

Connections

A monthly letter calling the church to faithful new life

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What can Christians do?

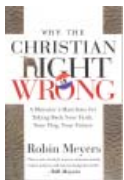
Every time we pick up a newspaper, see TV news reports, or get the latest news from our computers or smart phones, it seems, we learn about an individual or group acting out hatred and rage against someone. It's scary—sometimes even more scary than whatever event has caused the hatred and rage. It's discouraging, too. It tends to make us feel that the situation is hopeless.



Plenty of hatred and rage were already on display in 2006 when Robin Meyers's first book was released, yet these reactions seem to have gotten more widespread and more violent since then.

Bad theology causing bad public policy

Meyers is therefore still asking himself and the rest of us, "What do Christians need to be doing about this situation?" He's concerned because what some Christians are doing isn't helping. In fact, it's making some problems worse. Meyers feels we're facing a threat even more frightening than terrorism. It's the role of bad theology in producing bad public policy. That theology puts more emphasis on believing things about Jesus than on doing what he taught and did. "Our way of life is imperiled," Meyers writes, "and the church to which I have given my life is now married to the Empire, a chaplain to corporate mercenaries, and impotent with regard to social change."



I wrote about Meyers's most recent books in the 7-09 and 3-12 *Connections* (see these on my website), but while planning *Connections* Live! 2012, at which Meyers will speak, I've looked again at his earlier one, *Why the Christian Right Is Wrong: A Minister's Manifesto for Taking Back Your Faith, Your Flag, Your Future* (Jossey Bass, 2006), and its message is still important.

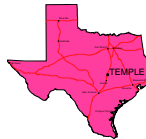
It's time to register for *Connections* Live! 2012

So many *Connections* readers tell me they feel alone in their local churches and communities. They long for safe places to ask questions and talk about what they really believe. They wish for places to find support for acting on their beliefs. *Connections* Live! 2012 will be such a place, so I hope you'll come.



A registration form, a tentative schedule, lodging information, and other information are now on my website, www.connectionsonline.org. If you don't have internet access but want the information, please ask a computer-using friend to download and print it for you, or let me know and I'll send it by U.S. mail.

Promoting justice and love



Connections Live! 2012 will happen Friday night and Saturday, September 28 and 29, in my hometown, Temple, Texas. Keynote speaker will be Dr. Robin R. Meyers, senior minister of the Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ in Oklahoma City; professor at Oklahoma City University; and author of *Why the Christian Right Is Wrong*, *Saving Jesus from the Church*, and *The Underground Church*. His talks will address the question, "How can the church be a subversive force for love?"

At *Connections* Live! 2012 you'll also hear lay Christians who are working to be that kind of force: to spread today's best information about the Bible and Christianity; to expose and oppose injustice and promote justice; and to bring progressive Christians together, even in places where they're in the minority.

A place for honesty and openness

At *Connections* Live! 2012, you will see that even if your views are in the minority in your church or local community, you're not really alone. You'll find help for promoting needed change in the church and the world. And you'll be able to safely ask your real questions and say what you really believe.



Be part of the solution

“Make a promise after reading this book,” Meyers urges us, “that you will be part of the solution.” I always hope that some church members will make or reaffirm that promise after reading *Connections*, too. But how can we be part of the solution? Often it’s by performing what Meyers calls acts of “dignified indignance.” Even the smallest one can set off a chain reaction, he reminds us.

“Do what is right, and then trust that change is possible. Get involved in local politics and advocate for peace and non-violence. Join with like-minded people to help bring about the change you want to see in the world.” Above all, never give up.



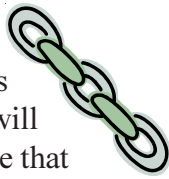
That’s not easy, of course. It’s tempting to give up, especially if you feel that churchgoers—the main people from whom you feel you should get support for efforts to follow Jesus—aren’t helping.

“Some of the best and brightest human beings alive today,” Robin Meyers observes, “have run screaming out of the sanctuaries where they went looking for spiritual nourishment and a chance to serve God.” In Meyers’s view, they’ve run because in those sanctuaries they didn’t find what they understood to be Christianity. What they found instead was support for war, injustice, and unkindness, which didn’t seem like Christianity. In fact, it seemed like the opposite of what Jesus taught. In Meyers’s opinion, “Jesus has been silenced by his own church.”



Which commandments?

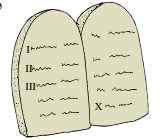
One thing that dismays Robin Meyers about how many followers of Jesus act today is the way they treat the Ten Commandments. “Why are some followers of Jesus so intent on the public display of a document from the Hebrew Scriptures?” Meyers asks. “They were obviously important to Jesus, but when asked by the rich young ruler which of the commandments he should follow to inherit eternal life, Jesus gives only six commandments, all related to religious behaviors: you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall honor your



father and mother. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 19:18b-19).” The four commandments Jesus leaves out, Meyers notices, are all specifically related to formal religious observances.



Meyers feels that the six commandments of Jesus could hang anywhere without violating the separation of church and state, because they are part of the teachings of every world religion. They all have to do with how one treats the “other.” In contrast, Meyers points out, the omitted commandments have to do with how one honors a particular religious tradition. They say, “I am the one God, don’t substitute idols for me, don’t misuse my name, and remember to worship me on the Sabbath.”



“It is rather amazing,” writes Meyers, “to consider that the six commandments of Jesus don’t mention God or faith but are consistent with all his teachings about religion as compassion, not allegiance.”

The essential religious question?



When Robin Meyers wrote *Why the Christian Right Is Wrong*, he felt that the essential religious question was “how is violence to be answered—with justice or with vengeance?” I suspect he still feels that way, because the worldwide terrorism that he saw increasing then is apparently still increasing. And it’s not apparent that the wars we’re waging to keep us safe from terrorism are likely to lessen it.

Besides, we often see religious leaders supporting vengeance. “Our religious leaders,” Meyers observes, “have made it clear that the enemy worships the Wrong God, and thus deserves to feel the wrath of those who worship the Right One.” But if the one we worship is really “the Right One,” and if Jesus was really the unique embodiment of that one, as many Christians claim, are we following what he taught, when we answer violence with violence?

The heart of the life of faith

In the opinion of Robin Meyers, the heart of the life of faith is the way in which the strong treat the weak. “This is the ultimate ethical test,” in his view. “Not



the things we are told to believe about Jesus. Not the creeds of the fourth century. Not the soothing incantations of personal salvation. But how the strong use their strength on behalf of those who are not strong.”



“We have the right to judge our presidents by how they respond to tragedy,” Meyers therefore believes. I don’t think that should be anywhere near our only standard for judging them, but it’s certainly an important one. How do the main current candidates measure up, when judged by this standard? Christians won’t all come to the same answer to that question, but I hope they all will ask it in deciding how to vote in this year’s election.

Being disoriented can be worthwhile

In the classes that Meyers teaches at Oklahoma City University, he says, he finds that most students are chips off the old parental block. They’re conservative if their parents were conservative and liberal if their parents were liberal. But some actually break that cycle and think independently, he’s glad to find. “After all,” Meyers writes, “the purpose of the university is to *disorient* students in order that they might *reorient* themselves.”



I found that an intriguing thought. I wonder how many parents of today’s students agree with it. I’m dismayed by the many who now send their children to so-called Christian schools instead of to public schools, to keep them from becoming disoriented by exposure to beliefs that differ from those



of their parents and churches, even to different interpretations of Christianity. I’m dismayed, too, by those who choose universities that indoctrinate their students with a narrow interpretation of Christianity and train them specifically to promote that interpretation in government positions when they graduate. It seems to me that those students could gain from being shown the possible value of viewpoints that differed from those of their family and church.



And what about the church? Isn’t there a sense in which it needs to disorient attendees from their usual ways of thinking and from the culture’s ways, and nudge them to reorient themselves to the way of Jesus? Would that kind of disorientation and reorientation motivate more of them to really follow the teaching of Jesus? Would it be more effective than merely indoctrinating members with one relatively narrow interpretation, as many churches do?

I’m not sure. Maybe being told what they must believe and not being exposed to other possibilities is all that some people can handle. Yet others are driven away from the church—“run screaming out of its sanctuaries,” as Robin Meyers describes it, or at least feel a strong urge to run and scream—by its failure to present a variety of views.

Collective resistance is essential

Robin Meyers urges us to speak and act in opposition when we see things happening that we know aren’t right, in our nation or in our churches. If wrongs are happening, our silence helps them to keep happening. So does unquestioning support of tradition and the status quo. Quoting historian

This issue, many back issues, a list of books I’ve written about, and more *Connections* information are available free from my website, www.connectionsonline.org. To get *Connections* monthly by e-mail, let me know at BCWendland@aol.com. Please include your name, city, and state or country. To start getting *Connections* monthly by U.S. Mail, send me your name, address, and \$5 for the coming year’s issues. For paper copies of any of the 19 years’ back issues, send me \$5 for each year or any 12 issues.



I’m a lay United Methodist and neither a church employee nor a clergyman’s wife. *Connections* is a one-person ministry that I do on my own initiative, speaking only for myself. Many readers make monetary contributions but I pay most of the cost myself. *Connections* goes to several thousand people in all U.S. states and some other countries—laity and clergy in more than a dozen denominations, and some nonchurchgoers. *Connections* is my effort to stimulate fresh thought and new insight about topics I feel Christians need to consider and churches need to address.

Howard Zinn, Meyers reminds us that dissent is sometimes the highest form of patriotism. It's sometimes the highest form of Christian faithfulness, too.

“Collective resistance,” Robin Meyers points out, “is an essential component of social change.” And isn't social change an essential aim of Christianity? The overall message of the Bible, from the words of the Hebrew prophets through the teaching of Jesus, seems to say that it is. The Bible's message consistently emphasizes the



importance of letting ourselves be changed and also working for change in society.

That usually requires being part of a community that has these aims. Robin Meyers therefore emphasizes that in order to be willing to resist and try to right the wrongs that we see, we need the support of a group. “People need to know,” he observes, “that other people feel as they do and are willing to make the effort to do something about it. We need to get together and encourage one another.” That's what churches need to help us to do.

Barbara



Connections

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What can Christians do?

July 2012

The time has come!
Connections Live! 2012
Register at www.connectionsonline.org

Hear Robin Meyers, author of *Why the Christian Right Is Wrong*, *Saving Jesus from the Church*, and *The Underground Church*

Hear lay activists who are working for needed change in the church and the world

Meet kindred spirits from all over

Get ideas and materials for use in your groups at home

Safely ask your real questions and admit what you really believe

