

GOD'S POLITICS

When Did Jesus Become Pro-War?

June 25, 2006

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(Matthew 5:2-9 NRSV) Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: {3} "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. {4} "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. {5} "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. {6} "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. {7} "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. {8} "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. {9} "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Charles Sheldon in his classic novel written 110 years ago: *IN HIS STEPS*, present a simple, yet profound message. He suggested that to be a Christian was to do whatever Jesus would do, if Jesus was in your situation.

Pretty simple message. In the 90's that message was converted into a neat like acronym: WWJD → What Would Jesus Do?

What would Jesus do?

In 1980, two years after I graduated from High School, President Carter reinstated the draft registration requirement making it retroactive for males born in 1960 and later — it looked like war with Iran was imminent. Being born in 1960 I was confronted with Charles Sheldon's question — what would Jesus do?

Would Jesus register?

Would Jesus serve?

Would Jesus seek conscientious objector status?

While I struggled with that issue — many of my friends were excited about the possibility of going to war — and on the very last day before I would be in default, I walked down to the Glenview post office and filled out my registration — my heart and my head heavy.

It wasn't until I read Tony Campolo's book *20 Hot Potatoes Christians Are Afraid to Touch* that I finally put all my wrestling together.

Tony writes:

During the Korean War, the draft was in effect, and there was some

indication that I might be required to go into military service. In a preliminary session at the draft board office, I was interviewed by an army colonel. He was obviously concerned about me after I gave several indications that I might have problems about killing in battle. I distinctly remember that colonel looking across his desk at me and sternly asking me why I had doubts about the rightness of killing for my country. I told him about reading *In His Steps* and said I was trying to figure out what Jesus would do if He were in my shoes. The colonel asked me directly, "Do you think you could shoot another human being or drop bombs from an airplane?"

I answered, "If I got into a plane and flew over an enemy village, just before I pulled the lever to release the bombs, I would have to ask, 'Jesus, if you were in my place, would you drop these bombs?'"

The colonel answered me gruffly, "That's the dumbest thing I ever heard. Everybody knows that Jesus would never drop bombs!"

Sometimes I wonder — Does everybody really know that Jesus would never drop bombs?

He tells us this pretty clearly:

(Matthew 5:38-47 The Message)

"Here's another old saying that deserves a second look: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Is that going to get us anywhere? Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all.' If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

"You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.

But everything changed on September 11, 2001

No more “turn the other cheek” — instead our policy became one of: “get them before they get us.”

Fear became a part of our national experience

We became like the rest of the world — no longer immune from terror

Don't get me wrong — I am not suggesting that we do nothing to stop terrorists from blowing us up, but isn't their another alternative?

Haven't we learned from Ireland or the Middle East that an eye for an eye does not work!

Jesus seems to be offering to us another way — but that is a way that requires that we ask why the rest of the world hates us so much — and take seriously their concerns

I know that last week Jeff encouraged us to move beyond a politics of complaint — and look for alternatives instead of only the negative. But I don't want to look at any one war, in particular, because, for our purposes I am not sure that is helpful. One of the things that I think might be helpful is a column that Jim Wallis wrote on Sept 11, 2002 — the one year anniversary of that horrible event.

TEN LESSONS TO DEFEAT TERRORISM

1. Treat the threat of terrorism very real.
2. Avoid bad theology
3. Listen to the different perceptions of Sept. 11 around the world
4. Let's define terrorism the right way., and allow no double standards
5. Attack not only the symptoms, but also the root causes of terrorism
6. Solutions to terrorism are not primarily military
7. It's time to move beyond the old debates of pacifism and just war
8. It is time to end the era of unilateral action by any nation
9. This is not a time for peace-loving, but rather for peacemaking
10. The fight against terrorism is a spiritual struggle, not just a political one

I'll be honest with you — I don't agree with all of those — but I think they can get us started in the right direction.

Jim Wallis then goes on to bash the Bush administration about the war in Iraq — and while I believe that war is wrong — I do not think it is the issue.

The issue is What Would Jesus Do? Or maybe phrased another way —> When did Jesus become pro-war?

I think the key plank of Wallis 10 lessons is #2 – We must avoid bad theology

What do I mean by that?

I few months ago I addressed this issue in much greater detail when I preached on When Religion Becomes Evil.

Eugene Peterson — in his translation of the Bible in very contemporary language, writes this:

Religion is the most dangerous energy source known to humankind. The moment a person (or a government or religion or organization) is convinced that God is either ordering something or sanctioning a course or project, anything goes. The history, worldwide, of religion fueled hate, killing, and oppression is staggering. The biblical prophets are in the front line of those doing something about it.

The biblical prophets continue to be the most powerful and effective voices ever heard on this earth for keeping religion honest, humble, and compassionate. Prophets sniff out injustice, especially injustice that is dressed up in religious garb. They sniff it out a mile away. Prophets see through hypocrisy, especially hypocrisy that assumes a religious pose.

When I preached on this I suggested five marks of Religion being used in Evil fashions

1. Absolute Truth Claims
2. Blind Obedience
3. Establishing the “Ideal” time
4. The End Justifies Any Means
5. Declaring Holy War.

What we have seen increasingly in our culture is the use of God justifying what we are doing to other people.

Ronald Regan may have been the master of this when he branded Russia as the Evil Empire at a time when Star Wars was the most popular movie in the land. We all knew what he meant.

Russians were bad — evil
Americans were good

We have got to be careful that we don't think that God blesses America and only America.

We have to take back our faith — take it back from the religious right which uses God to further their own personal agenda

We need a new confession of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ today.

1. Jesus Christ, as attested in Holy Scriptures, knows no national boundaries.
Our allegiance to Christ must take priority over our allegiance to nation. Whenever we compromise Jesus for our nation — our faith is compromised.
We must be careful not to believe that “we are the light” and that the rest of the world is darkness and our light is what is needed.

2. We must have a strong presumption against war.
This is especially true in this day of modern technology.
As followers of the Way we must count the cost, speak out for victims, and explore every avenue before we go to war.

3. (Matthew 7:3-5 NRSV) Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

We must be careful not to stereotype all people as good or evil. Some are good, some are evil

4. We must show love to our enemies even as we believe God in Christ has shown love to us and the whole world.
(Romans 5:8, 10 NRSV) But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

5. Christ teaches us that humility is the virtue befitting forgiven sinners. That must temper all political disagreements, and help us to see that our own political perceptions — might be wrong.

So where do we turn? I suggest we turn back to the prophets and see if they can't give us a new vision as we take back our faith.

(Micah 4:1-4 NRSV) In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, {2} and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we

may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. {3} He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; {4} but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

What would Jesus do?

Would Jesus drop bombs?