

**21st CENTURY CULTURE WARS:
Sociological, Historical, and Biblical Perspectives**
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Shortly after Jon Johnston invited me to speak on the subject of "Culture Wars" at this ANSR conference, I googled the topic on the internet. I expected to find hundreds of entries but was informed there are about 72,900,000. (Very likely many more were missing.) I assure you that my preparation does not completely cover the subject! I shall, however, call attention to some current issues, theoretical approaches, historical predecessors, practical problems, and especially Christian perspectives related to the topic.

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE WARS

Culture wars are especially evident in election years as political parties oversimplify the issues before the nation in campaign promises and often-misleading slogans. One that has irked me the most in recent years is the "Death Tax," especially when the appeal is made to people in the lower and middle half of the social class structure. They all will die and do not want to be taxed for death, so they should vote for the party that opposes the estate tax, which few if any of them will ever need to pay because it currently applies only to estates willed to someone other than a spouse that are valued at \$2,000,000 or more (unless its base has risen).

Among recent issues in the American culture war battles are disagreements related to topics like these:

- American supremacy and democracy building in other countries vs. complete independence and autonomy of each nation.
- America-First patriotism versus the all-humanity globalism of the United Nations and one-world-power advocates.
- Pro-life anti-abortion vs. pro-choice pro-abortion advocacy.
- Legalization of gay marriages vs. heterosexual marriages only.
- Adoption and child care in homosexual homes vs. child care limited to heterosexual parents.
- Public vs. private education, plus related issues like home schooling, public kindergartens, and college tuition subsidies,
- Tensions related to the rights and interests of allegedly competing generations (see Lancaster and Stillman, 2002).
- Violence against prisoners under national security vs. universal human rights for even enemies.
- Religious symbols in the public square (Ten Commandments; Christmas displays; depictions of Christian persons or places, etc.) vs. narrow views of the separation of church and state.
- Traditional moral values and laws vs. the belief all values should be reconsidered.
- Sexual intercourse only within marriage vs. the free choice of sexual expressions as a right of all adolescents and adults.
- Abortion by and contraceptives for teenagers as their private rights vs. parental responsibility for and control of adolescents.

- Lax discipline in homes and schools to protect civil liberties, psychological health, and development of independence by children vs. strong efforts to control deviance and develop character through traditional interpretations of morality, ethics, child rearing, and discipline.
- Wealth as the product of self-made persons vs. wealth as a result of exploiting others.
- Health care as a universal human right that government must support vs. health care as a strictly private concern.
- Government financing by progressive income taxes vs. user fees and regressive sales taxes.
- Transportation support for highways (private auto and truck vehicles) vs. support for public rail and bus services.
- The Peace Movement vs. justifications for preemptive wars to support American political or economic interests, participatory democracy, and worldwide safety to protect citizens against their fears of terrorism.
- Harsh punishment and imprisonment of all criminals and delinquents vs. rehabilitative justice by their probation, parole, education, job training, and work placements.
- Restorative justice for criminal and juvenile offenders vs. retribution and harsh punishment.
- Environmentalism and global warming issues vs. profit-making exploitation of natural resources.
- Social Security as an appropriate government program for all citizens vs. privatized insurance to replace Medicare and Medicaid.

Emerging battles that are likely in the near future include. religiously sanctioned polygamy (Mormon fundamentalists and Islam) vs. traditional monogamy and the legitimation of dying by choice (suicide and euthanasia) as a human right for people who are terminally ill vs. the anti-euthanasia stance of traditional Christianity.

Many of these issues are like battles of an overarching culture war, especially as American society is increasingly polarized by party politics. The Republican Party is usually on the side conventionally labeled as conservative and the Democrats on the one normally labeled as liberal. Under the impasses created by the above and other culture wars, the nation's problems are multiplying. Rampant partisanship prevents legislative compromises that once were possible when "liberal Republicans" and "conservative Democrats" cooperated. Now their nearly even balance of power deadlocks Congress and leads to crippled federal agencies (Povich, 2008).

The arguments of extremists on either side of culture wars tend to take very dubious forms, one being guilt by association: "Communists love their mothers, and you love your mother, so you are a Communist." Christians among them attempt to get God onto their predetermined side instead of trying to be sure they are on His side.

Interlude: A Vivid Exemplar: During his invitation phone call, Jon mentioned the popular *Culture Warrior* book by O'Reilly (2006), which I subsequently read. It reduces most culture wars to a single struggle between traditionalists and secular progressives. I agree with him and some other analysts that "Right now, it is the conservative Christian groups that are most engaged on the traditional side, and their interest stems primarily from theology" (p. 173), that Christian values are implicated in all of them [although not always unequivocally in the direction O'Reilly advocates], and that "What traditional [and all other] Americans need desperately is leadership along with a clarification of which traditional values are worth fighting for and why" (p. 177). Therefore I am on his side of many of the wars, although his arrogance, lopsided arguments, and methodology turn me off.

O'Reilly claims that *The O'Reilly Factor* broadcast is politically independent and balanced, giving liberals and traditionalists, including the Bush Administration, a fair hearing through national television exposure (pp. 61-64). He nevertheless acknowledges that his program and the Fox News broadcasts "are

very effective in unmasking S-P [secular-progressive] strategies and exposing their dangerous agenda" (p. 62). Although he knows that "there is a difference between challenging people on their portrayal of the issues and attacking them by using defamation, rumormongering and name-calling" (p. 181), he uses the same propagandistic techniques so much that his own imbalanced work is equivalent to that of "smear merchants" who are "guttersniping" (p. 182) instead of genuinely debating issues.

"Not only is it virtually impossible to have a reasonable conversation with an S-P fanatic (or any fanatic, for that matter), it is also boring, because they will never cede a point, no matter how persuasive the evidence" (pp. 64-65). O'Brien does not acknowledge that he, along with Hannity and Colmes on Fox News, is himself a fanatic.

His work is very obviously produced for a popular audience that enjoys name calling and other propagandistic over-simplifications without being encumbered by precise references to most sources. Many techniques that appeal to the mass market of those that agree with him turn off scholars who want fair-minded appraisals of the strengths and weaknesses of all sides of the culture wars. His bombastic approach undercuts the strength of his legitimate critiques. Projection is obvious in the language he uses for the S-Ps, whom he fervently attacks in favor of his own traditionalism. His words about them describe himself at least as accurately as them: He is a fanatical, bloviating, intellectually deficient, guttersniping, bomb-throwing, ruthless ideologue, a loon who is a clown prince and poster-boy for the media group-think of traditionalism.

The radical right-wing politics of O'Reilly and others like him make everyone in the political center appear to be a part of the radical left, just as the counter arguments of left-wingers make fair-minded centrists appear to be members of the radical right. He claims the mainstream print media are about three-quarters progressive (p. 15), while his opponents believe they are heavily dominated by traditionalists. Political Independents, even more than the political centrists within each major political party, therefore become targets for the barbed arrows of both Republican and Democrat culture warriors.

Critical Analyses of Culture Wars

Underlying most, if not all, of the culture war battles are the self-interests of protagonists. **The "haves"** wish to protect their income, wealth, and power against intrusions from progressive taxation while they try to control of the political parties and exert the hegemony of private business, industry, and the mass media over government and other societal institutions. **The "have nots"** wish to receive benefits from government, like improved employment opportunities, livable minimum wages, affordable health services for themselves and their families, better education and training for their children, and backup services for special needs that result from personal emergencies and community catastrophies. On most issues related to governmental policies, programs, and taxation those groups tend to be on opposite sides. The practical leaders and philosophical elites of each camp argue that public support for their interests is the best way to satisfy the needs of their antagonists.

People of wealth and power are attracted to the **Trickle Down philosophy** that the best way to help the poor is to subsidize the rich, for that will expand business and industry, creating new jobs and opportunities for rank-and-file workers. I'm sure I do not need to remind you that the Bush Administration has aggressively pursued that policy both overtly and subtly during the past seven years. It has given "tax relief," subsidies to business and industry, aids to big agriculture, granted special privileges to pharmaceutical companies, and made appointments of persons with vested interests to positions evaluating and overseeing those interests. Many other policies have made major corporations and wealthy people increasingly powerful and prosperous. At the same time and largely as a result, its actions have contributed to shifting thousands of jobs away from America to other nations, relocating international headquarters of innumerable corporations to offshore islands and third-world nations where they can evade much of the control and taxation of the USA, enabling

exorbitant salaries and bonuses for corporate CEOs (even when their companies were losing money), widening the gulf between the incomes of wealthy executives and poor workers, and diminishing the middle class.

Meanwhile the "have not" side has a **Thrust Up philosophy**. It believes that the best way to help the rich and privileged classes of society is to aid those who are poor. Their financial subsidies from the federal government will boost the national economy by increasing people's purchases of goods and services, which in turn will stimulate the productivity of corporations and businesses, thus augmenting the income and profits of their managers and owners. Much more durable than handouts is the stimulation of employment opportunities and improving human qualifications for them. They will take people off the welfare rolls and reduce their need for other subsidies. The most obvious American example of this was the New Deal under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It created agencies like the WPA, TWA, CCC, and NYA that, among many other products and services, paid for public infrastructures from which we still benefit. It put unemployed people to work, took many young people out of hopeless crime-inducing circumstances by educating them and giving them training in work skills, and helped poor and suffering people to help themselves. As a result, by the late 1930s the Great Depression was conquered and prosperity had begun to return to our nation.

Culture Wars in Theory

Our topic lies within the frame of reference of *conflict theory*, but I shall not elaborate the ways it fits into that broader context, except to mention that conflict sociologically includes any and all forms of overt or covert struggle and constraint in which two or more opposing persons or groups seek to attain different goals. It includes competition and rivalry, ranging from the mildest of disagreements to the violence of murder, execution, genocide, and war.

The *Culture Wars* phrase first became a common expression from the work of James Davison Hunter (1991). He defined *cultural conflict* as "political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding" (p. 42), each aiming at the domination of its own cultural and moral ethos over all the others. The principles and ideals that mark competing systems are not trivial. Instead they passionately carry a sense of ultimacy and provide "basic commitments and beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose, and togetherness for the people who live by them" (p. 42). The competing moral visions do not take form as coherent, clearly articulated, and sharply differentiated world views, but as polarizing impulses or tendencies within American culture (p. 43). Older arrangements have been transformed and older agreements unraveled, so

The divisions of political consequence ... are not theological and ecclesiastical in character but the result of differing worldviews ... our most fundamental and cherished assumptions about how to order our lives ... and ideas about who we are as Americans (Hunter, 1991, p. 42).

Hunter argued that the contemporary culture war is created above all by the competing impulses toward **orthodoxy** and toward **progressivism**. Whatever their religion or doctrinal creed, the adherents to orthodoxy are committed to an external, definable, and transcendent authority, while the cultural progressivists view truth as a process with an ever unfolding reality. They translate religious and moral ideals so that they conform to and legitimate the contemporary *zeitgeist*, sharing the tendency to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life (pp. 43-45). Debates over topics like the morality and legality of abortion therefore go far beyond the abortion controversy.

[W]hat seems to be a myriad of self-contained cultural disputes actually amounts to a fairly comprehensive and momentous struggle to define the meaning of America--of how and on

what terms will Americans live together, of what comprises the good society (p. 51).

Hunter (1991) described and critiqued numerous aspects of moral visions, religious variables, and political tensions associated with the basic orthodox/progressive cleavages in American society, including those evident in the family, education, media, the arts, law, and electoral politics as major fields of conflict. He concluded that

A principled pluralism and a principled toleration is what common life in contemporary America should be all about. But this is only possible if all contenders ... do not kill each other over these differences, do not desecrate what the other holds sublime, and do not eschew principled discourse with the other (p. 325).

Critiques of the Cultural Wars Thesis

Numerous extensions and critiques of Hunter's thesis have subsequently emerged. Williams' (1997a) significant collection has 13 chapters by 23 authors critiquing culture wars in American politics as a popular myth on the basis of evidence from the mass media, party politics, religion, social movements, theological seminaries, and other domains. The dominant perspective among them is that the bipolar ideological axis of **orthodoxy** and **progressivism** is too simplistic. Religion, social class, the entertainment industries, political behavior, and much more reveal the presence of cross-cutting issues that attenuate rather than intensify conflict in American society. Smith (1997, p. 192) found that even the allegedly powerful and cohesive Religious Right, when defined as consisting of politically conservative Independent or Republican Christians who say religion is very important in their lives, attend church services regularly, and oppose abortion in all circumstances comprised only 9% of the Republicans and 4% of the American population.

Kniss (1997) concluded that even as few as the two major cultural contrasts of modernism/traditionalism as a locus of moral authority and of libertarian/communal divisions as the locus of "the moral project" are dialectically related to each other in diverse ways. (Libertarianism focuses on individual salvation and moral improvement, while communalism submits the individual to the common good of society.) Empirically these dualistic typologies dynamically interact with each other in various configurations, so culture conflict should be seen in terms of multidimensional rather than unidimensional bipolar tensions (p. 276). The cross-cutting issues blur distinctions between groups, attenuate rather than intensify cultural conflict, and undercut efforts of both the political Right and Left to polarize the population. "It does not behoove us as sociologists to share in the simplistic apocalyptic vision of those who have a particular ideological battle to fight" (p. 277).

Williams (1997b, pp. 284-285) concluded that there are at least two axes along which political opinions, attitudes, and values of Americans are arrayed. One pertains to issues related to the distribution of economic and political resources, the other to personal and cultural morality. The "crosscutting cleavages" intersect the body politic in a variety of ways, with mass opinion less that of a culture war than a matter of political discourse by elites. Apathy and lack of interest dominate the public in general, with some getting politically involved through social networks rather than previously existing attitudes. The political parties deliberately create logically inconsistent platforms in order to appeal to different segments of their constituencies. In our two-party system the organizational pressures thus are centripetal, while ideological pressures are centrifugal. American politics paradoxically eschews either/or understandings and favors the both/and reality (pp. 287-293).

Research on the electoral behavior of Americans by Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006) also concludes that the alleged culture war in a polarized nation is a myth. Detailed analyses of voting

behavior in the 2004 presidential election show that no sharp division between the Red versus Blue states solidly splits the corresponding Republicans and Democrats into two clearly distinct camps on specific issues. While activists in the ideologically polarized political parties force us to choose between them, most voters are somewhere in the middle. The vast majority of people in both Red and Blue states have a centrist position on such issues as abortion, the Iraq War, school vouchers, equal employment of minorities, gun control, equality of gender roles, regular church attendance, homosexual adoptions, no gay job discrimination, the death penalty, and other issues, even though most voters tend to lean slightly toward one of the opposing sides of center on many specific issues.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIAN CULTURE WARS

Christians are found on both sides of most American culture wars. Usually they simply take it for granted that the side chosen by them or their reference group represents genuine Christianity. Except for occasional major topics, they seldom study most issues from perspectives revealed by both in-depth Bible studies and research based factual data. Instead the majority are content with brandishing one-sided pet slogans and selected Bible verses, often taken out of context.

Experiences of the past can help us become wiser than our ancestors, for patterns from history do tend to recur even though past events are never precisely repeated.

Culture Wars in the Bible

Numerous events that we would now label as culture wars are mentioned in the Bible, although few of their details and cultural components are described. The first actually appears in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-19) when Adam along with Eve (3:6) succumbed to the Serpent's tempting claim that eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would make them become like God. Their descendents ever since have yielded repeatedly to similar sins of pride and selfish ambition, choosing their own way of doing things instead of following directions from God that result in the shalom of total well-being.

We know almost nothing about the culture war between the earliest sheep grazing "ranchers" and agricultural tillers of the soil, but God's rejection of their respective first fruit offerings contributed to the murder of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4:1-16). We similarly lack details about the specific evils in the hearts of men that separated righteous Noah from the majority population of his society (Genesis 6:5-13), nor do we know the events at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) that led to linguistic divisions and cultural distinctions that scattered people groups over the face of the earth.

Culture wars are reflected in the histories of Abraham and Lot, Jacob and Esau, the Israelites and Egyptians before and during the Exodus, the wilderness worship of the Golden Calf instead of Yahweh, the expulsions and battles during Israel's occupation of the Promised Land, and the repetitive cycles of sinning and repentance among the Hebrews as they absorbed culture patterns associated with the worship of idolatrous gods from surrounding nations and tribes.

King Solomon's political alliances and attraction to women resulted in having "seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines ... [who] led him astray" (1 Kings 11:3). They enticed him into doing evil in the eyes of God by turning his heart after other gods. As a result, his kingdom fell. The prophets were as forthright about condemning "idols in the heart" (see esp. Ezekiel 14:2-8) as they were about worshiping tangible idols made of wood, clay, or metal. The Babylonian captivities that resulted and many more events related to culture wars are reported in the Old

Testament.

The Hebrew prophets who brought the message of the Lord were especially adamant about His commands to evade assimilation into their neighbors' idolatrous cultures, to resist moral and religious compromises with pagan cultures, and to restore personal righteousness among all of God's people (see, e.g., Deut. 7:1-6; Joshua 23:6-13). Nevertheless, they were also commanded not to mistreat or oppress the aliens living in their land (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:33-34). Particularly vivid examples of their prophetic messages about restoring social justice are in Isaiah 1:15-17; 10:1-4; Jeremiah 7:1-11; Amos 2:6-8; 5:11-15, and Zechariah 7:8-12. God's people must be different from their pagan neighbors.

The New Testament carries a similar refrain about the battles of God's people with cultural belief systems and behavior patterns that violate the will of God. Jesus emphasized that his disciples do not belong to the world (1 John 15:19), yet his prayer for them was not that God would take them out of the world but that He would protect them from the Evil One (John 17:15-16). He violated the religious and cultural rules of separation by associating with gentiles, gluttons, drunkards (Matt. 11:19), prostitutes (Luke 7:39), tax collectors (Luke 19:7), and other sinners.

Believers are told to flee worldly lusts, come out from among those who sin against God, and avoid all cultural behavior patterns that in any way demean or disown Him. Many of the biblical commands to avoid sinfulness are linked with counsel not to be like people whose lifestyles typified worldly culture patterns.

If the world is sane, then Jesus is mad. ... The world says, Mind your own business, and Jesus says, There is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says, Follow me and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully – the life you save may be your own – and Jesus says, Whoever will save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, Get, and Jesus says, Give. In terms of the world's sanity, Jesus is crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under a cross than under a delusion (Buechner, 2006).

The struggle of believers with wicked elements of their cultural environment is especially evident in the epistles to the Christians in the wicked city of Corinth. Confronting culture patterns typical of the Corinthian lifestyle that had seeped into the church absorbs a large proportion of the warnings, admonitions, and counsel in their pages (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 5:1; 7:32; 15:33). Believers were told to avoid the thought patterns of regarding others from a worldly point of view (2 Cor. 5:16).

Most fights and quarrels among Christians come from coveting, pride, desires for pleasure or power, and other wrong motives (James 4:1-3; see 1 John 2:15-17). As the Great Deceiver grabs every conceivable chance to make us violate the will of our Heavenly Father, he also uses our limitations of knowledge and wisdom to clad sinful motives in shiny garments of serving God and doing good. The "wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17) as it faces the dilemmas and ambiguities of culture wars.

Culture Wars in Christian History

There have been so many culture wars of believers in Christ arrayed against other believers

that nearly all the history of Christendom can be summarized by recounting them. One of the earliest heresies eroding conventional Christianity was *Gnosticism*. It was evident as early as John's first epistle, which was written in large part to correct the Gnostics' mystical "knowledge" and dualistic ideology that all matter, including the body, was inherently evil, while the human spirit allegedly possessed the spark of divinity. First hand experience with Jesus (1 John 1:1-4) refuted the Gnostic contention that he was only a spirit who appeared to be a man, yet Gnostic sources with their erroneous doctrines are still present today, radiantly lurking under New Age and other guises.

Culture wars were among the forces giving rise to numerous reform movements within Roman Catholicism, as well as the Protestant Reformation. They were implicated in the emergence of state churches and free churches in Europe, the rise of denominations in the USA and worldwide, and many other significant changes that are influencing Christianity to this very day. Neither the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversies early in the twentieth century (see Moberg, 2007), nor the confrontations between the Moral Majority and People for the American Way at its end were based upon theology alone.

Barna (2005) reminds us that the Great Awakening and its leaders, so greatly admired by most Christians today, were harshly attacked by the established churches of the colonial era. "In fact, energetic resistance by the established church has accompanied *every* significant episode of growth in the Kingdom since the time of Christ" (p. 111).

Historically speaking, it is only recently that taboos against women's haircuts, long hair on men, skirts ending above women's ankles, gender segregation during worship, insistence that women wear hats or other head coverings in church, wearing lipstick or jewelry, mixed gender swimming, shopping on Sunday, attending commercial movies, and using any Bible other than the King James Version were rescinded in many (most?) evangelical Christian groups. Now a thing of the past except in a few small sects, none of those changes occurred without such bitter conflict among many believers that some church members departed and numerous congregations were bitterly split.

Culture Wars among Contemporary American Christians

To survey all of the contemporary culture wars among Christians would be a huge research project. Many of them are **internal** to Christian faith and ministry, dealing with differences of interpretation or application of Bible doctrines, which Bible translation to use, discipline of straying members, organizational structures and processes, qualifications for ordination or other leadership, and a variety of other matters that concern few or no other people than the members of a given denomination or congregation. Among the most prominent ones today are clashing interpretations of traditional and contemporary music, ideas about appropriate and desirable worship styles, the proper roles of women in the church, and whether homosexual persons may become members or be ordained in churches that wink at other sins (see Romans 1:29-32).

The battles that emerge at the complex intersections of societal culture wars as they interact with different ideologies within Christianity are often the most incendiary. A current example is the contrasting reactions to a 2003 sermon by the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, longtime pastor of presidential candidate Barack Obama, that was publicized in March 2008. It includes statements like "God damn America for treating our citizens as less than human. God damn America for as long as she acts like she is God and she is supreme" (Gilbert, 2008, p. 8A). Obama's political rivals prefer to omit the context of Wright's statements because it referred to America's unethical history, a history of ethical and moral injustice, including the slave trade, plantation slavery, breaking down the Black family, the

expulsion of Native Americans to reservations, educational and employment discrimination, syphilis experiments on Black men, and other racist evils, all of which Wright condemned as contrary to the will of God..

Similar statements have been widespread in traditional African-American churches when they have served as a political voice to help poor and oppressed people. They resonate with the spirit of liberation theology that Wright represents, with God's call through the Hebrew prophets to reform decadent society, and with the goals (though not the language) of progressive evangelicals today. They disturb the jingoistic and xenophobic loyalties of conservative "America First" citizens, especially fundamentalists who have been "card carrying members" of the erstwhile Moral Majority and the radical Christian Right, desiring to create an American form of Zionism (see Gelernter, 2007). They violate the traditional stay-away-from-politics position of most evangelical Protestant leaders who assume on the basis of Romans 13:1-5 that the main political role of believers is to submit to whatever government holds power, forgetting that in our society they themselves are a part of the government.

Political Captivity. When evangelical Christians accept their citizenship responsibilities, whether they become Republicans or Democrats, the first reaction of many when exposed to new research or other factual data on culture war topics related to the Iraq War, international affairs, national healthcare deficiencies and needs, and problems related to poverty, crime and delinquency often is a question that reveals their highest political loyalty -- a question I have heard from devout believers, "Is that information or its source politically left or right?" They are not primarily concerned with whether it supports or clashes with the ethics of the one they claim as Lord, Jesus Christ, nor even whether the data represent facts or only opinions. They refuse to expose themselves to any evidence or news sources that are labeled as "the wrong side" of the political spectrum. They pay no attention to educational or political sources on the side they "know" is incorrect while blindly absorbing the slogans, name calling, card stacking, and other propaganda of the side they favor.

Such Christians engage in the gossip of political whispering crusades through Email messages, conversations, and recommending selective Internet resources, giving no attention to whether they are spreading truth or lies as long as the message promotes their favored political cause or candidate. They are quick to discern the logical and other inconsistencies of opponents, but blind to their own. They individualize the gospel to such an extent that they fail to see its implications for society at large, the body politic. They think the biblical neighbors Jesus wants them to love are only the persons they can directly see, not human beings who suffer in another neighborhood, county, state, or nation. They follow prominent elite Christian leaders who define their political positions on the basis of loyalty to a political party, assuming that supporting its platform is always equivalent to upholding teachings of the Bible.

Far too many evangelical congregations have compromised the gospel by that kind of political captivity. They use the name of Jesus to serve national ambitions and justify war. Indifferent to the wisdom gained through Christian history and tradition, they have baptized their prejudices and recast their faith to fit secular civic piety and cultural preferences (see Marsh, 2007). The dangers from that kind of simple compliance with government have seldom been as dramatically illustrated as in the experiences of Christians in Nazi Germany where nearly all churches gave their blessing to the Nazi regime of Adolf Hitler (Lutzer, 1998).

Tactics of "divide and conquer" may be increasing in conservative evangelical Christians. They result, in part, from the above tendencies, the mixtures of always-impure moral values found among political candidates, and the splitting off of members when important leaders change positions

on politically or theologically significant issues. "Some have been convinced, by their own scriptures and by new leaders, that poverty, human rights, genocide, sex trafficking and global warming must be no less matters of Christian concern than abortion, homosexuality and embryonic stem-cell research. Even more have reacted against their faith being enlisted in partisan politics" (Steinfels, 2008). Culture wars indeed are present among Christians today!

BIBLICAL VALUES IN CULTURE WARS

Perhaps all of Jesus' ethical teachings, both by his words and example, can be interpreted as commentaries, explanations, and illustrations of the Ten Commandments. He modified many interpretations and applications of the Decalogue in his society, possibly the most directly of all in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, Chapters 5-7). Doing that infuriated the religious establishment, which had developed 613 commandments plus added hedges to protect, enforce, and expand them. On issue after issue the teachings of Jesus still run counter to many established cultural norms of every human society.

Like the Hebrew prophets, Jesus frequently called attention to the greed of people with power and wealth in his society. Many had piled up so much earthly wealth that they needed bigger storage space, while they failed to give attention to their eternal souls. They lived lavishly but ignored homeless people outside their gates. They ran temple businesses that profited from cheating ordinary worshipers. They bowed before the idolatrous god of Mammon (materialism) instead of the One and Only True God. They put on a false front of sanctimoniously showing off their better-than-thou religiosity, but their inner souls were spiritually rotten. Jesus repeatedly condemned the hypocrisy of rich and powerful religious leaders who exploited the common people and augmented their power with the support of Israel's enemy, the Roman government. (Of course, some of the rich became his followers. Among them are Matthew, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. Sweeping generalizations about "all" people of any type usually were errors then, even as they are today.)

Although Jesus usually was very harsh with the rich, I have not found any passages in the Gospels that say he harshly condemned the poor, oppressed, sick, disabled, orphaned, widowed, and alien people of his day, nor even convicted or imprisoned criminals. He did not condone or excuse their sins, but, instead of calling them on the carpet, he forgave them and told them to sin no more.

When the culture war of social class distinctions corrupted the early church, James (2:1-10) strongly condemned the favoritism they showed to wealthy people, reminding them that it was the rich who exploited them and slandered the name of Christ, while God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to inherit his promised kingdom. As early as 1967 Billy Graham declared that he had found 175 Bible passages that command care for the poor and needy, making anti-poverty efforts a major biblical teaching, so he was a convert to the War on Poverty (see Moberg, 2007, pp. 134-135 for details).

The Crux of Biblical Admonitions

Whenever social scientists approach complex topics like culture wars, we try to look beyond whatever is obvious and seek also for the relatively invisible or latent variables that lie beneath the surface. As a result, whatever the topic we study, we almost without fail notice gradations of human characteristics and behavior instead of only two categories, as in most culture war theorizing. In our research we therefore prefer to use questions with five or more response categories rather than only two. (E.g., if we were to ask about respondents' perceptions of the sinfulness of a series of actions,

we usually would avoid requesting Sinful/Not Sinful answers for each in favor a range like Very Sinful, Sometimes Sinful, Undecided, Usually Not Sinful, Never Sinful.)

The Bible, however, persistently emphasizes dichotomous either/or classifications and thereby fits the culture wars rhetoric. We are children of either God or the Devil (1 John 3:10) and walking in either the light or in darkness. Everyone is on either the broad road that leads to destruction or the narrow path that leads to eternal life. Numerous passages similarly contrast the godly and ungodly, the righteous and wicked, and the friends and enemies of God. Jesus emphasized that we cannot worship both God and Mammon (materialism; Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13), for greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

This means, it seems to me, that from a Christian perspective every specific culture war is a manifestation, subdivision, or battle of just **one overarching war, the spiritual conflict of Satan against God**. That should be in the background of our thinking during all our research, sociological analyses, and recommendations for action, even when it is not an upfront component for direct attention. At the same time, however, we must do this with great humility because our knowledge and understanding are always limited, all cultural wars are very complex, and many ambiguities are evident in all of them.

PROBLEMS OF APPLYING BIBLICAL VALUES

Christians who are strongly committed to their Christian faith and understand how social evil is caused and sustained by moral people doing good things (Niebuhr, 1932), recognize that they themselves sin unconsciously, even while doing good. With Isaiah (6:5) they can say, "Woe is me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips ..." (see also 1 John 1:6-10). As we shall see, even though the Bible gives us much guidance, there is no perfect solution for many culture wars.

Ethical Ambiguities of Culture Wars

Even though there is but one overarching war between God and Satan, it is difficult to know with incontrovertible certainty which side of many culture battles is God's. As a result, Christians are deployed against other Christians, to the delight of our Archenemy. Human perspectives are always as if through smudgy distortions of steamy windows while we wear grimy spectacles that obscure and distort our foe's armies, battle fields, and strategies. Satan masquerades as an angel of light, making evil seem like good and good evil (2 Corinthians 11:13-15), complicating our warfare "against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). When we who are God's children stray, we can become fools who are skilled in doing evil (as in Jeremiah 4:22), making Satan's people wiser than children of the light (Luke 16:8).

Friendship with the world is enmity to Christ (James 4:4), but Christians have no viable alternative other than living in the world, using its media of exchange, and subjecting themselves to its governing institutions (Romans 13:1). When the Israelites were captives in Babylon, God instructed them to seek the well-being of their captors' cities (Jeremiah 29:1-8). Jesus' command to love neighbors and enemies means seeking their total wellness, as well as that of our friends.

Jesus' prayer for his disciples was not that God would take them out of the world but that they would be protected from the evil one as long as they are in it (John 17:15-16). God does watch over His children, sifting temptations and trials to ward off any too strong to overcome, providing

strength to resist those that do arrive, and revealing a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). Successful spiritual warfare requires all of the armor of God, wielding its only offensive weapon, His word, while remaining alert and continuously praying in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:10-18).

To discern how to fight as Christians, it is easy to identify Scripture passages that are especially relevant to the most virulent culture wars, including Isaiah 1:15-17; Amos 8:4-7; Micah 6:6-8; Malachi 3:5; Matthew 5:3-7:27; 25:31-46; 28:18-20; Luke 16:1-13; Acts 20:35; Galatians 2:10; Colossians 3:17, etc. It is not easy, however, to apply them to specific circumstances and situations, especially under the diverse political options in the complexities of democratic society. The issues of politics are very complex, interwoven with each other, entangled with crisscrossing ethical and moral values, blended with both false and true assumptions of causes and effects, tainted by conflicting predictions of consequences on every major issue, and confounded by the Christians on opposite sides who argue that only their position is true to biblical or Christian ethics. Research in all relevant disciplines and professions -- research that is guided by high ethical standards for honest methodologies and scholarship -- can help us immensely in our efforts to discern how to apply Christian values and genuinely follow Jesus Christ as our Lord.

In a discussion about Satan, Jesus stated, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30; Luke 11:23), but in a conversation about driving out demons he paradoxically stated that "whosoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40). Today, too, the same set of actions may convey opposite messages, reflect contrasting loyalties, and have contradictory results, depending on the context. *Is it possible that all rules for Christian behavior may be bent or broken under unusual circumstances in which they conflict with higher values?*

That question helps to explain the difficulties and dilemmas that conscientious Christians face when we try to act upon biblically correct Christian values in the culture wars of modern American society. We need to recognize the error of simply assuming that any given partisan agency or political party is invariably in tune with Christian ethical and moral values. The issues are so complex and entangled with each other that supporting one set of Christian principles can directly or indirectly violate another. Sometimes people of the world are wiser than children of the light (Luke 16:8). (I am reluctant about giving precise illustrations because they so easily are misconstrued as "playing party politics.")

Biblical Evaluations of American Culture Wars

Research by the Barna Group reveals that "churchgoers are more likely to see themselves as Americans, consumers, professionals, parents, and unique individuals than zealous disciples of Jesus Christ" (Barna, 2005, p. 88). Recent studies also show no significant differences between born-again or conservative Christians and the rest of the American population on their rates of divorce, premarital sex, political bias, and other social issues.

Many evangelicals deplore those findings because they assume that evangelical Christianity ought to be morally superior to other brands of the Christian faith and that their job is to make their brand stand out as distinctly different from its culture. However, Galli (2007), senior managing editor of *Christianity Today*, thinks they fail to recognize that God usually hides himself (Isaiah 45:10). He was and still is present in the form of a servant, humbly taking on flesh and blood, confronting evil by dying instead of by unequivocal displays of power. The gospel is like a treasure hidden in a field, so weeds grow up inside the church along with the wheat. Galli claims that few of God's disguises are better than the "mystifying conglomerate of sin and love" that is the church, so we should learn to

live as members of the paradoxical Church of the Crucified.

Living in the light of our invisible faith and hope, "The call of a Christian sociology is to live your life in the shadow of the unseen and in the hope of the unseen. ... And in the sometimes lonely, prophetic work of Christian sociology we must judge the work we do by the standard of the unseen – for the unseen will last, but the seen is passing away" (Vos, 2008).

Despite the invisible quality of Christian servanthood that often makes it a "shadow culture" (Taylor, 1999), differences from non-believing neighbors are discernible. In his review of Brooks' (2006) study of compassionate conservatism, Shields (2008) emphasized that the differences in charitable giving between religious liberals and conservatives are so distinct, the conservatives being so much more generous, that the groups can be classified as "Selfish America" and "Charitable America," respectively. Those findings fly directly in the face of the popular stereotype that religious conservatives are hard-hearted and less charitable than secular liberals.

Poverty, Wealth, and Power in America. A major domain in which Christians fight culture wars against other Christians pertains to "the love of money, which is the root of all sorts of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). When Jim Wallis (2005) was a student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he and his activist colleagues "found *several thousand* verses in the Bible on the poor and God's response to injustice ... One of every sixteen verses in the New Testament is about the poor or the subject of money" (p. 212). It was the second most prominent theme in the Old Testament. (The first was idolatry, which was often related to poverty. Greed itself is idolatry according to Colossians 3:5.) Nevertheless, not one of those seminarians could recall ever hearing even one sermon on the poor in their various home churches.

Some Christians take the Lord's descriptive statement, "The poor you will always have with you" (Mark 14:7), as an implicit declaration that all efforts to overcome poverty are futile, so it's best not to waste time and resources on fruitless ministries to try to eliminate its sources. A few make it the equivalent of a prescriptive command to sustain social class distinctions by keeping many people poor. Less rare is the assumption that the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1 - 7:29) and parallel passages elsewhere constitute the governing code of conduct for a theocratic kingdom of God during an earthly millennium, not a set of attainable ideals to elevate in the current dispensation

In addition, many middle and upper class Christians spiritualize biblical teachings related to poverty and oppression, instead of accepting them literally. All people do have problems that make them psychologically, socially, physically, or otherwise "poor" in one respect or another. It also is undeniably true that everyone except a tiny cluster of the richest billionaires is poor in comparison with them. Those maneuvers, however, tend to be measures consciously or unconsciously used to protect vested interests, justify selfish greed, rationalize apathy, or excuse collective sins of societal injustice, and thus to wash the hands of collective guilt for social sin.

Commenting on the narrow passage of the House Budget Reconciliation Bill in 2005, Wallis declared that it is one more example of the absence of morality in America's political leadership. Taking food from hungry children to increase the luxuries of those who feast at a table overflowing with plenty is a moral disgrace inconsistent with American values.

There is no moral path our legislators can take to defend a reckless, mean-spirited budget reconciliation bill that diminishes our compassion, as Jesus said, 'for the least of these.' It is morally unconscionable to hide behind arguments for fiscal responsibility and government efficiency. It is dishonest to stake proud claims to deficit reduction when tax cuts

for the wealthy that increase the deficit are the next order of business. ...

The choice to cut supports that help people make it day to day in order to pay for tax cuts for those with plenty goes against everything our religious and moral principles teach us. ... It is a blatant reversal of biblical values -- and symbolizes the death of compassionate conservatism (Wallis, 2005).

Wealth in the USA is being redistributed rapidly from poor and middle class people to those who are rich. In only twenty years from 1983 to 2004 the average wealth of the top 1% of households increased by 78%, while the bottom 40% lost 59%. The number of billionaires rose from 13 in 1982 to 482 in 2006. "Since 2000, we have added 184 billionaires – and 5 million more people living below the poverty line. ... Tax cuts will save the top 1% a projected \$715 billion between 2001 and 2010 and cost us \$715 billion in mounting national debt" (Sklar, 2007).

Sklar's report reminds me of a recent television broadcast, probably on PBS, in which Warren Buffett, then the third wealthiest person in the USA and now first, mentioned that his 2006 income tax took 17% of his income, but his secretary's \$60,000 salary was taxed significantly higher (was it 30%?). In 1981 the United States ranked thirteenth in income equality among 22 leading industrial nations, but by 1997 it was dead last with "a titanic gulf" separating the rich from the poor (DeGraaf, Wann, and Naylor, 2002, p. 78).

Those inequalities contribute to human suffering – the suffering of people who are broken, hurting, discriminated against, falsely accused of causing their own misery, but in nearly all cases the victims of circumstances far beyond themselves. The underlying systemic causes deep in the underpinnings of society's economic, social, and political institutions indeed are ultimately the effects of sin, but their social roots are generally ignored by loving Christians (and most other citizens) who interpret the solution as merely giving help to individual persons in trouble. If Jesus were here, I think he would say with respect to personal aid and systemic change, "This ought ye to have done, but not to the neglect of the other." Social welfare and societal change are both essential.

Government. Another area for biblical appraisal is our entire governmental system. I have been very dismayed to see how our nation that once was "of the people, by the people, and for the people," as Abe Lincoln (I think) said, is being transformed by politicians in both major political parties into a nation that is of the rich, by the rich, and for the benefit of the rich. This trend strongly contradicts the biblical ethic that Christians should be concerned not only for our own personal and family well being, but also for the well-being of the nation as a whole, especially remembering the needs of people who are poor, whether they are widowed, orphaned, handicapped, disabled, or impoverished for other reasons.

We are members of a society that wants to export participatory democracy to all the other nations of the world as if it is a cure for all the ills of internal affairs and international relations. The realities of human sinfulness are reflected by having three branches of government, instead of having only one. The Constitution of the United States established the tri-partite system so that each branch of government would act as a check on the sinful temptations of the other two. That balance of powers was an innovative means for controlling the selfishness and greed that could have put the government in the hands of a monarch or oligarchy.

A 350-page report by Representative Conyers (2006) has presented evidence that the Bush Administration is endangering that system by attempts to fuse those branches. Conyers believes it has been gnawing away the Constitution by misconduct that violated approximately 26 laws and

regulations. His report claims that during the previous six years, most Republicans in Congress viewed themselves as defenders of the Bush Administration, instead of serving as a vital check on overreaching by the Executive Branch. Conyers believes that doing so was detrimental to our constitutional form of government. He said, "We have seen so many transgressions by this Administration that it is easy to forget last week's scandal amid this week's new outrage." Some scholars interpret those changes as a move toward fascism, others as an attempt to establish a new ruling dynasty.

Our system of electing the president, members of Congress, and many other officials is based upon the "majority rule" of the electorate. It assumes that citizens will each vote for their own best interests, so the greatest good of the greatest number will triumph. At its core are selfishness, greed, and the belief that whatever options are desired by the greatest number of voters are best for the overall welfare of the nation.

If Jesus' teachings apply to government, however, the majority of people are walking the broad road that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). How, under majority rule, is it possible for national righteousness and social justice to prevail? That will occur only if a majority of that majority are consciously and conscientiously making them their primary concern.

Sometimes current disciples of Jesus engage in "Christian subculture wars." Some insist upon following traditional rules for personal conduct, regulations for rituals to celebrate the faith, and rigid patterns for proper worship of God, while others ignore tradition, violate arbitrary rules of conduct or clothing, find new applications for biblical moral principles, develop new worship rituals, and/or oppose the formal power structures of their churches.

Political Behavior. The oversimplification of complex issues that dominates casual conversations and the mass media leads many Christians into **single-issue politics**. If a political candidate has trusted credentials or holds the "correct" position on a high priority issue, then he or she is assumed to be correct on all others. ("A born-again official can do no wrong!") During past decades, major concerns among the Christian Right have been abortion, homosexual marriage, stem-cell harvesting, human cloning, and euthanasia with little or no attention to wider issues that are clearly addressed in the Bible. Any political candidate who supported their side on the issue of the day then was supported, regardless of where he or she stood on other issues.

One reason the abortion debate has been so intense among many people is that pro-life and pro-choice partisans have both made it a surrogate for additional battles related to individual morality and public policy, church and state issues, and men's and women's rights, all of which draw attention away from the central issue of governmental responsibility for protecting human life (Zylstra, 2008).

Having been embarrassed by the bad fruit of narrowly conceived political behavior that used, manipulated, and abused the Bible and the church, many evangelicals are adopting humbler, broader, and more wholistic biblical views that recognize scriptural values like justice, the dignity of every person, stewardship of creation, peace, and basic human and civil rights for all people. Unfortunately, although

Christians ... believe in and live by a set of values entirely at odds with the prevailing orthodoxy of the West, ... we seldom put it into practice and are easily bullied and cowed into compromising or, what is worse, into trying to restate our beliefs in terms that will make an easy peace with our secular peers. We have to stop playing this foolish game – for we can never win it (Pearse, 2004, p. 171).

Being cowed into compromise may be an especially great temptation for Christians in academic positions who are not in explicitly Christian schools. As Wuthnow (1990) explained in a semi-autobiographical interpretation, Christians are a disinherited people within intellectual circles whose members think Christians are a dying remnant from a less enlightened past. Evangelicals especially are objects of ignorant suspicion and subtle prejudice who carry the double stigma of a "shameful" religious past and the lingering consequences of coming from disadvantaged ranks of the social stratification system. Part of the anger addressed toward them comes from actions of Christian believers, for

... in the eyes of the secular world Christians are often seen as angry, intolerant people. ... Christians are there [at school board meetings, outside abortion clinics, even the funeral of a homosexual murdered for his lifestyle] to angrily condemn sin and its perpetrators. ... As a result, many outside the churches see Christianity as a religion of law, similar to most other world religions (Closson, 1999/2003, p. 4).

Discrimination also flows from not recognizing the diversity within evangelicalism, which ranges so widely from radical fundamentalism to the ethical and political openness of its progressive wing.

Some of the discrepancies between beliefs and behavior, especially in regard to personal decision-making and social ethics, result from the entanglements that flow from diverse applications of biblical principles. Jesus was in trouble with the Pharisees and scribes because he put human values above the letter of the law in his dealings with people who were not members of the majority population. Reflecting the Hebrew prophets, his self-defense often took the form, "You have heard that it is said ..., but I say unto you...."

Cultural Influences. When believers apply Scripture to current culture wars, they are faced with countless overt and subtle influences upon their own value formation and their models for Christian decision making. Among the influences that lead sincere Christians to opposite conclusions on moral and ethical behavior are many background variables, including varying levels of general and religious education, knowledge of the Bible and history of Christianity, the stance their racial or ethnic group has taken, their economic and ideological vested interests, their occupational and social class identity, and the traditional positions of their church or denomination.

Interwoven with those frames of reference and the associated funneling and sifting of news and information are their assumptions about past and present factual data, their belief in well-grounded or off-the-wall predictions they hear about the immediate and ultimate outcomes of each alternative option, their recognized and latent postulates and theories pertaining to the situation at hand, their theological frames of reference (Calvinism/Arminianism, eschatological interpretations, hermeneutical principles for Bible study, etc.), and much more.

The wars of the Christian Right and its allies against American culture patterns at large have brought charges of hypocrisy against evangelicalism, especially by young adults. They are distressed especially by "the air of moral superiority many of us carry around. We stop acknowledging imperfections in our lives" instead of admitting that "At the most basic level, we all share the human condition with all of its brokenness" (Kinnaman, 2007, p. 61). The perception of hypocrisy is also a result of fighting the culture wars of attacking the behavior patterns of other people and of lobbying to control them by legislating their morality instead of loving them as people (pp. 61-62).

The Future of Culture Wars

The precise issues that were the focus of past culture wars in society at large and in the widely

diverse Christian subcultures have repeatedly shifted, and we again are in a major transition period. As the President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod recently stated,

Outreach methods of the previous century have and will continue to diminish in effectiveness as tools for engaging our present culture. Christians once could simply prepare themselves for apologetics over and against other Christian thought. In today's culture, the Christian church must prepare her people to engage a culture where a Christian predisposition is no longer the norm. ... Status quo will not do, lest we find ourselves as a church body drifting into a bay of non-relevance in the sea of the culture surrounding us (Kieschnick, 2008, pp. 1, 2).

To be sure, some underlying issues repeatedly re-emerge. For example, the alleged warfare of science with religion that was so prominent in the second half of the nineteenth century is still reflected in skirmishes between six-day creationists and intelligent design advocates with atheistic evolutionists. Parallel battles are evident in academic tensions between Christian faith and logical positivism, which still insists that only the phenomena observable through empirical observation are real, in spite of a rising tide of interest in spirituality and indications from quantum physics that there may be as many as ten or more human senses. Fears in the 1910s and 1920s that the American way of life was endangered by "the yellow peril" may soon return as China owns ever more of our billowing national debt and wins increasing power in global society.

Freedom of conscience and of religion play an increasingly central role in the public life of numerous nations. One result is that "The culture wars that America has grown used to may become a global phenomenon; expect fierce battles about science, in particular" (Anonymous, 2007, p. 15). The popular television series about "God's Warriors," especially the militant fundamentalists among Muslims, Jews, and Christians (Amanpour, 2007), also portend the likelihood of continuing militancy both within and among those world religions.

Steinfels (2008) believes that, despite potential compromises, "significant cultural flash points like those over abortion rights and gay marriage have not gone away ... [but] remain ready to flare up at the least provocation" because they are trapped in spider webs of details and suspicions that divide the opposing groups. Deeper disagreements about issues that he identifies are "the sources of moral authority, ... the nature of knowing and the limits of scientific rationality, ... how best to live out one's sexuality, ... purpose or accident in the universe," all of which reflect the central battle between atheistic secularism and biblical faith.

In a summary interpretation of changes indicated by public opinion polls, Barna (2005) discerns a single trend that is redefining faith and the Church in America. It is "an explosion of spiritual energy and activity we are calling the Revolution – an unprecedented reengineering of America's faith dimension that is likely to be the most significant transition in the religious landscape that you will ever experience" (p. viii). It includes tensions between the "Revolutionaries" who give more attention to Christian faith than to its institutional expressions in the religious establishment that will keep trying to do business as usual (p. 106-107). Its primary focus is the Revolutionaries' commitment to living like Jesus in a life of continuous spiritual warfare between God and Satan (p. 26). Their total devotion to being Christlike will trigger transformations in the world "by being replicas of Jesus in every space they inhabit" (p. 126). The resultant spiritual awakening will begin inwardly and work itself outwardly, reforming the culture by holy and obedient lives that society cannot ignore. The "primary ministry effect is not within the congregational [local church] framework but in the raw world" (p. 127). He believes that spiritual and behavioral transformations will thus contribute to transformations of society.

CONCLUSIONS

Culture wars, writ large or small, are ubiquitous. In varying degrees of intensity -- from mild disagreements and competitive alternatives to horrendous violence and warfare -- they have contaminated humanity ever since the Garden of Eden.

From a strictly biblical perspective, all culture wars are between two major protagonists -- God and Satan. The issues involved are so complex and interrelated, however, that it sometimes is difficult for even the most devout and intelligent of the twice-born children of God (by physical birth and by spiritual regeneration) to know with absolute certainty which is the side of their Lord. (Perhaps they are closely related to the theological concept of **adiaphera**. We may never perfectly succeed, but we should try to keep God's Kingdom above the earthly "kingdom" of America and all its political camps while we study and act upon the political and social issues at stake, not only during this political year, but as long as we remain loyal citizens of both our earthly and heavenly homes.)

Evangelical sociologists and researchers, along with other Christian scholars, scientists, theologians, pastors, and teachers, have a special obligation to exercise our spiritual gifts so carefully, skillfully, and diligently that we are genuinely led by the Holy Spirit while we help rank-and-file believers discern the will of Jesus Christ for citizenship obligations in a world of culture wars.. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2). Although His basic principles of love and justice are clear, even the wisest of human beings cannot fathom fully everything related to culture wars that God has done, but we must allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in all domains of human behavior.

Intellectual work helps the body of Christ successfully deflect the deceptions and fiery darts of God's Archenemy. It requires continual renewal of dedication to Jesus Christ through immersion in the Scriptures while using sound hermeneutical principles, ever deeper knowledge of the world through the best research tools of our respective disciplines, humility to hear and evaluate the evidence and arguments of those who disagree with us (not only those who agree), and the love of Christ that constrains us to serve as faithful messengers of reconciliation, instead of seeing people who blunder from merely worldly points of view (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

As Christians, our supercultural relationship to God and citizenship in His kingdom make us flexible on many issues of the continually changing culture wars that are battles of the heavenly war between God and Satan. The Holy Spirit helps us to recognize the many ways in which applications of the unchangeable truths of Scripture lead us to what can be called *Christian relativism* on countless ethical, political, and moral issues (Moberg, 1962). It opens us to evidence from all sources, frees us from being trapped by political and philosophical ideologies, makes us empathize with people imprisoned in poverty, racism, and other distress, and helps us to demonstrate the love of Christ toward culture war enemies as well as our friends.

[D]ear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save

them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupt flesh (Jude 17-23, NIV).

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