haired, blue eyed, Anglo-Saxon, that is, presented in the image of the oppressor. This “whiteness” has prevailed to the extent that the black, brown, or red peoples of the world, who had accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, were denied full Christian fellowship in His church and were not accepted as brothers for whom Jesus died.

I am aware of the fact that this lecture is being delivered at one of the oldest Theological Schools in this country. I have been asked to address myself to the theme, “The Christian Faith in a Revolutionary Age” and to indicate the techniques by which this faith may be communicated.

You should expect that we would first critically evaluate the existing understanding of the Christian faith as interpreted and presented by white theologians and as a Black American reveal to you the thinking concerning this interpretation of the Christian faith in the black community. We begin with the premise that white Theology is severely limited in its interpretation of the Christian faith in so far as the non-white peoples of the world are concerned. This limitation is one of the causes for the quest for a Black Messiah.

THE LIMITATIONS OF WHITE THEOLOGY

To be sure, during the past fifteen years we have entered, in so far as the black community is concerned, into one of the most exciting periods in the life of the black people of this country. For more than one hundred years black students have studied in predominantly white seminaries and have been served a theological diet, created, mixed and dosed out by white theological technicians. The black seminarians took both the theological milk and meat and even when they
had consumed these, their souls were still empty. Those of us who went through the white seminaries did not understand why then. We had passed the courses in the four major fields of studies; we knew our Barth, Brunner and Niebuhr. We had entered deeply into a serious study of Bonhoeffer and Tillich, but we discovered that these white theologians had described the substance and had elucidated a contemporary faith for the white man. These white scholars knew nothing about the black experience, and to many of them this black experience was illegitimate and unauthentic.

The black man’s religious style was considered sub-human by many of the white theological seminaries of this Nation and the emotional nature of his religious experience was termed primitive. For the black seminary student to become a great preacher really meant that he had to whitenize himself. He had to suppress his naturalness and re-make himself in the image of a Sockman, Fosdick or Buttrick. You see, insofar as the white seminaries were concerned there were no great black preachers, and if a black preacher was fortunate to be called great by the white community, it meant that he was merely a pale reflection of the white ideal.

The young black seminary student today has been introduced into a whole new experience—one fashioned by the late Martin Luther King, Jr. but clarified and profoundly interpreted by Frantz Fannon, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and Ron Karenga. The young black seminary student today has been tried by every conceivable ordeal that sadistic racial minds can devise; from the fire hoses to vicious dogs, from tear gas to electric animal prods. They have matched wits with the white racist of the power structure and are helping to pull down the system of segregation and discrimination. They have no objection to the combination of such words “black and power,” “black and theology,” “black and church,” “black and Christ,” “black and God.” They believe Du Bois who wrote, “This assumption that of all the hues of God, whiteness is inherently and obviously better than brownness or tan leads to curious acts...” They are not shocked nor are they discouraged if the term “black power” seems to offend or frighten white or black Americans. To these young blacks, “black power” means consciousness and solidarity. It means the amassing by black people of the economic, political, and judicial control necessary to define their own goals and share in the decisions that determine their faith. Fannon, Malcolm X, Carmichael and Karenga forced the black seminary students to ask these questions: What do these white American and European theologians of a white racist dominated religious establishment know about the soul of black folks? What do Barth, Brunner and Tillich know about the realities of the black ghettos or the fate of black sharecroppers’ families whose souls are crushed by the powerful forces of a society that considers everything black as evil? Could these white theologians see the image of the crucified Jesus in the mutilated face of a rat-bitten child, or a drug addict, bleeding to death in a stinking alley?

We have learned that the interpretation of Christian Theology and of Jesus expounded by white American theologians is severely limited. This is due to the simple reason that these white scholars have never been lowered into the murky depth of the black experience of reality. They never conceived the black Jesus walking the dark streets of the ghettos of the north and the sharecropper’s farm in
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the deep south without a job, busted, and emasculated. These white theologians
could never hear the voice of Jesus speaking in the dialect of blacks from the
southern farms, or in the idiom of the blacks of the ghetto. This severe limitation
of the white theologians’ inability to articulate the full meaning of the Christian
faith has given rise to the development of Black Theology.

The Commission on Theology of the National Committee of Black Church-
men has issued a statement on Black Theology. In this document Black Theology
is defined:

For us, Black theology is the theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the
black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black
community can see the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black
humanity. Black Theology is a theology of “blackness.” It is the affirmation of
black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism thus provid-
ing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity
of white people in that it says “No” to the encroachment of white oppression.

The black scholars are indebted in a measure to white theologians. We have
learned much from them. However, the white theologians in their interpretation
of the Christian faith have ignored the black Christian experience. Many have felt
that this black Christian experience was devoid of meaning and therefore could
be omitted in their exposition and interpretation of the Christian faith. To be sure,
this was a grievous error. The omission of the black Christian experience by white
interpreters of the Christian faith meant that the message of the Christian faith
thus interpreted was oriented toward the white community. Therefore this mes-
sage had nothing significant to say to the black man who is now struggling for
identity and dignity. The black theologians were forced to look at the black Chris-
tian experience and interpret this experience so as to ascertain what the black
Christian experience has to say to the black man concerning the vital matters of
the Christian faith. Black Theology is a product of black Christian experience and
reflection. It comes out of the past. It is strong in the present and we believe it is
redemptive for the future.

THE QUEST FOR THE BLACK JESUS

The reason for the quest for the black Jesus is deeply embedded in the black man’s
experience in this country. The black man’s introduction to the white Jesus was a
catastrophe! Vincent Harding reminds us that the blacks encountered the Ameri-
can white Christ first on the slave ships that brought us to these shores. The blacks
on the slave ship heard His name sung in hymns of praise while they died
chained in stinky holes beneath the decks locked in terror and disease. When the
blacks leaped from the decks of the slave ships they saw His name carved on the
side of the ship. When the black women were raped in the cabin by the white
racists, they must have noticed the Holy Bible on the shelves. Vincent Harding de-
claims,
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The horrors continued on American soil. So all through the nation's history many black men have rejected this Christ—indeed the miracle is that so many accepted him. In past times our disdain often had to be stifled and sulen, our anger silent and self-destructive. But now we speak out.2

One white perceptive theologian, Kyle Haselden, has observed that

The white man cleaves Christian piety into two parts: the strong, virile virtues he applies exclusively to himself; the apparently weak, passive virtues he endorses especially for the negro. "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely" belong to the white man; "whatsoever things are of good report" belong to the Negro. The white man takes the active and positive Christian adjectives for himself: noble, manly, wise, strong, courageous; he recommends the passive and negative Christian adjectives to the Negro: patient, long-suffering, humble, self-effacing, considerate, submissive, childlike, meek.3

White theology has not presented us with good theological reasons why we should not speak out against this gross perversion of the Christian faith. White theology has not been able to re-shape the life of the white church so as to cleanse it of its racism and to liberate it from the iron claws of the white racist establishment of this nation. White theology has presented the blacks a religion of contentment in the state of life in which they find themselves. Such an interpretation of the Christian faith avoided questions about personal dignity, collective power, freedom, equality and self-determination. The white church establishment presented to the black people a religion carefully tailored to fit the purposes of the white oppressors, corrupted in language, interpretation and application by the conscious and unconscious racism of white Christians from the first plantation missionary down to Billy Graham.

The white Christ of the white church establishment is the enemy of the black man. The teachings of this white Christ are used to justify wars, exploitation, segregation, discrimination, prejudice, and racism. This white Christ is the oppressor of the black man and the black preacher and scholar were compelled to discover a Christ in his image of blackness. He was forced to look at the teachings of Jesus in the light of his own black experience and discover what this black Jesus said about the realities of his own life. The black preacher, seminary student, and scholar had their work cut out for them. If Bultmann's task was to demythologize the New Testament, the black preacher and scholar had to detheologize his mind of the racist ideas which had crept into interpretations of Jesus and to see Him in the depth of His full humanity.

We remind you, we were asked to address ourselves "in the general area of understanding and communicating the Christian faith into today's revolutionary society." The first requirement is one of admitting the inadequacies of an understanding of the Christian faith which is used to support our contemporary racist society. Black and white scholars must read again the scriptures with new eyes and minds so as to hear the words of Jesus in their disturbing clarity.

The subject of all preaching is Jesus Christ. As Paul says, "We proclaim Christ—yes, Christ nailed to the cross and though this is a stumbling block to
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Jews and folly to the Greeks, yet to those who have heard His call, Jews and Greeks alike, He is the power of God and the wisdom of God."

A RECOVERY OF THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

Detheologizing demands that we recover the humanity of Jesus in all of its depth, length, breadth, and height. Jesus was born in a barn, wrapped in a blanket used for sick cattle, and placed in a stall. He died on a city dump outside Jerusalem.

The New Testament presents with disturbing clarity its record of the birth, ministry and death of Jesus. There is no attempt to hide the stark realities which confronted Jesus from the barn of Bethlehem to the city dump of Jerusalem. The realism is naked and stark. Jesus was born in a barn. He died on a city dump. Even the place of the birth of Jesus is identified with the needs and the conditions of people. Where the need is the deepest, the situation most desperate and the pain the sharpest, that is precisely where Jesus is. We repeat, even in the birth of Jesus, the gospels of Matthew and Luke identify him with the needs, the suffering, the pain and the anxieties of the world. You see most of the world’s babies are not born in the palaces of kings or the government houses of prime ministers, or the manses of Bishops. Most of the world’s babies are born in the ghettos of corrupt cities, in mud houses, in disintegrated cottages with cracked floors and stuffed walls where the muffled cries of unattended mothers mingle with the screams of newborn infants.

Bultmann writes about the offense of the incarnation of the word.¹ He contends that the revealer appears not as man in general, that is not simply as a barrier of human nature but as a definite human being in history—Jesus of Nazareth—a Jew. The humanity of Jesus is genuine humanity. The writer of the Gospel of John has no theory about the pre-existent miraculous entrance into the world nor of the legend of the Virgin Birth. You know this legend or myth is presented to us in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke. The writer of the Gospel of Mark, the Evangelist of the Fourth Gospel and Paul teach a high Christology without reference to the Virgin Birth.

Permit us to make this suggestion: Suppose we would omit the phrase “of the Holy Spirit” from Matthew 1:18 where it is recorded that “Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with a child,” what would this teach us about the humanity of Jesus? The reaction of many would be instantaneous and we would be accused of teaching “a doctrine of the illegitimate birth of Jesus.” These objectors would insist that the birth of Jesus was due to a special act of God in and through humanity and that since Jesus is who He is and has done what He has done, this requires that His entrance into the world through humanity must be unique. Those who advocate this position forget the teachings of Jesus in particular and the New Testament writers in general concerning all life. Jesus taught that all life comes from God and that the birth of every child embodies and expresses a unique act of God.

Who Jesus was, was determined not necessarily by the manner of His birth but rather by what He did. John Knox states that the first form of the Christologi-
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cal question was, "What had God done through Jesus?" The New Testament writers go to great length in presenting and discussing the saving deed of God through Jesus.

It was the belief of most writers of the New Testament that God was at work in the life and deeds of Jesus and that what God was doing in Jesus had both soteriological and eschatological significance. The conviction shared by most New Testament writers was to the effect that the last days had finally dawned and that God was acting decisively for man's salvation, renewal and liberation. Again John Knox notes that the supreme importance of Jesus was determined more by his role and function than by his nature and further, "the Christological question, which was originally a question about the eschatological and soteriological significance of an event, has become a question about the metaphysical nature of a person." What must be done, therefore, if we are to understand the meaning and significance of Jesus, the Liberator, is to go behind the metaphysical speculation concerning Him and ascertain and study those events which were foundational and believed by writers of the New Testament to possess saving and liberating significance. Men knew Jesus in terms of what he had done for them. J. K. Mozley states, "There is in the New Testament no speculative Christology divorced from the gospel of the Savior and the salvation he brings." The early Christians were not seeking abstract definitions concerning the person of Jesus. The language of the early Christians was experimental, functional and confessional. The foundation for the theology of St. Paul is the experience of what God had done for him in his own conversion, and he is basically interested in Jesus and the Redeemer, Re-vealer and Liberator.

Brunner has argued that the titles given to Jesus in the New Testament are verbal in nature and character. They all describe an event, a work of God, or what God has done through Jesus in and for mankind. Further, Brunner writes, "Who and what Jesus is can only be stated at first at any rate by what God does and gives in him."

Brunner insists that all Christological titles must be understood not in terms of their substantive implications but in terms of their verbal functions. The term Christos may be interpreted as the one in whom and through who God is to establish his sovereignty. The title Son of God is functional and it suggests an office and the work of the Liberator rather that a description of his metaphysical nature. Even the title Immanuel is defined in terms of its functional implications because this title means "God is with us." The title Kyrios describes the one who rules over the church. And finally, the title Savior points to the one who is to bring the healing, salvation and liberation for which mankind yearns.

The significance of Jesus for religious living is determined by what Jesus has done for mankind and all of the Christological titles applied to Jesus emphasize His gift of Liberation to and for men.

The divinity of Jesus is a divinity of service. His humanity was stretched in service so as to include the whole world of man in its miseries, slavery, frustration, and hopelessness. The New Testament word used to express this deep concern for men is splagchnizesthai. This word means to be moved with compassion and it is used to describe an emotion which moved Jesus, the Liberator, at the very
depth of His being. This word also indicates the depth of Jesus’ concern and identification with others. Whenever the Gospel writers use this word splagchnizesthai in reference to Jesus they were attempting to describe the manner and the way in which Jesus identified Himself completely with others and how He entered into the world of their misery and suffering, their slavery and hopelessness, and provided the means for liberation and renewal.

The men and women of the New Testament period who witness this ministry of service, love, and liberation reach the astounding conclusion that Jesus is the Revelation of a new kind of freedom and has made available to men the liberating power of God’s love. Jesus is God acting in the service of men, thereby enabling them to realize their God-given potentials as human beings and as sons of God.

The Christians of the first century saw in Jesus the Liberator the answer to their most distressing problems. Jesus, in His ministry, identifies Himself with all men. The early Christian believed that He provided the answer to their most disturbing problems and whatever they needed He was sufficient. The writers of the Four Gospels interpreted Jesus in the light of what they considered to be the greatest need of mankind. For the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the new Rabbi; for Luke, He is the great Physician; for Mark, He is the Stranger satisfying the deepest needs of men; and for John, Jesus is the Revealer.

The people of all races, because of His service, are able to identify with Him and to see in His humanity a reflection of their own images. Today the black man looks at Jesus—observes His ministry of love and liberation and considers Him the black Messiah who fights oppression and sets the captive free.

COMMITTED TO THE MESSAGE AND MISSION OF JESUS

The radicalness of the humanity of Jesus is not only expressed in His service but also in His speech. We must permit His speech to address, probe, disturb and challenge us. Professor Ernst Fuchs has called the rise of the gospel a speech event—an opening of a new dimension of man’s awareness, a new break-through in language and symbolization. Professor Fuchs writes:

The early Church is itself a language phenomenon. It is precisely for this reason that it has created for itself a memorial in the new stylistic form of the Gospel. Even the Apocalypse of John, and more than ever the apostolic epistles, are creations of a new language that transforms everything with which it comes into contact.2

The words of Jesus have the rugged fibre of a cypress tree and the jagged edge of the cross-cut saw. His language is extreme, extravagant, explosive as hand grenades which are tossed into the crowds that listened to Him. A tremendous vigor and vitality surges through his words. In Jesus’ words, “A man with a log in his eye tries to pick a cinder out of his brother’s eye.” In the words of Jesus “a giant hand hangs a millstone around the neck of one who exploits a little child


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and hurls the sinner into the midst of the sea." In the words of Jesus—"a man asks for bread and is given a stone, another asks for fish and is given a snake." In the words of Jesus, "men strain at the little gnats and gulp down the camels." In the words of Jesus, "a mountain develops feet and casts itself into the sea." He attacks the religious establishment of his day—the religious leaders, the ordained ministers with such phrases as "you hypocrites," "you blind guides," "you blind Pharisees," "you brood of snakes," "you serpents," "you murderers."

Jesus spoke with authority and with power!

In the city of Nazareth where he was reared, this dark long haired, bearded ghetto lad of Nazareth took over the synagogue service and read his universal Manifesto of Liberation:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; He has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. Luke 4: 18–19 (NEB)

The reading of this liberation Manifesto caused debates, rebuttals, accusations, counter rebuttals, wrath, anger and hate. The Gospel of St. Luke is explicit in describing the reaction of the religious establishment to the manifesto of liberation of Jesus. "When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath, and they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them he went away." Luke 4: 28–30

Liberation was the aim and the goal of the life of Jesus in the world. Liberation expresses the essential thrust of his ministry. The stage of his ministry was the streets. His congregation consisted of those who were written-off by the established church and the state. He ministered to those who needed him, "the nobodies of the world," the sick, the blind, the lame and the demon possessed. He invaded the chambers of sickness and death and hallowed these with the healing words of health and life. He invaded the minds of the demon possessed and in those dark chambers of night he brought light, sanity and order. Jesus ministered to men in their sorrow, sin and degradation and offered them hope and light and courage and strength. He offered comfort to the poor who did not fit into the structure of the world. Jesus comforted the mourner and offered hope to the humble. He had a message for the men and women who had been pushed to the limits of human existence and on these he pronounced his blessedness.

The people who received help from Jesus are throughout the Gospels on the fringe of society—men who because of fate, guilt and prejudices were considered marked men; sick people, who must bear their disease as punishment for crime or for some sin committed; demoniacs, that is those possessed of demons; the lepers, the first born of death to whom fellowship was denied; Gentiles, women and children who did not count for anything in the community and the really bad people, the prostitutes, the thieves, the murderers, the robbers. When Jesus was pressed for an explanation of the radicalness of the thrust of his ministry his an-
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swor was simple and direct. "Those who are well have no need for a physician but those who are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

The greatness of Jesus is to be found precisely in the way in which he makes himself accessible to those who need him, ignoring conventional limitations and issuing that grand and glorious welcome—"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

The Gospel of St. Mark records the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Please listen to this passage. "And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her." Now, verse 31 tells us what Jesus did: "And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she served them." Mark 1:30-31

Jesus is saying to his disciples the only way to lift is to touch. You cannot lift men without touching them. Jesus is saying to the church—the people of God—the church must not be locked in its stained glass fortress with its multicolored windows, red cushioned seats, crimson carpets and temperature controlled auditorium where according to Kierkegaard, "An anemic preacher, preaches anemic gospel about an anemic Christ to an anemic congregation."11

The church building must be a point of departure, a departure into the world, into the dirty here and now.

We are challenged to continue in our world Jesus' ministry of love and liberation. We must recognize that to be a Christian is to be contemporaneous with Jesus, the Liberator. To be sure, to be a Christian is not to hold views about Jesus but rather to become a contemporary with Jesus in His ministry of suffering and humiliation and of love and liberation. To be a Christian is to be committed to the man Jesus in spite of the world's rejection of Him, in spite of Christendom's betrayal of Him, and in spite of the social and intellectual stigma involved in accepting and following Him. To be a Christian is to stand with Jesus and participate in His ministry of love and liberation at the crossways of the world where men are crucified on the crosses of poverty, racism, war and exploitation. To be a Christian is to try again to introduce Christianity into Christendom and to set free again the powers of the love and liberating ministry of Jesus, the Liberator.

NOTES

6. Ibid., pp. 55-56.
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U.S. Catholic Bishops
A Pastoral Message:
Economic Justice for All

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

1. We are believers called to follow Our Lord Jesus Christ and proclaim his Gospel in the midst of a complex and powerful economy. This reality poses both opportunities and responsibilities for Catholics in the United States. Our faith calls us to measure this economy, not only by what it produces, but also by how it touches human life and whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person. Economic decisions have human consequences and moral content; they help or hurt people, strengthen or weaken family life, advance or diminish the quality of justice in our land.

2. This is why we have written Economic Justice for All: A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy. This letter is a personal invitation to Catholics to use the resources of our faith, the strength of our economy, and the opportunities of our democracy to shape a society that better protects the dignity and basic rights of our sisters and brothers, both in this land and around the world.

3. The pastoral letter has been a work of careful inquiry, wide consultation, and prayerful discernment. The letter has been greatly enriched by this process of listening and refinement. We offer this introductory pastoral message to Catholics in the United States seeking to live their faith in the marketplace—in homes, offices, factories, and schools; on farms and ranches; in boardrooms and union halls; in service agencies and legislative chambers. We seek to explain why we wrote the pastoral letter, to introduce its major themes, and to share our hopes for the dialogue and action it might generate.

A Pastoral Message: Economic Justice for All

WHY WE WRITE

4. We write to share our teaching, to raise questions, to challenge one another to live our faith in the world. We write as heirs of the biblical prophets who summon us “to do the right, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mi 6:8). We write as followers of Jesus who told us in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit. . . . Blessed are the meek. . . . Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness. . . . Your are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world” (Mt 5:1–6, 13–14). These words challenge us not only as believers but also as consumers, citizens, workers, and owners. In the parable of the Last Judgment, Jesus said, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. . . . As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me” (Mt 25:35–40). The challenge for us is to discover in our own place and time what it means to be “poor in spirit” and “the salt of the earth” and what it means to serve “the least among us” and to “hunger and thirst for righteousness.”

5. Followers of Christ must avoid a tragic separation between faith and everyday life. They can neither shirk their earthly duties nor, as the Second Vatican Council declared, “immerse [them]selves in earthly activities as if these latter were utterly foreign to religion, and religion were nothing more than the fulfillment of acts of worship and the observance of a few moral obligations” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 43).

6. Economic life raises important social and moral questions for each of us and for society as a whole. Like family life, economic life is one of the chief areas where we live out our faith, love our neighbor, confront temptation, fulfill God’s creative design, and achieve our holiness. Our economic activity in factory, field, office, or shop feeds our families—or feeds our anxieties. It exercises our talents—or wastes them. It raises our hopes—or crushes them. It brings us into cooperation with others—or sets us at odds. The Second Vatican Council instructs us “to preach the message of Christ in such a way that the light of the Gospel will shine on all activities of the faithful” (Pastoral Constitution, no. 43). In this case, we are trying to look at economic life through the eyes of faith, applying traditional church teaching to the U.S. economy.

7. In our letter, we write as pastors, not public officials. We speak as moral teachers, not economic technicians. We seek not to make some political or ideological point but to lift up the human and ethical dimensions of economic life, aspects too often neglected in public discussion. We bring to this task a dual heritage of Catholic social teaching and traditional American values.

8. As Catholics, we are heirs of a long tradition of thought and action on the moral dimensions of economic activity. The life and words of Jesus and the teaching of his Church call us to serve those in need and to work actively for social and economic justice. As a community of believers, we know that our faith is tested by the quality of justice among us, that we can best measure our life together by how the poor and the vulnerable are treated. This in not a new concern for us. It is as old as the Hebrew prophets, as compelling as the Sermon on the Mount, and as
current as the powerful voice of Pope John Paul II defending the dignity of the human person.

9. As Americans, we are grateful for the gift of freedom and committed to the dream of "liberty and justice for all." This nation, blessed with extraordinary resources, has provided an unprecedented standard of living for millions of people. We are proud of the strength, productivity, and creativity of our economy, but we also remember those who have been left behind in our progress. We believe that we honor our history best by working for the day when all our sisters and brothers share adequately in the American dream.

10. As bishops, in proclaiming the Gospel for these times we also manage institutions, balance budgets, meet payrolls. In this we see the human face of our economy. We feel the hurts and hopes of our people. We feel the pain of our sisters and brothers who are poor, unemployed, homeless, living on the edge. The poor and vulnerable are on our doorsteps, in our parishes, in our service agencies, and in our shelters. We see too much hunger and injustice, too much suffering and despair, both in our own country and around the world.

11. As pastors, we also see the decency, generosity, and vulnerability of our people. We see the struggles of ordinary families to make ends meet and to provide a better future for their children. We know the desire of managers, professionals, and business people to shape what they do by what they believe. It is the faith, good will, and generosity of our people that gives us hope as we write this letter.

PRINCIPAL THEMES OF THE PASTORAL LETTER

12. The pastoral letter is not a blueprint for the American economy. It does not embrace any particular theory of how the economy works, nor does it attempt to resolve the disputes between different schools of economic thought. Instead, our letter turns to Scripture and to the social teachings of the Church. There, we discover what our economic life must serve, what standards it must meet. Let us examine some of these basic moral principles.

13. Every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person. The pastoral letter begins with the human person. We believe the person is sacred—the clearest reflection of God among us. Human dignity comes from God, not from nationality, race, sex, economic status, or any human accomplishment. We judge any economic system by what it does for and to people and by how it permits all to participate in it. The economy should serve people, not the other way around.

14. Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community. In our teaching, the human person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to "love our neighbor" has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment to the common good. We have many partial ways to measure and debate the health of our economy: Gross National Product, per capita income,
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stock market prices, and so forth. The Christian vision of economic life looks beyond them all and asks, Does economic life enhance or threaten our life together as a community?

15. All people have a right to participate in the economic life of society. Basic justice demands that people be assured a minimum level of participation in the economy. It is wrong for a person or group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate or contribute to the economy. For example, people who are both able and willing but cannot get a job are deprived of the participation that is so vital to human development. For, it is through employment that most individuals and families meet their material needs, exercise their talents, and have an opportunity to contribute to the larger community. Such participation has a special significance in our tradition because we believe that it is a means by which we join in carrying forward God’s creative activity.

16. All members of society have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable. From the Scriptures and church teaching, we learn that the justice of a society is tested by the treatment of the poor. The justice that was the sign of God’s covenant with Israel was measured by how the poor and unprotected—the widow, the orphan, and the stranger—were treated. The kingdom that Jesus proclaimed in his word and ministry excludes no one. Throughout Israel’s history and in early Christianity, the poor are agents of God’s transforming power. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Lk 4:18). This was Jesus’ first public utterance. Jesus takes the side of those most in need. In the Last Judgment, so dramatically described in St. Matthew’s Gospel, we are told that we will be judged according to how we respond to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger. As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental “option for the poor”—to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This “option for the poor” does not mean pitting one group against another, but rather, strengthening the whole community by assisting those who are most vulnerable. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response.

17. Human rights are the minimum conditions for life in community. In Catholic teaching, human rights include not only civil and political rights but also economic rights. As Pope John XXIII declared, “all people have a right to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, education, and employment.” This means that when people are without a chance to earn a living, and must go hungry and homeless, they are being denied basic rights. Society must ensure that these rights are protected. In this way, we will ensure that the minimum conditions of economic justice are met for all our sisters and brothers.

18. Society as a whole, acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights. In addition to the clear responsibility of private institutions, government has an essential responsibility in this area. This does not mean that government has the primary or exclusive role, but it does have a positive moral responsibility in safeguarding human rights and ensuring that the minimum conditions of human dignity are met for
all. In a democracy, government is a means by which we can act together to protect what is important to us and to promote our common values.

19. These six moral principles are not the only ones presented in the pastoral letter, but they give an overview of the moral vision that we are trying to share. This vision of economic life cannot exist in a vacuum; it must be translated into concrete measures. Our pastoral letter spells out some specific applications of Catholic moral principles. We call for a new national commitment to full employment. We say it is a social and moral scandal that one of every seven Americans is poor, and we call for concerted efforts to eradicate poverty. The fulfillment of the basic needs of the poor is of the highest priority. We urge that all economic policies be evaluated in light of their impact on the life and stability of the family. We support measures to halt the loss of family farms and to resist the growing concentration in the ownership of agricultural resources. We specify ways in which the United States can do far more to relieve the plight of poor nations and assist in their development. We also reaffirm church teaching on the rights of workers, collective bargaining, private property, subsidiarity, and equal opportunity.

20. We believe that the recommendations in our letter are reasonable and balanced. In analyzing the economy, we reject ideological extremes and start from the fact that ours is a "mixed" economy, the product of a long history of reform and adjustment. We know that some of our specific recommendations are controversial. As bishops, we do not claim to make these prudential judgments with the same kind of authority that marks our declarations of principle. But, we feel obliged to teach by example how Christians can undertake concrete analysis and make specific judgments on economic issues. The Church’s teachings cannot be left at the level of appealing generalities.

21. In the pastoral letter, we suggest that the time has come for a "New American Experiment"—to implement economic rights, to broaden the sharing of economic power, and to make economic decisions more accountable to the common good. This experiment can create new structures of economic partnership and participation within firms at the regional level, for the whole nation, and across borders.

22. Of course, there are many aspects of the economy the letter does not touch, and there are basic questions it leaves to further exploration. There are also many specific points on which men and women of good will may disagree. We look for a fruitful exchange among differing viewpoints. We pray only that all will take to heart the urgency of our concerns; that together we will test our views by the Gospel and the Church's teaching; and that we will listen to other voices in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue.

A CALL TO CONVERSION AND ACTION

23. We should not be surprised if we find Catholic social teaching to be demanding. The Gospel is demanding. We are always in need of conversion, of a change of heart. We are richly blessed, and as St. Paul assures us, we are destined for glory. Yet, it is also true that we are sinners; that we are not always wise or loving
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or just; that, for all our amazing possibilities, we are incompletely born, wary of life, and hemmed in by fears and empty routines. We are unable to entrust ourselves fully to the living God, and so we seek substitute forms of security in material things, in power, in indifference, in popularity, in pleasure. The Scriptures warn us that these things can become forms of idolatry. We know that, at times, in order to remain truly a community of Jesus' disciples, we will have to say "no" to certain aspects in our culture, to certain trends and ways of acting that are opposed to a life of faith, love, and justice. Changes in our hearts lead naturally to a desire to change how we act. With what care, human kindness, and justice do I conduct myself at work? How will my economic decisions to buy, sell, invest, divest, hire, or fire serve human dignity and the common good? In what career can I best exercise my talents so as to fill the world with the Spirit of Christ? How do my economic choices contribute to the strength of my family and community, to the values of my children, to a sensitivity to those in need? In this consumer society, how can I develop a healthy detachment from things and avoid the temptation to assess who I am by what I have? How do I strike a balance between labor and leisure that enlarges my capacity for friendships, for family life, for community? What government policies should I support to attain the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable?

24. The answers to such questions are not always clear—or easy to live out. But, conversion is a lifelong process. And, it is not undertaken alone. It occurs with the support of the whole believing community, through baptism, common prayer, and our daily efforts, large and small, on behalf of justice. As a Church, we must be people after God's own heart, bonded by the Spirit, sustaining one another in love, setting our hearts on God's kingdom, committing ourselves to solidarity with those who suffer, working for peace and justice, acting as a sign of Christ's love and justice in the world. The Church cannot redeem the world from the deadening effects of sin and injustice unless it is working to remove sin and injustice in its own life and institutions. All of us must help the Church to practice in its own life what it preaches to others about economic justice and cooperation.

25. The challenge of this pastoral letter is not merely to think differently, but also to act differently. A renewal of economic life depends on the conscious choices and commitments of individual believers who practice their faith in the world. The road to holiness for most of us lies in our secular vocations. We need a spirituality that calls forth and supports lay initiative and witness not just in our churches but also in business, in the labor movement, in the professions, in education, and in public life. Our faith is not just a weekend obligation, a mystery to be celebrated around the altar on Sunday. It is a pervasive reality to be practiced every day in homes, offices, factories, schools, and businesses across our land. We cannot separate what we believe from how we act in the marketplace and the broader community, for this is where we make our primary contribution to the pursuit of economic justice.

26. We ask each of you to read the pastoral letter, to study it, to pray about it, and match it with your own experience. We ask you to join with us in service to those in need. Let us reach out personally to the hungry and the homeless, to the poor and the powerless, and to the troubled and the vulnerable. In serving them,
we serve Christ. Our service efforts cannot substitute for just and compassionate public policies, but they can help us practice what we preach about human life and human dignity.

27. The pursuit of economic justice takes believers into the public arena, testing the policies of government by the principles of our teaching. We ask you to become more informed and active citizens, using your voices and votes to speak for the voiceless, to defend the poor and the vulnerable and to advance the common good. We are called to shape a constituency of conscience, measuring every policy by how it touches the least, the lost, and the left-out among us. This letter calls us to conversion and common action, to new forms of stewardship, service, and citizenship.

28. The completion of a letter such as this is but the beginning of a long process of education, discussion, and action. By faith and baptism, we are fashioned into new creatures, filled with the Holy Spirit and with a love that compels us to seek out a new profound relationship with God, with the human family, and with all created things. Jesus has entered our history as God’s anointed son who announces the coming of God’s kingdom, a kingdom of justice and peace and freedom. And, what Jesus proclaims, he embodies in his actions. His ministry reveals that the reign of God is something more powerful than evil, injustice, and the hardiness of hearts. Through his crucifixion and resurrection, he reveals that God’s love is ultimately victorious over all suffering, all horror, all meaninglessness, and even over the mystery of death. Thus, we proclaim words of hope and assurance to all who suffer and are in need.

29. We believe that the Christian view of life, including economic life, can transform the lives of individuals, families, schools, and our whole culture. We believe that with your prayers, reflection, service, and action, our economy can be shaped so that human dignity prospers and the human person is served. This is the unfinished work of our nation. This is the challenge of our faith.

Jerry Falwell

The Imperative of Moral Involvement

Bible-believing Christians and concerned moral Americans are determined to do something about the problems that we are facing as a nation. In our family we were recently sitting in the family room having a time of Bible study and devotions and discussing some of these crucial issues. One of my children asked, "Dad, will I ever grow up to be as old as you are in a free America?" Another one of my children asked, "Will I ever get to go to college?" and "Will I ever get married?" Speaking about the vital issues is not just a question of dealing with...
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our generation but with the generations to come. Our children and our grand
children must forever be the recipients or the victims of our moral decisions
today.

My responsibility as a parent-pastor is more than just concern. The issue of
convenience is not even up for discussion. If the moral issues are really matters of
conviction that are worth living for; then they are worth fighting for. In discussing
these matters further with other pastors and concerned Christian leaders, I have
become convinced of the need to have a coalition of God-fearing, moral Ameri-
cans to represent our convictions of our government. I realize that there would be
those pastors who misunderstand our intentions. I know that some object that we
are compromising in our involvement with people of different doctrinal and
theological beliefs. As a fundamental, independent, separatist Baptist, I am well
aware of the crucial issues of personal and ecclesiastical separation that divide
fundamentalists philosophically from evangelicals and liberals. I do not believe
that it is ever right to compromise the truth in order to gain an opportunity to do
right. In doctrinal and spiritual matters, there is no real harmony between light
and darkness.

I am convinced of two very significant factors. First, our very moral existence
as a nation is at stake. There are many moral Americans who do not share our
dothological beliefs but who do share our moral concerns. Second, we must face
the fact that it will take the greatest possible number of concerned citizens to re-
verse the politicization of immorality in our society. Doctrinal difference is a dis-
tinctive feature of a democracy. Our freedoms have given us the privilege and the
luxury of theological disagreement. I would not for a moment encourage anyone
to water down his distinctive beliefs. But we must face realistically the fact that
there are Christians in the world today who have lost the luxury of disagreement.
When the entire issue of Christian survival is at stake, we must be willing to band
together on at least the major moral issues of the day.

One only needs to travel to Rhodesia, as I was privileged to do earlier this
year, to realize that the Christians there have lost their opportunity to argue with
one another. The recent election of Comrade Mugabe, the new Marxist dictator of
that country, may well have ended any opportunity of genuine Christian witness
there. Petty theological differences do not mean a whole lot today to Christians
living in Russia, China, Cambodia, Mozambique, or Rhodesia! Undoubtedly, the
next target of communist conquest will be the Republic of South Africa. The many
Christian believers of that great nation need our prayers that their doors remain
open to the Gospel. If we are not careful the United States will be next. We may
not have the luxury of theological disagreement much longer. The time may soon
come when claiming to be any kind of Christian may cost you your life!

Our ministry is as committed as it ever has been to the basic truths of Scrip-
ture, to essential and fundamental Christian doctrines. But we are not willing to
isolate ourselves in seclusion while we sit back and watch this nation plunge
headlong toward hell.

Moral Americans can make the difference in America if we are willing to
exert the effort to make our feelings known and if we are willing to make the nec-
essary sacrifices to get the job done. In October 1978, our church entered what
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seemed at the time to be a losing battle. Pre-election polls in September 1978 in the state of Virginia indicated that there was general apathy regarding pari-mutuel betting. Those in favor of pari-mutuel betting expected it to win approval easily. Convinced that gambling is typical of a nation losing its moral values and that it is a sin based upon a lust for things, we took a strong stand against it. While some of our politicians argue that gambling would increase revenue in the state, I knew that it would ultimately cost taxpayers in increased welfare costs or destroy families and increase police protection in prison costs. Gambling is supported by men who are dominated by greed, and who do not consider the havoc that gambling causes to the home.

Our church took a stand against pari-mutuel betting and rallied other good people in the state of Virginia against it also. On November 7, 1978, pari-mutuel betting was rejected by the voters in the state of Virginia. Virginia newspapers stated, “Both the winners and the losers credited an aggressive campaign by the religious leader as bringing about the betting proposal’s demise.” Those newspapers went on to quote my comment: “The vote is an indication of what the Christian people in Virginia have been able to do by simply uniting their efforts. This is the first time that six thousand Virginia churches of all denominations have joined hands in a moral campaign, and this should be, as I see it, a forecast of future endeavors together.”

To change America we must be involved, and this includes three areas of political action:

1. REGISTRATION

A recent national poll indicated that eight million American evangelicals are not registered to vote. I am convinced that this is one of the major sins of the church today. Until concerned Christian citizens become registered voters there is very little that we can do to change the tide of political influence on the social issues in our nation. Those who object to Christians being involved in the political process are ultimately objecting to Christians being involved in the social process. The political process is really nothing more than a realization of the social process. For us to divorce ourselves from society would be to run into the kind of isolationism and monasticism that characterized the medieval hermits. Many Christians are not even aware of the importance of registering to vote. It is perfectly legal, for example, for a deputy registrar to come right to your local church at a designated time and register the entire congregation. I am convinced that those of us who are pastors have an obligation to urge our people to register to vote. I am more concerned that people exercise their freedom to vote than I am concerned for whom they vote.

2. INFORMATION

Many moral Americans are unaware of the real issues affecting them today. Many people do not know the voting record of their congressman and have no idea how
he is representing them on political issues that have moral implications. This is one of the major reasons why we have established the Moral Majority organization. We want to keep the public informed on the vital moral issues. The Moral Majority, Inc., is a nonprofit organization, with headquarters in Washington, D.C. Our goal is to exert a significant influence on the spiritual and moral direction of our nation by: (a) mobilizing the grassroots of moral Americans in one clear and effective voice; (b) informing the moral majority what is going on behind their backs in Washington and in state legislatures across the country; (c) lobbying intensely in Congress to defeat left-wing, social-welfare bills that will further erode our precious freedom; (d) pushing for positive legislation such as that to establish the Family Protection Agency, which will ensure a strong, enduring America; and (e) helping the moral majority in local communities to fight pornography, homosexuality, the advocacy of immorality in school textbooks, and other issues facing each and every one of us.

Christians must keep America great by being willing to go into the halls of Congress, by getting laws passed that will protect the freedom and liberty of her citizens. The Moral Majority, Inc., was formed to acquaint Americans everywhere with the tragic decline in our nation’s morals and to provide leadership in establishing an effective coalition of morally active citizens who are (a) prolife, (b) profamily, (c) promoral, and (d) pro-American. If the vast majority of Americans (84 per cent, according to George Gallup) still believe the Ten Commandments are valid today, why are we permitting a few leading amoral humanists and naturalists to take over the most influential positions in this nation?

Tim LaHaye has formed a code of minimum moral standards dictated by the Bible; his code would be used to evaluate the stand of candidates on moral issues. These minimum standards are:

- Do you agree that this country was founded on a belief in God and the moral principles of the Bible? Do you concur that this country has been departing from those principles and needs to return to them?
- Would you favor stricter laws relating to the sale of pornography?
- Do you favor stronger laws against the use and sale of hard drugs?
- Are you in favor of legalizing marijuana?
- Would you favor legalizing prostitution?
- Do you approve of abortions on demand when the life of the mother is not in danger?
- Do you favor laws that would increase homosexual rights?
- Would you vote to prevent known homosexuals to teach in schools?
- Do you favor capital punishment for capital offenses?
- Do you favor the right of parents to send their children to private schools?
- Do you favor voluntary prayer in the public schools?
- Do you favor removal of the tax-exempt status of churches?
- Do you favor removal of the tax-exempt status of church-related schools?
- Do you believe that government should remove children from their parents’ home except in cases of physical abuse?
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o. Do you favor sex education, contraceptives, or abortions for minors without parental consent?
p. Except in wartime or dire emergency, would you vote for government spending that exceeds revenue?
q. Do you favor a reduction in taxes to allow families more spendable income?
r. Do you favor a reduction in government?
s. Do you favor passage of the Equal Rights Amendment?
t. Do you favor busing schoolchildren out of their neighborhood to achieve racial integration?
u. Do you favor more federal involvement in education?

The answers to these questions would be evaluated in the light of scriptural principles.

If you were to ask the average Christian who his congressmen and senators are, there is a good possibility that he could not tell you. Some congressmen have gone so far as to brag that their constituents back home have no idea what their real voting record is. In order to affect our nation’s moral future we must become informed about the issue. Dwight Eisenhower once stated: “Our American heritage is threatened as much by our own indifference as it is by the most unscrupulous office seeker or by the most sinister foreign threat. The destiny of this republic is in the hands of its voters.”

3. MOBILIZATION

The history of the church includes the history of Christian involvement in social issues. The preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield led to great revival movements in England and America. The great awakening in colonial America prepared the way for the proper application of freedom stemming from the Revolutionary War. In England, William Wilberforce crusaded against slavery in the British Empire, while Robert Raikes established the Sunday school movement to give children religious training and elementary training in reading and writing. In the meantime, Lord Shaftesbury lobbied for child-labor laws and protection of the insane. At the same time, John Howard, influenced by the Wesleyan revival, devoted his life and fortune to prison reform in England. William Booth, a Methodist minister, organized the Salvation Army to carry out open-air evangelism and social work. In 1844, George Williams founded the YMCA, to meet the needs of young men in the cities of England and America. Evangelist Dwight L. Moody raised thousands of dollars for the support of the YMCA and other youth movements. During the same period of time the great missionary movement exploded worldwide. William Carey, a Baptist, went to India not only to evangelize but also to organize the people on a self-supporting industrial level. David Livingstone, the great Congregationalist missionary to Africa, not only proclaimed the Gospel but also openly opposed the Arabian slave trade and exploitation of the African natives. Robert Morrison translated the Bible into Chinese and estab-
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lished vocational industrial training schools to help the people. In America, outstanding evangelical preachers such as Charles G. Finney, Albert Barnes, and Lyman Beecher called on Christians to feed the poor, educate the unlearned, reform the prisons, humanize treatment for the mentally ill, establish orphanages, and abolish slavery. Led by the work of Jerry McCalley, there were eventually seventy-six rescue missions opened in New York City alone in the nineteenth century.

The turning point in Christian involvement in social action seems to have been the repeal of prohibition in 1933. A wide variety of Christians and moral Americans were united in the crusade against alcohol for nearly twenty years. Led by the preaching of evangelist Billy Sunday, prohibition finally became law in 1919. Its eventual repeal caused many Christians to conclude that we have no business trying to legislate Christian morality on a non-Christian society. The Depression and World War II followed shortly thereafter, and Christian concern about social issues hit rock bottom during the fifties and sixties. We have tended to develop the attitude that our only obligation is to preach the gospel and prepare men for heaven. We have forgotten that we are still our brother’s keeper and that the same spiritual truths that prepare us to live in eternity are also essential in preparing us to live on this earth. We dare not advocate our responsibility to the society of which we are so very much a vital part. If we as moral Americans do not speak up on these essential moral issues, who then will? As Christians we need to exert our influence not only in the church but also in our business life, home life, and social and community life as well.

Since government has the power to control various areas and activities of our lives, it is vital that we as concerned Americans understand the importance of our involvement in the political process. Everett Hale, author of The Man Without a Country, once said: "I'm only one—but I am one. I cannot do everything—but I can do something. What I can do, I should do, and what I should do, by the grace of God, I will do." In order to make your influence felt, the first thing you must do is to know who to contact in positions of authority. Elected officials depend upon the voice of the people, and elected officials are willing to listen to those groups who will speak out on the issues. It is important for you to know who your elected officials are: your senators, congressmen, governor, state attorney general, state senator, state representative, county officials, etc. One of your important obligations is to write or call your elected officials and express your opinions on moral issues and legislation. In order to support good candidates you need to become familiar with their campaign issues. To do this it would be well to attend your political party’s precinct and committee meetings. Don’t be afraid to go, and don’t be afraid to speak out. At these meetings people are selected as delegates for county and state meetings. In most states the county and state meetings will adopt a party platform. In some states they will elect delegates to the national conventions, which will eventually select the party candidates for President and Vice President.

Another area of involvement is to join with other concerned citizens in your region to promote godly morality. Recently in Virginia, profamily citizens united and showed up in force at the Virginia Conference on Families. Because of this
they carried the day, for their view on the family rooted firmly in the tradition of the Bible. They were able to gain a majority representation on the Virginia committee. Not only is it important to vote, but it is important to encourage others to do so as well. Never underestimate the power of your vote in a given election. In 1948 Lyndon Johnson was elected to the U. S. Senate from Texas by less than one hundred votes. Edmund Burke once said: “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

America was born in her churches, and she must be reborn there as well. The time has come for pastors and church leaders to clearly and boldly proclaim the Gospel of regeneration in Christ Jesus. We need a return to God and to the Bible as never before in the history of America. Undoubtedly we are at the edge of eternity. Some are already referring to us as “post-Christian America.” We have stretched the rubber band of morality too far already. A few more stretches and it will undoubtedly snap forever. When that happens we will become like all the other nations preceding us who’ve fallen under the judgment of God. I love America not because of her pride, her wealth, or her prestige; I love America because she, above all the nations of the world, has honored the principles of the Bible. America has been great because she has been good. We have been the breadbasket of the world, we have fed our enemies and canceled their national debts against us while maintaining an exorbitant debt of our own. We have bound up the wounds of a dying and hurting world. We have rushed to nearly every international disaster in the twentieth century to provide comfort and financial aid. In spite of all of this, we have been cursed and belittled by our friends and foes alike. All too often we have been looked upon as “ugly Americans.” Instead of closing our hearts to the needs of the world, we have opened our doors to its peoples. Instead of only exporting the products of our commercial expertise, we have imported the goods of nearly every country in the world. In many ways we have been our brother’s keeper. But good deeds alone will not save a nation, nor an individual.

Salvation is of God. Regeneration is the theological term for the new birth. Jesus said to Nicodemus nearly two thousand years ago: “Except a man be born again, he shall not see the kingdom of Heaven.” (Jn. 3:5) The Apostle Paul stated: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Rm. 10:13) Regeneration is not based upon moral goodness alone. If our morality could make us acceptable in the sight of God, we could literally work our way to heaven and brag about ourselves. Christians are concerned about moral issues not because they want to brag about themselves but because they have experienced the reality of the life-changing power of God. The Bible clearly states: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ep. 2:8–9) Salvation is a gift from God. It is a gift that you need to receive personally by faith. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” If you have never received Christ as your personal Savior, I would urge you to do so. Acknowledge your sin, accept His forgiveness and the gift of life that He offers.

I am convinced that we need a spiritual and moral revival in America if America is to survive the twentieth century. The time for action is now; we dare
not wait for someone else to take up the banner of righteousness in our generation. We have already waited too long. The great American Senator Jesse Helms said: "Each of us has a part to play in bringing about the great spiritual awakening that must come upon this land before we are brought to our knees by the chastisements of God. Each of us must place our hope and reliance in God, and in that hope and reliance turn our energies to restoring a government and society that serves us as sons of God. . . . Faith and courage are not dispensed by civil governments or revolutions, but by the spirit of God. Americans as a people must once again rise up and reclaim their nation from the slothful, divisive, prodigal, and treacherous individuals who have bartered away our freedoms for a mess of pottage . . . we must return to the author of liberty to enjoy again what once we had so abundantly."

We should thank God every day that we were born in a free land. We must pray that God will help us to assume the obligation to guarantee that freedom to the generations that will follow. In a time when freedom is becoming less and less a privilege to the peoples of the world, we cannot value our American citizenship too highly. No one in the world knows the freedoms that Americans know. Those who so often criticize our country with their anti-American, antimilitary, anticapitalist attitudes must forever realize that the very freedom that allows them to do this is the freedom they are trying to destroy. Let them take anti-Soviet slogans and march up and down the streets of Moscow; they would swiftly disappear.

Right living must be re-established as an American way of life. We as American citizens must recommit ourselves to the faith of our fathers and to the premises and moral foundations upon which this country was established. Now is the time to begin calling America back to God, back to the Bible, back to morality! We must be willing to live by the moral convictions that we claim to believe. There is no way that we will ever be willing to die for something for which we are not willing to live. The authority of Bible morality must once again be recognized as the legitimate guiding principle of our nation. Our love for our fellow man must ever be grounded in the truth and never be allowed to blind us from the truth that is the basis of our love for our fellow man.

As a pastor and as a parent I am calling my fellow American citizens to unite in a moral crusade for righteousness in our generation. It is time to call America back to her moral roots. It is time to call America back to God. We need a revival of rightous living based on a proper confession of sin and repentance of heart if we are to remain the land of the free and the home of the brave! I am convinced that God is calling millions of Americans in the so-often silent majority to join in the moral-majority crusade to turn America around in our lifetime. Won’t you begin now to pray with us for revival in America? Let us unite our hearts and lives together for the cause of a new America . . . a moral America in which righteousness will exalt this nation. Only as we do this can we exempt ourselves from one day having to look our children in the eyes and answer this searching question: "Mom and Dad, where were you the day freedom died in America?"

The choice is now ours.