

The Politics of Religion

By Ronald L. Dart

I have to make one thing clear before I begin. I don't endorse any political candidate for any office. I mistrust them all. Non-profits and churches are not supposed to endorse candidates anyway. That said, since the Bible is within my purview, when a candidate tees off on a biblical or theological topic, he opens the door for me to comment on what he has said.

I was surprised recently when James Dobson sounded off about a speech by Barack Obama. The speech was two years old, but Dr. Dobson had just heard the content of the speech. I heard about it through the media coverage of Dobson's reaction. So, I didn't go off half-cocked. I took some time. I went on the Internet and read the speech first. I wanted to know what Senator Obama had said, in his own words. Only then did I listen to the radio program by James Dobson to hear what he said, in his own words.

I have this observation to make about all this. One more time, I have learned that the news media are not to be trusted. There were some things in the senator's speech that, taken out of context, might cause offense. But, in context, I

understood what he was driving at, and considering that his audience was a "progressive" group, it was a pretty good speech on paper. I say on paper, because I find the senator's oratory style grating—that is just a personal quirk of mine. I prefer to read his speeches. And James Dobson's response was milder than the news media made it sound. Frankly, I think he was justified in taking offense at the way his and Al Sharpton's names were brought into the conversation. You won't get any of this from the news media. If you really want to know, you'll have to do what I did and get it from the Web.

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Bear Much Fruit

"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Many of our family members have found that supporting the work God is doing through CEM is a way to "bear much fruit." In so doing, they are able to help with such things as: the *Born to Win* broadcast, getting the Gospel out via CDs, DVDs, and printed literature, publishing YEA lessons to anchor our children and teens to Christ, providing a treasure trove of biblical information and YEA! Let's R.E.A.C.H. Activities for kids to do seven days a week on www.borntowin.net, and an adult Bible study course. Working together as a team can multiply the impact and scope of your gift. All donations are tax deductible, gratefully received, and judiciously used.

Amazing Love!

Youth Day 2008

By Joe and Sandy Weicks

The Feast of Tabernacles is just a couple of months away. It is time to start thinking about Youth Day! An essential element of CEM's youth ministry program, the Youth Day service has become an established tradition at CEM's Feast site that is enjoyed by all.

The Youth Day service is important! It gives our children, teens, and young adults the unique opportunity to participate in—and actually lead—our worship service. On Youth Day, our youth provide opening and closing prayers, lead the song service, present special music, perform Bible skits, teach God's Word, and share their faith in a unique and inspiring way. In short, the Youth Day service is a youth ministry to the church.

This year's Youth Day theme is

Amazing Love. The service will tell the story of the amazing love of Jesus Christ culminating in his great sacrifice for our sins. It is a great story and certainly one that could never be completely told in just one worship service. But, we will do our best. We will tell it through our music, songs, testimonials, skits, narratives, and messages. As we reflect upon the *Amazing Love* of Jesus Christ, we hope to celebrate the wonder of his great sacrifice and what it means to all believers.

To do this, we need help. Any child, preteen, teen, or young adult who would like to participate by performing special music, providing a Scripture reading or testimonial, narrate, act in a skit, provide staging or video support, or assist in any other manner, should contact

As we reflect upon the Amazing Love of Jesus Christ, we hope to celebrate the wonder of His great sacrifice and what it means to all believers.

Joe or Sandy Weicks at sandyjoeweicks@bellsouth.net or 601-853-1776. We would love to hear from you and need to hear from you soon so that we can complete our worship service planning! To the adults who will be at the CEM's Feast of Tabernacles in Panama City Beach, Florida, please join us on Youth Day. You will not want to miss this special worship service as we celebrate the *Amazing Love* of Jesus Christ!

Honesty with God

By Lenny Cacchio

Being honest with God to the point of being blunt is perfectly okay with him—even to the point of being uncharitable.

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21 NIV). These were Martha's words after her brother Lazarus had died, and she spoke these words to the Son of God himself. If you read her comments with the proper inflection, you can sense her frustration. Jesus had failed to hurry to their side when he learned of Lazarus' sickness. They

had sent for him days before (v. 3), but John, when presenting these facts, strangely juxtaposes two sentences: “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days” (John 11:5-6 NIV).

Here is the enigma: Jesus loved them. Therefore, he stayed where he was for two more days. That is a strange way to love someone in a crisis. But that's what Jesus did, and sometimes it seems like he is doing that to us. And without the benefit of

having the Great Physician nearby, Lazarus died. That's why Martha reflected an accusatory yet understandable tone in her first comment upon seeing Jesus. “If you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.” And, her sister Mary made the same comment to Jesus not long after (v. 32).

If you have ever had to wait on God (and we all have), you can understand Martha's frustration. Here is why it's right to be honest with God about your feelings, even when such feelings are unchari-

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But there was one unfortunate example in Senator Obama's speech that calls for some thought. Out of context, it is jarring. In context, it isn't much better. In his broader argument, he is making the case for the separation of church and state—a phrase that is not in the Constitution. What is in the Constitution is the statement that "Congress shall make no law establishing a religion or inhibiting the free exercise thereof." Freedom of religion can only be maintained where there is no establishment religion. Keeping this in context, the Senator went on to say:

"And even if we did have only Christians in our midst, if we expelled every non-Christian from the United States of America, whose Christianity would we teach in the schools? Would we go with James Dobson's, or Al Sharpton's? Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is OK and that eating shellfish is abomination? How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith? Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount—a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application? So before we get carried away, let's read our Bibles. Folks haven't been reading their Bibles."

He would have skated on the first point here if he had resisted

naming names. But orator that he is, he, or his speech writer, couldn't resist concrete examples, so he had to go on.

*Freedom of
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Now the first three examples—slavery, eating shellfish, and stoning your child if he strays from the faith—betray a serious lack of understanding of biblical law. I discuss these issues in my book *Law & Covenant*, available in hard copy or paperback from CEM. But for now, I want to take the Senator's reference to the Sermon on the Mount: "Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount—a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application?"

It was at this point his speech was interrupted by sustained applause, which surprised me until I figured out who his audience was. So what is he talking about here? What's radical about the Sermon on the Mount? There is nothing radical about it if you understand that it was a message of instruction, not for governments, but for individuals in private life.

I don't fault Senator Obama for not knowing this, because many Christians don't know it. But it's not a good idea to talk about things you don't fully understand. I have an idea he was referring, perhaps, to "Blessed are the meek: for they

shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5 KJV). There is nothing meek about an armored column charging into Baghdad, or troops kicking in doorways looking for the enemy. Or maybe he had in mind, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (v. 7). Or perhaps "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (v. 9).

When you keep in mind that these are directed at men and women in private life, you will be on the way to understanding where the Senator went astray. Nevertheless, I have an idea that the dominant passage in the Senator's mind (or that of his speech writer) would be this well known section later in the chapter: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (vv. 38-39).

"Turning the other cheek" has entered our language as a symbol of nonviolence. This is one of the things I have learned to respect about Dr. Martin Luther King. How is it possible to live in a society and not resist evil? If you take the literalist approach and a mugger comes up to you on the street and threatens your wife or kids, you are not to oppose him. If a thief breaks into your home, you must not defend yourself or your wife and children. Thankfully, most Christians have found a way to defend their homes in spite of the radical interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

What was Jesus advocating, and how are we supposed to react

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to evil? The answer is that a government which protects us and avenges the helpless is what makes it possible for us to live peacefully in society. If we are going to understand what Jesus is calling on us to do, we first have to understand the roles of law and government. A good place to start the fundamentals is with the instructions of Paul to a handful of small churches living right in the belly of the beast—Rome: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody” (Romans 12:17). That is, what is right within the sight of everyone. Not everyone will think it is right. Moreover, “If it is possible, *as far as it depends on you*, live at peace with everyone” (v. 18). Obviously, it isn’t always possible.

Finally, Paul concludes: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (v. 19). There is something of overriding importance here. For some reason, many people seem to believe that vengeance is a bad thing. It is not. Vengeance is the central value of justice. But vengeance, you say, is the work of God, not man. True, but in that case, vengeance is a good, not a wrong. And what is God’s instrument for exacting vengeance? Paul goes on: “Every-one must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God”

(Romans 13:1 NIV).

Keep in mind that the governing authority for these churches was Rome. Paul went on: “Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you” (vv. 2-3).

If we are going to understand what Jesus is calling on us to do, we first have to understand the roles of law and government.

Paul is generalizing here. Obviously there have been evil governments which have been a terror to people who were doing right. But that is not the case here. Paul’s point is: “For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an avenger to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience” (vv. 4-5).

This is crucial to understand. Government is the agent of God to protect the weak and to avenge the victims of wrongdoing. So let’s do a little theology here. Is the Sermon on the Mount really so radical that, if applied, it would scrap the Defense Department? And, of course, all police departments as

well? The idea is nonsense. The Sermon on the Mount is instruction, not for governments, but for the man of God in his private life.

This is one of the reasons I become uncomfortable when a candidate for office starts talking about the Bible. I am concerned that he may be confusing his responsibility as a private Christian with his responsibility as a civil leader. If government does not do its duty to protect, the natural result is vigilantism and social chaos.

Just how much has changed since Old Testament times? Less than you might think. Certainly God has not changed. The difference lies in the area we are talking about: governmental responsibility.

Some aspects of Old Testament Law are governmental. For example, the laws regulating slavery. Senator Obama is understandably bothered by the laws in Exodus which permit slavery: “Should we go with Leviticus,” he asked, “which suggests slavery is OK?” It isn’t Leviticus, it is Exodus, but the Book does not suggest that slavery is “okay.” What the Law was doing was regulating a necessary practice. What? Slavery was a necessary practice? Sure it was, and we still practice slavery to this day for much the same reason. We call it prison. (When we had the draft, we called it military service.) Bear in mind that Israel was a society without prisons. What did you do with a thief when caught? First, he had to make full restitution with punitive damages. If he had nothing with which to make restitution, he was put on the auction block and sold to the highest bidder. His maximum sentence was six years. What the Bible did was

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regulate what the government could do with miscreants.

Unlike Rome, where the slave was the property of the owner with no rights, in Israel there were rights granted to slaves. They were not mere property, they were human beings with rights. I suppose it is fair to say that Senator Obama's theology was off base, but his point was not theology, it was the separation of religion and state. He is running for president, not national theologian, and he would have been okay if he had stayed with his field of expertise.

As for the other items he mentioned, eating shellfish is not a governmental matter except as the health department becomes involved. In Israel, the priests had responsibility for inspections that had to do with health. We do much the same thing, but with elected officials instead of hereditary Levites. The dietary laws were for individuals, not for the state, to observe.

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There were some other highly problematic ideas the Senator advanced, but space doesn't permit examining them all. However, I did go a lot further in a radio program titled *The Politics of Religion*, and you can get a *FREE* CD of that program by merely checking the box on the enclosed card and returning it to

us. Don't delay. It is important in this election year to be as informed as possible about the candidates, who they are, what they believe in, and what they stand for.

Thanks for reading this far, and please order this CD which is indeed *FREE*. You can purchase additional CDs if you want to give them to others who would be interested. We can always use your support to help us get the word out as far as we can reach.

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table. Jesus understood the deep grief they were suffering and realized the best thing for them was to vent that grief. He did not rebuke those women for their attitudes. There is no reason not to be honest with God. He knows what you are thinking. Just say it and get it into the open. God is a bigger person than we credit him for, and he won't zap us for our honesty, for honesty is a cornerstone of our relationship with him.

Jesus understands things we experience because he walked among us and experienced the same tribulations. He'll have compassion on our frustration in the same way he had for Mary and Martha. He understood the stress in their lives and overlooked their emotional outbursts.

But I also believe something else, something that is easier to believe than it is to live. Jesus expects me to have compassion and patience in the same way that he expressed it to Mary and Martha. When someone is unusually (or maybe just usually)

grumpy and impolitic, it might be wise to step back before reacting and realize that maybe this person has just lost a loved one, or suffered a financial setback, or had an unpleasant exchange with the boss or a teenage son. This was driven home to me when I received an unusually angry email from someone. My first reaction was, "What a jerk!" It didn't occur to me that this was out of character, and only later that day did I learn that a family crisis of the worst kind was the background to the attitude.

I had just studied the Martha and Mary incident, but I didn't do as well as Jesus did. It was an object lesson nevertheless, and one that was learned with gratitude.

Employment Opportunities

Intern: CEM is looking for a person who would like to spend time in an intern position with us. We especially need someone who has audio/video experience or who is willing to be trained. If you have an interest, please send your resume to Personnel, P.O. Box 560, Whitehouse, TX 75791 or via email to lsw@cemnetwork.com.

Editorial Assistant: A challenging and rewarding position is available at CEM for a dedicated on-site person with good grammar, computer skills, and Bible knowledge. This opportunity provides variety and potential for growth for a person with a passion to make a difference in the work God is doing. Internship considered. Send resume to Editorial, P.O. Box 560, Whitehouse, TX 75791.

YEA Feast Classes at Panama City Beach, Florida

By Diane and Keith Kleeschulte

Plans for exciting YEA 2008 Feast of Tabernacles classes are shaping up to be bigger and better than ever. Every child, preteen, and teenager will want to be in one of the action-packed classes for all age groups scheduled from 9:30-10:30 a.m., Wednesday-Friday, October 15-17, and Sunday and Monday, October 19-20. Themes are:

- Beginners (ages 3-5):
All Aboard
- Primaries (ages 6-8):
Ready for Takeoff
- Juniors (ages 9-11):
Be a Winner
- Intermediates (ages 12-15):
Online 2008
- Senior Teens (ages 16-20):
You've Got Mail

Each dynamic, fun class will be staffed with capable and enthusiastic teachers and assistants. For families attending the Feast in Panama City Beach, *FREE* full-color YEA books will be available for students at the registration table in the lobby on the opening night, October 13th, and before the morning worship service on the holy day, October 14th. Each YEA Feast book includes five lessons. Each lesson includes a fun activity to drive the lesson's point home and make it memorable. The lessons are not left hanging in midair, each contains a personal application of God's Word to kids' lives. Parents should encourage their child or teen to read each

lesson, along with the Daily Devotionals. YEA goals are to help our children and teens become biblically literate and to bring them to repentance and baptism as early as maturity will allow. Students attending the Feast in Panama City Beach need not order YEA books—they will be provided. However, for other Feast sites, YEA books for all five age groups are available to order at www.borntowin.net until September 17th. If you are coming to Panama City Beach and would like to volunteer to help in a YEA class, contact Diane or Keith Kleeschulte at jetklee33@yahoo.com, or Allie Dart at allie@borntowin.net.

The Bible: Making It the Book for Kids

By Allie Dart

Not long ago I was reading an article in *Children's Ministry*, published by Group, about a Church of Christ teaching children under the age of one the Bible. As I recall, they put these little tots in highchairs and sang to them. Each song ended with "It's in the Bible." I couldn't help but believe the majority of those children will remain in that church.

Kids learn faster, and retain longer, words put to music. Likely you remember religious songs you learned as a child: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me

so. . ." "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. . ." "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. . ." Every Sabbath School class should include singing. It should be a family tradition to sing Bible songs every day.

What else can be done to make the Bible a book for kids? Encourage children to ask "what" and "why." It is through providing these answers that children and teens become convicted that the Bible is valuable for living a godly life and are anchored to Christ.

"Knowing the facts about the Bible is great, but unless a child understands why it applies to life, it won't really have the impact we desire" (*Children's Ministry*, July/August 2008).

From the beginning of the Youth Educational Adventures (YEA) program, we realized that relational context shapes the outcome of assessing the Bible. Isolated Bible stories often hang in midair. Being in context answers the "why" and "what." We decided to start with the beginning of the

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Special CD Offer - *Kings Series*

The two Books of Kings begin with the death of the most significant man in the History of Israel, King David, a man praised as a “man after God’s own Heart.” In spite of all his sins, which were many, David was called a man who did what was right before God. How is that possible? Because it was in the end that he did right. David erred mightily, but unlike his son, Solomon, he never trifled with another god. David, in fact, was the last true monotheistic king in Israel’s history. The history of the kings of Israel that follows is checkered with idolatry. First and Second Kings outline in the sharpest terms what went wrong in Israel and Judah.

People who read the prophets without understanding the history of these years are doomed to, at best, misunderstand, at worst become totally lost. True, there are prophecies of the distant future to be found, but all of them are rooted firmly in the history of these days. This 13 CD album is normally priced at \$59.95. Order this special offer now for only \$47.95 until September 30th, 2008.

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New Testament, the Life of Christ, and cover it chronologically in context. Then the YEA program takes every age group to Genesis 1:1—the Creation series. Students are taken chronologically through the Old Testament, as far as time and space allow in 17 years of lessons.

How else can we make the Bible a book for kids? “The Bible is simply not a collections of short stories waiting to be outfitted with morals. When teachers force applications upon Bible stories, they do so at the expense of the child seeing the grand plot of the Bible. Children will view the Bible as Aesop’s Fables—lots of good stories that tell me how to live—just far more encyclopedic. The Bible does more than give advice for living; it tells the story of how to connect with the Author of Life” (Ibid). Helping children and teenagers make the connection with the “Author of Life” will improve their chances of remaining in the faith and making it into God’s Kingdom many times over.

What Our Listeners Say

“Sir, I would like to thank you very much for your wonderful website, it is a great source of information. I found [out] about it today and have really been looking at all the resources and valuable info on this site. I have also listened to one of your sermons, very inspirational. I hope I can attend the Feast with you all this year and learn even more!”

“I can’t begin to describe my heart felt thanks to your programming. It means a world to me. I’ve not yet got on my feet. I’m by no means poor, yet I’ve nothing to share my appreciation to your ministry. I’m cancelling my internet service in order to, well, do the right thing. One should not do what one cannot afford to do. That’s simple economics and no action of a pen will change that. I will however, continue to listen to you on WVOC in Columbia, SC. You’ve done more to my belief in Christ Jesus than most men I know. . .”

“I listened to today’s radio broadcast and, once again, was struck with the simple profundity with which Ronald L. Dart delivered his message, ‘Fairness and the Christian.’ If only more Christians and Christian ministers took the Bill of Rights more seriously, the Gospel could go forth in these United States with unfettered freedom (fairness doctrine, notwithstanding!). Those who blindly follow ‘coercive collectivism’ will only perpetuate the very problems that have so beset the republic. Or, like Ron stated, vote for the very jailers who harm them the most (I grossly paraphrase). Anyway, I really appreciated the simplicity making the distinction of the two forms of collectivism; coercive and voluntary. Would to God more believers took the founders’ vision of liberty and freedom to heart. The ‘vision of the annointed’ is a vision, to be sure, but not annointed by God. God bless” (CS).

Footnotes to the Ten Commandments

By Lennie Cacchio

“The Ten Commandments don’t have any footnotes,” said the pundit. The point being to take them literally if you are going to take them at all.

I appreciate the sentiment, but disagree with the premise. Yes, those commandments mean what they say. “Thou shalt not steal” is a good command to live by. But what if you and your children are starving and you have a chance to slip off with an apple from the produce aisle? Are you committing a crime worthy of jail? A biblical footnote, if you will, says, “Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry” (Proverbs 6:30).

From this one might conclude that extenuating circumstances and the offering of grace can temper the commands and judgments of God.

And if taken literally, “Thou

shalt not commit adultery” leaves open a wide range of behaviors not covered literally by that command. But, are we to conclude that this is what the commandment means? Jesus placed a heavy footnote on this commandment. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-29 NASB).

“Thou shalt not kill.” Does that mean we shouldn’t slap the mosquito that’s sucking our blood? In Hebrew the command is “Thou shalt not murder,” but does that make everything short of murder acceptable? The footnote from Jesus: “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to

the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matthew 5:21-23 NASB).

Jesus once again raises the standard by saying that the act is evil, but the act will never happen in the first place if the heart is right. If you walk around with an attitude of anger and hate, you have corrupted your heart and, in the end, it is the heart that matters.

As with any piece of literature, one must be careful not to be too literal, especially when lifting a verse or two from its context. And that context is not just its immediate context, but the sweep of evidence in the entire piece.

Calendar of Events

2008 Feast of Tabernacles, Boardwalk Beach Resort Convention Center, Panama City Beach, Florida, beginning the evening of October 13 through 21. A daily morning worship service will be held with inspirational sermons and music. Daily Educational and Christian Living seminars, the best-anywhere Youth Bible classes, Youth Day, and plenty of social events for making friends and bonding with friends await you. Plenty of housing, from single hotel rooms to three- to five-bedroom condominiums, are available in every price range. Check for yourself at www.getawaytothegulf.com or www.boardwalkbeachresort.com. See our discounts under “Accommodations” at www.borntowin.net. You’ll have to look long and hard to find a more uplifting, better-organized Feast site that offers more spiritual food and fun than CEM’s site at Panama City Beach. Everyone is welcome and no preregistration is required. Come join us!

Check It Out!

Go to www.borntowin.net and check out daily YEA! Let’s R.E.A.C.H. Activities for kids three to 20 to do.

Christian Educational Ministries

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*That the man of God may be proficient
and equipped for every good work.*