

A Proposal for

Ask Jesus:

*The Intersection of Christianity
and Humanity in 21st Century America*

by Tom Ersin

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tom@graniteword.com

GraniteWord.com

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This mostly nonfiction, some historical fiction manuscript is finished and edited. It comes in at approximately 61,000 words and contains no illustrations.

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Imagine if Jesus decided that He finally must speak to the modern world to refute all the wild social media myths surrounding His (Second) comings and goings. Imagine He determined that the misconceptions were so great — about His cultural beliefs, His political inclinations, which NFL teams He roots for — that He needed to do a series of publicly broadcast discussions. This book is a collection of historical fictional interviews, commentary, and news-event analysis. With a mixture of humor and gravity it explores how Christianity has intersected American politics, culture, and humanity between 2011 and 2026.

Throughout its history, politicians in the United States often have invoked religion to get elected and support their policies. But never before the second and third decades of the 21st century have so many American Caucasian Christians, especially evangelicals, been willing to suspend their spiritual principles to support a movement antithetical to their values. In the name of “religious freedom” — cover for white Christian nationalism — they’ve abandoned expertise and humanitarianism in exchange for myth and self-absorption. Approximately 81% of white evangelicals and 60-70% of all other Caucasian Christians support a monumentally dishonest leader who has defied and defiled most every Commandment and principle of human relations Jesus ever taught. All the while that leader challenged them: “Who are you gonna believe, me or your lying eyes?” They believed him.

The good news is that 19% of white evangelicals and 30-40% of all other Caucasian Christians have seen through the corruption, incompetence, and amorality.

Markets

It's not a novel idea that many Americans believe President Trump has furthered and protected the cause of Christianity while many others believe he has prostituted it. A review of book store shelves and online retail inventories reveals a plenitude (great word) of volumes in both camps. An Amazon search for books on "religion and Trump" produced over 50 entries. However, *Ask Jesus: The Intersection of Christianity and Humanity in 21st Century America* will stand out through its unique collection of historical fictional discussions with a modern-day Jesus Christ and its searing, sometimes-droll analysis of persistent evangelical Christian hypocrisy manifested by self-appointed leaders.

Ask Jesus will sit comfortably among the following titles in categories related to "politics and religion," "politics," "religion and media," and "current affairs."

Competing, Complimentary Books

- *The Cult of Trump: A Leading Cult Expert Explains How the President Uses Mind Control*, Steven A. Hassan, Ph.D., *NYT* bestseller (Free Press, 2025, 320 pages, hardcover: \$45, paperback: \$21). Examines how Trump's presidency is in many ways like a religious cult. Details the ways in which followers are influenced through an array of religious cues to become fiercely loyal and obedient.
- *For God and Country: The Christian Case for Trump*, Ralph Reed, founder and chairman of Faith and Freedom Coalition, 2000-2004 Bush-Cheney campaign senior adviser (Regnery, 2024, 383 pages, hardcover: \$19, paperback: \$14). Lays out sincerity of President Trump's Christian faith. Reveals how liberals hope to demoralize Christians,

defeat Donald Trump, and reverse his pro-life, pro-family, pro-religious freedom policies.

- *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump: 30 Evangelical Christians on Justice, Truth, and Moral Integrity*, Ronald J. Sider, Ph.D., editor (Cascade Books, 2025, 252 pages, hardcover: \$38, paperback: \$25). Questions how the support of President Trump affects the image of Christianity in the larger culture. Examines why vast numbers of white evangelicals enthusiastically support Donald Trump despite his markedly un-Christian values and policies.
- *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump*, John Fea (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2024, 254 pages, hardcover: \$24, paperback: \$17). Argues that Trump's Christian support is the logical outcome of an evangelical approach to life defined by fear, pursuit of worldly power, and nostalgic longing for a repressive American past.
- *President Trump's Pro-Christian Accomplishments*, Steve Cioccolanti, Christian influencer (Discover Media, 2023, 262 pages, hardcover: \$22, paperback: \$15). Compares the most significant events of Trump's life and presidency with Scripture and prophecy. Explains how Trump may be the most pro-Christian, pro-Church, pro-Israel President we've ever seen.
- *Doing Theology in the Age of Trump: A Critical Report on Christian Nationalism*, Jeffrey W. Robbins & Clayton Crockett, editors (Cascade Books, 2022, 174 pages, hardcover: \$36, paperback: \$22). Examines the moral character of the evangelical Right in the United States today. Illustrates the threat of white Christian nationalism.

About the Author

Tom Ersin has been a full-time health and well-being writer since 2010, holds degrees in communications and counseling, and is the editor of *GraniteWord.com*. His body of work includes a half-dozen nonfiction books on 21st century U.S. politics, one being a 2023 *International Book Awards Finalist*, and a self-help volume examining the effects of dysfunctional families. Ersin is a former Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor and mental health therapist. He has a comprehensive familiarity with both sides of the counselor-client relationship. And he has a good dog named Bob Barker.

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Ask Jesus: Faith vs. Works

September 21, 2011

[PRODUCER:] This show, we're doing things a little differently. We've hired an outside consultant to represent a cross section of devout, churchgoing, middle-class Christians. If she comes off occasionally as holier-than-thou, please don't hold that against the polite and thoughtful majority. Our consultant's name is Laurie Crusades.

[ANNOUNCER:] Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome: Jesus Christ and Laurie Crusades!

(enthusiastic applause)

[JESUS:] Thank you, thank you. How is everyone? Better than that mead in the Green Room, I hope.

[LAURIE:] Jesus, I — I — can't tell You what an honor this is. I just had to be GraniteWord's pick to represent our Christians.

[JESUS:] Well, you know what they say: Everything that happens in life is just dumb luck. *(long silence)* I'm just playing with you, Laurie. You were meant to be here, and I'm glad. What do you have for Me today?

[LAURIE:] I was really impressed after watching Your last interview. I thought a lot about what You said, about the canonical Gospels being chosen based on Church politics. It made me think about the importance of Your basic principles of human relationships — as opposed to being an expert on the rules, regulations, and history of Christianity. The history often can be debated and obscured, as You illustrated with the story of the four Gospels, no more, no less. But Your

principles are universal and timeless. I was inspired by a list I discovered, compiled by an anonymous author, that was distilled from the New and Old Testaments. Want to hear it?

[JESUS:] Yes, definitely.

[LAURIE:] The official title is God's Abbreviated Principles for Human Relations: 7 Do's and 14 Don'ts. These are: Do compassion; Do forgive; Do Golden Rule; Do honor parents; Do love neighbor; Do mercy; Do volunteer; Don't cause sinning; Don't cheat; Don't covet; Don't hurry to evil; Don't hypocrite; Don't judge; Don't look arrogantly; Don't offend; Don't plan wickedly; Don't kill; Don't sow discord; Don't steal; Don't vex strangers; Don't witness falsely.

[JESUS:] Wow! I think I'm *stealing* that list. It would be so much more convenient than those wordy stone tablets. And don't forget: Human relationships includes non-Christians, problem relatives, and New York Yankees fans. Laurie, that list highlights how our spiritual *actions* are just as important as My spiritual *history*.

[LAURIE:] I'm listening, Jesus.

[JESUS:] You're probably pretty good with Bible passages. Do you know this one? "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" Or this one? "You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing?" Or one of My favorites: "Does some stupid person want proof that faith without deeds is useless?"

[LAURIE:] The first one is James 2:20, from the KJV.

[JESUS:] They're *all* James 2:20 — alternative translations from the King James Version, New Century Version, and Contemporary English Version. That last one gets right to the point, eh?

[LAURIE:] Yeah, but everybody knows that James 2:20 doesn't mean you need good works to get to heaven.

[JESUS:] How about lack of bad works? You know: Does one have to be free of committing hurtful behavior or doing evil deeds for ill-gotten gains, for example?

[LAURIE:] Well, I also have a quote: Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” I think that pretty much spells it out: I believe in You, therefore, I go to heaven. End of story.

[JESUS:] You got Me. Is that one of your favorites?

[LAURIE:] Yes. That one has always stuck in my head — ever since I had to write it on the board in Sunday School.

[JESUS:] The only problem is that some people use that passage as a get-out-of-hell-free card. Once again, let’s look at James 2:20, and even 2:24: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” When you say “everybody knows that James 2:20 doesn’t mean you need good works to get to heaven” — Who is everybody?”

[LAURIE:] My pastors did many sermons on this over the years. They’re the experts. They went to college for this stuff. Jesus, if we can’t trust our church leaders, who *can* we trust?

[JESUS:] Maybe your pastor made a mistake. And you might want to run that universal vote of confidence by the former flock members of Pastor Michael Guglielmucci, Brother Jim Jones, Pastor Mary Manin Morrissey, Father John Geoghan, or Pastor Royden Wood. Of course we need to have confidence in our leaders, and most of them deserve it. But a little healthy skepticism is healthy. Laurie, let Me address the standard comebacks they teach at preacher school to explain away James 2:20-24.

(Jesus knows a teaching moment when He sees it)

[JESUS:] First, they want to point out that James was addressing only believers — “my brethren” — or what I call preaching to the choir. I say: *So what!?* Words are words. Either they mean

something or not. I don't care if James was talking to the Vatican, Billy Graham, Franklin Graham (Don't get Me started), or the International Brotherhood of Atheist Chamber Pot Attendants — “faith without works is dead” seems clear to Me. Then they want to argue over the meaning of “dead.” This reminds Me of another great semantic debate: “It depends on what the meaning of the word *is* is.” It didn't work for Bubba and it's not gonna work here. You know, many of these same guys just love to refer to the apocryphal *Gospel of James* where he talks about Mary's perpetual virginity, that she was ever-virgin. None of them is arguing the meaning of *those* words. Virgin means virgin — and dead means dead.

(Jesus is animated; Laurie is a little nervous)

[JESUS:] Then others like to chime in, “Well, you know, the NT Book of James might not have been divinely inspired. We have some doubts.” Or they'll say that James was supposed to be My stepbrother, but they think the Book of James was written too late for that, so it must be pseudepigraphical — look it up. Then they tell you that all this explains away the apparent contradictions about works because there *are no contradictions* in the Bible. Yeah, right. Just compare My last human hours alive in the canonical Gospels. You'd think Mark and Luke were at different Crucifixions — they certainly weren't at Mine. Literally, they weren't at Mine, and that's part of the problem.

(Jesus is on a roll)

[JESUS:] You know that game you played in grade school, where the teacher whispers a story into the first child's ear, then it goes around the room, and by the time it gets to the last child the story is totally different? Now put approximately 40 years between the first story happening and the first time it gets written down. Then put another 1,380-some years between the first Gospel handwritten copies and Gutenberg's first printed Bible. Every New Testament passed along up until that time was hand-copied by scribes, many of them amateurs. There's *gonna* be some mistakes — assuming the original authors got it right the first time, which is not guaranteed. Then there are those scribes who had a particular doctrinal axe to grind. And the translations — today we have 50, 60, who knows how many various English language Bible translations. Then consider the untold number

of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew translations, before it ever got to English. That's a lot of room for inaccuracy.

[LAURIE:] So You mean ...?

[JESUS:] Yoko really *did* cause The Beatles' split. *And*, Ephesians, Galatians, Romans, and the others likely got it wrong. James, the Book, likely got it right. And I think *I* got it right. Let Me put another fly in the ointment: In Matthew 19:24 (and elsewhere in the NT), and I'm paraphrasing now, I told that rich young man that if he wants to enter into eternal life he needs to keep the Commandments — read: lack of bad works, plus a few good ones. The guy kept bugging Me — said he'd done all that. Finally I told him: If he was looking for the perfect way to salvation, he should sell all his possessions and give everything to the poor. Now, if that doesn't sound like good works, I don't know what does. The rich guy didn't like that answer too much — that's when I came out with My famous “camel through the eye of a needle” quote. Now Laurie, you know Me: I don't expect perfection. I don't expect you to give everything you own to the poor. But in Matthew 19, I made it pretty clear: Faith, alone, was not gonna get it.

[LAURIE:] Jesus, how come my pastor never put it to me like this?

[JESUS:] I don't know. Maybe your pastor is from the “faith only” camp. Maybe he's one of those nutty Calvinists, perhaps from the penal substitutionary atonement crowd. Maybe he was sick the day they taught salvation prerequisites at preacher college. But here Me now and listen to Me later: True faith *means* good works. There, I said it. And true faith also means the absence of bad works, or at least making sincere amends for them. This means minimizing false witness for fraudulent gain and discouraging evil deeds to support greed. Again, it doesn't mean perfection but it does mean consistently good intentions. I don't care if James didn't actually write the Book of James. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. Heck, we're not sure that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and others actually wrote *their* own Books, either. Some scholars believe those are mostly Greco-Roman fan fiction. Besides, whoever wrote those Books, especially the synoptic Gospels, it looks like there was a little plagiarism going on. It also looks like eye witness accounts can vary significantly — just like on “Law & Order.” But it doesn't *matter*. Nobody knows for sure which Books, if any,

were divinely inspired — except Me. And I’m not ready to spill it.

[LAURIE:] I need a little time to soak all this up.

[JESUS:] I know, Laurie. Let Me finish My Jack McCoy (aka Sam Waterston) summation imitation and put this thing to bed. Ladies and Gentlemen, let Me sum up. Four canonical Gospels. Why? Because there are four corners of a flat earth, and four winds, and four of this, and four of that. The decisions about which books were divinely inspired? Often arbitrary. Mostly Church politics. How can we reconcile the many, often conflicting, Books of the Bible? Well, we’ll redefine the word “dead,” but keep the definition of “virgin.” If the preacher is good enough, he can convince the flock to drink the Flavor Aid; or get them to sign over their bank accounts and their children; or get them to kill “for God.” All those things were actually achieved by reinterpreting the Bible, by changing and twisting definitions and interpretations. Laurie, church is a great place to spend time. Church fosters a lot of good works. And the fellowship (God, I hate that word; let’s call it goodwill and friendship) one enjoys is a wonderful thing. But the real treasure of information lies outside of church and often outside of the Bible. You have to dig for it on your own. You can’t just trust your pastor to feed you the truth like so much pabulum.

[LAURIE:] Then what good is the Bible?

[JESUS:] The *principles*, Laurie, the *principles*! Remember? Think metaphorically. It’s not always the literal “facts” of the Bible stories that matter, it’s the lessons. And if you are sincere about your 7 Do’s and 14 Don’ts list, this will all work in your favor. Sure, our sisters and brothers might have committed bad deeds against us, but there is always hope for them if they can reconcile those offenses in terms of lessons learned, true remorse, and amends to be made.

[LAURIE:] But Jesus, some people are unwilling to reconcile anything.

[JESUS:] I will pray that they start by making amends to Me, convince Me that they recognize their wrongs, show Me contrition. Then we'll talk about salvation.

Jesus received a standing O' that day. When He left the studio, it felt like the electricity of an Oprah Revival was still hanging in the air. You half-expected Him to come back out for an encore and tell the audience to "Look under your seats, everyone. ... and YOU get salvation! ... and YOU get salvation! ..."

But Jesus is not a pop culture icon. ■

God, Guns, and Nuts

January 19, 2013

The issue of gun safety restrictions has been thrust upon President Obama and the nation in a way that can't be ignored. On Dec. 14, 2012, a 20-year-old lunatic stole several firearms (including an assault rifle) from his mother. He killed her at their home, then went to Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and slaughtered 20 first graders and six educators. Many of the children's bodies were unrecognizable, having been shot between two and 11 times each. The nation still is in mourning.

There were outcries from many corners of society. Let's start with the disgusting nuts: the Christian far right. But we mustn't confuse the source of these vile statements with conservative, moderate, and liberal Christians, the vast majority of whom are good and caring people.

The reactionary evangelical Christian voice was strident and offensive. I know these guys don't speak for all their followers, but the lack of pushback from reasonable Christians was troubling. Why aren't more moderate Christian voices willing to balance the offensive ones? I suspect Billy Graham, if he were healthy, might have been a spiritual voice of reason and empathy during a tragedy like this. Even his son Franklin Graham, an ultraconservative evangelical apple that *has* fallen far from the tree, gave a sensitive, loving, nonjudgmental response to the mass killings.

Pastor, former Arkansas governor, and former presidential primary candidate Mike Huckabee offered his church-merged-with-state perspective just hours after 26 innocent human beings were massacred leaving many bodies unidentifiable:

“We ask why there's violence in our schools, but we have systematically removed God from our schools. Should we be so surprised that schools would become a place of carnage? Because we've made it a place where we don't want to talk about eternity, life, what responsibility means, accountability — that we're not just going to have to be accountable to the police if they catch us, but one day we stand before, you know, a holy God in judgment. If we don't believe that, then we don't fear that. And so, I sometimes, when people say, Why did God let it happen? You know, God wasn't armed. He didn't go

to the school. But God will be there in the form of a lot of people with hugs and with therapy and a whole lot of ways in which I think He will be involved in the aftermath. Maybe we ought to let Him in on the front end, and we wouldn't have to call Him to show up when it's all said and done at the back end."

(Huckabee, Mike, *Fox News* host and commentator, 2008 presidential primary candidate, former Arkansas governor, ordained Southern Baptist minister; *Fox News Live*; 12/14/2012.)

Bryan Fischer, radio evangelist, said this on his show — again, only hours after the Sandy Hook shootings left 26 children and educators dead:

"You know, the question's going to come up: 'Well, where was God? I thought God cared about the little children, God protected the little children. Where was God when all this went down?' And here's the bottom line: God is not going to go where He's not wanted. ... *And I think God would say to us, 'Hey, I'll be glad to protect your children, but you've got to invite Me back into your world, first. I'm not going to go where I'm not wanted. I am a gentleman.'*"

(Fischer, Bryan, Christian radio host; *American Family Radio's Focal Point*; 12/14/2012.)

James Dobson, founder of the Christian group Focus on the Family, at least waited three days before despicably disparaging the memories of 20 innocents who hadn't yet reached an age at which they could accept God or not, take a position on abortion rights, or support or oppose gay marriage:

"I am saying that something has gone wrong in America and that we have turned our back on God. I mean millions of people have decided that God doesn't exist, or He's irrelevant to me, and we have killed 54 million babies, and the institution of marriage is right on the verge of a complete redefinition. Believe me, that is going to have consequences, too. And

a lot of these things are happening around us. And somebody is going to get mad at me for saying what I am about to say right now, but I am going to give you my honest opinion: *I think we have turned our back on the Scripture and on God Almighty, and I think He has allowed judgment to fall upon us. I think that's what's going on.*”

(Dobson, James, Ph.D.; “A Nation Shaken by the Sandy Hook Tragedy”;
Oneplace.com's Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk; 12/17/2012.)

Meanwhile, Pastor Sam Morris of Old Paths Baptist Church in Tennessee barely could wait until the Sunday after the shooting to deliver his abhorrent sermon:

“We’re going to see more of this. ... Why do you still send your kids to the government schools? ... Are you a moron? ... *What’s behind this shooting that we saw December 14 in Newtown, Connecticut, and the other ones like it? What’s going on? ... I got news for you. When you kicked God out of schools, you’re going to be judged for that.* ... The [public school] system is corrupt. ... We kicked God out of our schools, and now they want Him back. It’s too late! I got news for you, it’s too late! Because He’s judging the schools.

“They’ve sold out God [in public schools] ... but boy, we can sure teach you all the humanism we want to teach you. You know what humanism teaches your children, by the way? That they are a god. ... They’re God. *You see ol’ [Sandy Hook Elementary School shooter] Adam Lanza, there, is God. He can just go blow away anybody he wants because he’s God. He’s been taught that through the public school system.*”

(Morris, Sam, pastor; “The Newtown Shooting” [sermon]; Old Paths Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Tenn.; *SermonAudio.com*; 12/16/2012.)

OK, Pastor Sam Morris obviously is an unhinged religious zealot. But Huckabee, Fischer, and Dobson are considered respectable and mainstream, at least for the conservative religious right.

The italics in these quotations are mine, but the repulsive messages are theirs, word for hateful word. By their reasoning, any disaster that happens where Christian God is not glorified is

inevitable judgment for Godlessness. It's no wonder that U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords and 11 others were wounded and six people, including a 9-year-old girl, were shot dead at a Tucson, Arizona, supermarket parking lot meet-and-greet with the congresswoman: We've taken God out of our grocery stores — and the parking lots! By Mike Huckabee's logic, Should we be so surprised that movie theaters would become a place of carnage? Twelve died and 59 were wounded at the Aurora, Colorado, premier of *The Dark Knight Rises* because we've expelled God from our cinemas. And food courts — two shoppers were shot dead at a Portland, Oregon, mall because God and Scripture no longer are welcome at our food courts.

Finally, according to the narrow-minded cretins masquerading as Christian teachers mentioned here, seven more people would be alive today if only they had worshipped *Christian* God — at the Sikh Temple of Oak Creek, Wisconsin. My thesaurus has about run dry in supplying words to characterize people like Mike Huckabee, Bryan Fischer, James Dobson, and Sam Morris. They have the legal right to say these things. But they don't have the moral right to say these things, then pretend to be spiritual leaders. I urge all reasonable, caring Christians to refute this excrement publicly. It's not enough simply to discount it in your own mind. Love needs your voice.■

Culture of Life Party

June 3, 2013

Honeymoon was short for Sen. Scott Brown and tea party; Brown was seen holding hands with new flame soon after special election

In January 2010 there was a special election to fill recently deceased Democrat Ted Kennedy's Massachusetts Senate seat. Kennedy had held that office for 47 years. But Republican Scott Brown soared to victory, not on the wings of a dove but behind the skirt of a tea party hawk. A few months after he took office in February the honeymoon was over. The hawk issued a statement through her press secretary that she wanted to see other politicians. Additionally, Brown was spotted holding hands with a mysterious beauty at a not-so-discreet rendezvous in a not-so-dark Senate chamber. Scott Brown's new interest appeared to be an upstart sociopolitical movement called the Culture of Life Party.

Sen. Brown maintained his position that he was sent to Washington to fight for the good of Massachusetts, not necessarily for the benefit of tea partiers and Republicans, and that he never led Ms. Hawk (or the tea party) on. Nevertheless, with certain carefully placed votes during his three-year tenure, Scott Brown showed an affinity for the "Life" philosophy.

The Culture of Life Party perspective asks: Does the response to the issue at hand generally support life (human, animal, or plant)? And does it support quality of life?

Of course, tea party and Culture of Life issues are not always black and white. But there are guiding principles in both movements that usually determine their respective positions. In contrast to so-called Lifers, tea partiers primarily promote an extremist version of limited government, individual liberties, ultralow taxes, and xenophobia — I mean, nationalism. Then they apply their political clout, pro or con, to deserving or undeserving candidates in important elections. Culture of Lifers, on the other hand, measure an issue's impact on the quality of life for the bulk of American and world citizens — and other living things. Each movement's philosophy defines its basic (opposite) stands on most issues.

This new Culture of Life Party enterprise is still in its infancy. It was incubated and hatched during the recently launched *Ask Jesus* series of interviews produced by *GraniteWord.com*, our

parent publication. *GraniteWord.com* promotes a bold new brand of journalism devoted to sharpening the satiric edge of critically thoughtful communication while exploring politics, religion, and cellphone etiquette — a natural vehicle for The Prince of Peace. Anyway, Jesus was attempting to elucidate His views on social and political issues while remaining neutral (just as He must for the Oscars and Super Bowl). Next thing you know, a tea party countermovement was born.

Former Sen. Scott Brown is far from a full-fledged COLP member, though he made some rumblings. The vote that pushed many tea partiers over the edge was his support for the *Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act*. Apparently the tea party believes it's best to keep a massive, opaque, unchecked Wall Street banking and investment system in place. Then if consumers, homeowners, and small investors can't understand the fine print and decide to trust the Street en masse, that's their problem.

But Brown's voting record should have raised a red (blue?) flag for teabaggers in February 2010, just weeks after his special election, when he led a small cadre of defecting Republicans who sided with Democrats on a jobs bill. Evidently the tea partiers prefer double-digit unemployment while lamenting high joblessness rates. Just because they complain that Obama has not focused enough on jobs doesn't mean they want their people, Scott Brown et al., to work with the president on this issue (and this is *not* because the president is Black).

You see, the tea party is in a tremendous intellectual bind. It has dedicated its existence to the failure of President Barack Obama (but *not* because it's bigoted). So when the president makes moves that are supportive of its goals, its leaders and surrogates repeatedly must haul out the pretzel logic machine to explain why they're against something they normally support. This is tough work, continuously cutting off their noses to spite their faces and throwing their babies out with their bath water. Tea party members make real sacrifices in standing up for their principles. They remain willing to suffer permanent facial disfigurement and higher child mortality rates for their cause.

Tea party heads almost exploded over speculation that Sen. Brown might throw his support behind repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (or as former GOP vice presidential candidate and tea party darling Sarah Palin calls it: "Don't Ask, Don't Know"), which is the military's highly flawed policy for keeping LGBT service members in the closet against their will. He *was* involved in talks to do just that. But Brown's conscience led him down a different road. His support would have

signified another point of alignment with Culture of Lifers, who virtually always support the strengthening of minorities' rights and their quality of life.

Former Sen. Brown probably has not yet heard of the Culture of Life Party. But that soon will change. Its members are planning a major Life March on Washington, D.C., sometime this summer. Don't be surprised if they tout Sen. Brown's more enlightened votes as representative of what they stand for. Also don't be surprised if Brown keeps a safe ideological distance. Happily, he has shown that he won't automatically carry tea party water. But he's also politically savvy (expedient?) — and still a Republican.

The entire country will know, if not love, the Culture of Life Party well before the consequential November 2014 midterm elections. The upcoming summer Life March on Washington will demonstrate several important things about the Lifers: They can make protest signs with the best of them, and they can spell. Fallacious logic, contradiction, and prevarication are rare among members of this group. Their beliefs make sense from the beginning. And if they make a mistake, they admit it and correct it. Their unofficial motto is “critical thinking with a heart.” Lifers will enlighten you about the folly of seizing on specious criticism of President Obama for using the term *czar* to describe important political appointments — because several past Republican presidents have popularized its use. Culture-of-Lifers understand that sometimes there is no other word except *lie* to describe things like “death panels,” accusations of socialism (Lifers know how to use a dictionary), accusations of racism projected by Glenn Beck et al., and certain Swift Boat fallacies.

COLP members understand that every action or decision produces subsequent reactions. They accept the reality of gray area, negotiation, and compromise. They realize that one person's liberties sometimes can infringe on another's: hence the need for compromise. For example, the Second Amendment protects the right of citizens to own firearms. It does not delineate any right of criminals or domestic terrorists (or even law-abiding citizens) to have free access to assault weapons. That's the beauty of a living Constitution, an important Culture of Life Party platform plank. It leaves these questions open for reasonable people, of contemporary times and under contemporary circumstances, to work out. No living Constitution? No abolition of slavery. No women's suffrage. No Prohibition — two out of three ain't bad.

The National Rifle Association believes in the right to have no restrictions against assault weapons. Many criminal drug enterprise soldiers and some of the mentally ill, however, lack the

restraint and good judgment of NRA rank and file, and they often kill innocent people with these weapons. The NRA says this is not its fault. Culture of Life Party members agree that it is not the NRA's fault. COLP members also remind us that it was not 4-month-old Andrew Garcia's fault that he was shot and killed in his family's parked car. It wasn't Andrew's fault that his parents lived in a rough, dangerous area. It wasn't his fault that he got caught up in neighborhood warfare. Neither the NRA nor Andrew was at fault. But in this case, the NRA's right to assault weapons has infringed on Andrew's right to a pulse. This is where Second Amendment absolutist logic crashes and burns.

Culture of Lifers are not socialists but they do believe in the inherent goodwill of humankind. They support the government helping the disenfranchised to help themselves. They realize that on paper all men and women might be created equal, but every newborn baby is assigned a different position at the starting line depending upon its background — and some starting line positions are more equal than others.

Culture of Lifers understand that your opportunities and decisions in life are grandly or abominably affected by the quality — or absence — of your financial-emotional safety net. It's easy to take a risk and start that business knowing your trust fund is alive and well. But it's difficult to take a similar leap if you're risking your family's security and you never had the positive role-modeling necessary to instill the confidence you lack.

Trust Fund Baby might have been raised around educated, successful, happy people and saw that as life's norm. That is her good fortune. Rough Neighborhood Baby might have been raised around uneducated, unsuccessful, depressed people and saw *that* as life's norm. Neither child deserved what he or she got more than the other. Trust Fund Baby and her family were helped along extensively by the privileges and opportunities our great country affords the affluent and elite. What's wrong with giving Rough Neighborhood Baby a little extra help, to lift himself up at key points in his life to offset some of the disparity? These are the questions that Culture of Life Party members ask.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE:]

The Culture of Life Party isn't a real party — yet.■

Worst “Baby Christian” Ever

November 22, 2018

“This is as cold-blooded a statement as I can ever remember being issued by a president. ... It began by saying ‘America First’ with an exclamation point, and the subtext for me throughout was *values, last*. ... [Referring to Saudi Leader Prince Mohammad bin Salman likely ordering the grizzly assassination of The Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi,] Trump said, ‘Maybe he [bin Salman] knew, and maybe he didn’t.’ But the implication was Trump didn’t really care.”

(Ignatius, David, associate editor and columnist at *The Washington Post*, co-worker and friend of Jamal Khashoggi; *MSNBC’s Morning Joe*; 11/21/2018.)

On Oct. 2, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi, an expat citizen of Saudi Arabia and legal resident of the United States, entered the Saudi Arabian embassy in Istanbul, Turkey. He was there to pick up papers necessary for him to marry his Turkish fiancé who waited in the car outside. Khashoggi was a journalist at *The Washington Post*, living in America and submitting reports critical of his home country. He had moved to the U.S. in the summer of 2017 after feeling threatened by the Saudi government over his opinion pieces criticizing Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s attempts to consolidate power. The royal family also had barred him from writing after he questioned the actions of President Trump.

Shortly after entering the consulate in Istanbul, Mr. Khashoggi was confronted by a 15-man Saudi hit squad clandestinely flown in from the homeland, including an autopsy physician equipped with a bone saw. The physician and half the other team members have or had close ties to the royal family. They tortured, strangled, and dismembered Jamal Khashoggi. His fiancé waited for him outside the building for 11 hours.

Since then, President Trump has been in a quandary: Does he hold the royal family accountable? Or does he let them off the hook? His administration has put all its Middle East policy chips on strengthening the Saudi alliance. Thirty-seven-year-old Trump adviser and son-in-

law Jared Kushner famously has nurtured a personal relationship with the current (de facto) Saudi leader, 33-year-old Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

And there's the money angle: 1) we buy oil from Saudi Arabia; 2) they buy lots of military hardware (and other stuff) from the U.S.; and 3) Donald profits heavily, personally from his business dealings with the Saudis going back decades (notwithstanding his untruthful tweets to the contrary). They bailed him out when he was strapped financially. Additionally, Joe Scarborough (*MSNBC*) had an interesting take on this latter point yesterday: Two years from now after President Trump decides not to run again (or loses), he'll be able to sit across from the Saudis during business negotiations and say, "Remember when I had your back with that Khashoggi thing?"

Here's how it all went down.

Chain of Events

"Top Turkish security officials have concluded that the Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi was assassinated in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul on orders from the highest levels of the royal court, a senior official said Tuesday. The official described a quick and complex operation in which Mr. Khashoggi was killed within two hours of his arrival at the consulate by a team of Saudi agents, who dismembered his body with a bone saw they brought for the purpose. 'It is like "Pulp Fiction,"' the official said."

(Kirkpatrick, David D. & Gall, Carlotta; "Turkish Officials Say Khashoggi Was Killed on Order of Saudi Leadership"; *The New York Times*; 10/9/2018.)

"I know [Congress is] talking about different kinds of sanctions, but [the Saudis are] spending \$110 billion on military equipment. ... [Sanctioning them] doesn't help us — not when it comes to jobs and not when it comes to our companies losing out on work. ... Again, this took place in Turkey, and to the best of our knowledge, Khashoggi is not a United States citizen. Is that right?"

(Trump, Donald, R-N.Y., U.S. president; Q&A with reporters; 10/11/2018.)

“For the record, I have no financial interests in Saudi Arabia (or Russia, for that matter). Any suggestion that I have is just more FAKE NEWS (of which there is plenty)!”

(Trump, Donald, R-N.Y., U.S. president; Twitter post; 10/16/2018.)

“Nobody has told me [Saudi leader Mohammad bin Salman] is responsible. Nobody has told me he’s not responsible. We haven’t reached that point. ... I would love if he wasn’t responsible.”

(Trump, Donald, R-N.Y., U.S. president; phone interview conducted by *The Washington Post*; 10/20/2018.)

“The CIA has concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ordered the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul last month, contradicting the Saudi government’s claims that he was not involved in the killing.”

(Harris, Shane & Miller, Greg & Dawsey, Josh; “CIA Concludes Saudi Crown Prince Ordered Jamal Khashoggi’s Assassination”; *The Washington Post*; 11/16/2018.)

“Maybe he did [know] and maybe he didn’t! That being said ... The United States intends to remain a steadfast partner of Saudi Arabia.”

(Trump, Donald, R-N.Y., U.S. president; “Statement From President Donald J. Trump on Standing With Saudi Arabia”; 11/20/2018.)

Still No Bottom

It's been well documented that authoritarian leaders around the globe have co-opted Donald's "fake news" and "the press is the enemy of the people" messages. They're using this theme to justify the suppression of their own press outlets through censorship and intimidation.

Now Trump has given cover to do much more than suppress the press — he's indicated the U.S. will look the other way, past your government's authoritarian imprisonment or murder of dissidents, if you have enough money or other loot to offer him. Other dictators may have little to offer but they'll still take the rhetorical cover. The president has demonstrated that his America has its price for overlooking other countries' wrongdoing. As long as they can meet that price, Donald will not fuss over trivialities like tortured-then-murdered journalists. And if you help him become president, he'll even excuse the annexation of a neighboring nation's territory and the manipulation of a U.S. election.

I've highlighted this before: Donald has no bottom. Some thought "grab 'em by the p***y," then disparaging a Mexican American judge's heritage was as low as he could go. Then "there are very fine people on both sides" and migrant child torture each established new nadirs. Some gullible people will say he can't get any worse than allowing Jamal Khashoggi's torture and murder without a price to pay. They are wrong.

Baby Christian

"[Donald Trump has] recently come to accept a relationship with Christ [and is now] a baby Christian."

(Dobson, James, Dr., founder of Focus on the Family, prominent evangelical pastor; interview by Anthony, Michael, pastor; *GodFactor.com*; 6/24/2016.)

"I remember when I accepted Christ, it took me two years to begin to understand what God did in me. *Two years.*"

(Anthony, Michael, pastor; *GodFactor.com*; 6/24/2016.)

OK, the president has had his two years and more. Any evangelicals who ever swallowed the Donald “baby Christian” crap in 2016 must now admit that Trump is the worst baby Christian since the apostle Paul saved a struggling religion in the middle of the 1st century.

[AUTHOR’S NOTE:]

Christianity was still a subset of Judaism, bound by Jewish law. But Paul won the repeal of circumcision as a prerequisite for membership — a big hit with prospective baby Christian adult male gentiles. Additionally, he launched the greatest branding campaign in marketing history: Instead of the Messiah being humiliated by this then-ubiquitous and scornful method of execution usually reserved for thieves and scoundrels, Paul successfully promoted Jesus’ *glorification* in crucifixion — embodied by the Cross — as the world symbol of Christianity.

In 2016, 81% of white evangelicals voted for Trump. The *good* news is that 19% did not. Nineteen percent were not manipulated by the epic hypocritical campaign of white evangelical leaders to push their corrupt, amoral candidate. Imagine a domineering Christian patriarch who learns to preach, only to be ridiculed behind his back by people who clearly see the colossal hypocrisy — that the guy does not *practice* Christian values at home, and the household is miserable. Nineteen percent of the American white evangelical family was not fooled by the hypocrisy. But they — like the rest of us — remain miserable under Trump.

“We are with Saudi Arabia. We’re staying with Saudi Arabia.”

(Trump, Donald, R-N.Y., U.S. president; Q&A with reporters; White House South Lawn; 11/20/2018.)

“After weeks of hemming and hawing, the White House put out a statement Tuesday from [President] Trump making clear that for the murder of [Jamal] Khashoggi — who lived in Virginia, was a permanent U.S. resident, and had children who are U.S. citizens — the Saudi regime will face no consequences. Zero. Not even a slap on the wrist.”

(Robinson, Eugene; “Trump Is Not a Champion of Human Rights. He Is a Clueless Clown.”; *The Washington Post*; 11/22/2018.)

Because of President Trump’s actions, additional people will die around the world. If you compliment the president and send support and money his way, you can get away with murder, literally. The Saudis know this. White evangelical leaders know this. And now the world knows this.■

“Rat AND Rodent Infested Mess”

August 1, 2019

“Rep. Elijah Cummings has been a brutal bully, shouting and screaming at the great men & women of Border Patrol about conditions at the Southern Border, when actually his Baltimore district is FAR WORSE and more dangerous. His district is considered the Worst in the USA ... As proven last week during a Congressional tour, the Border is clean, efficient & well run, just very crowded. Cumming District is a disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess. If he spent more time in Baltimore, maybe he could help clean up this very dangerous & filthy place”

(Trump, Donald, R-N.Y., U.S. president; Twitter posts; 7/24/2019.)

“Rat *and* rodent infested mess.”

Once again our president has disparaged an entire class of living beings by projecting the bad behavior of a few upon the whole group.

At first glance it appears Donald doesn’t know rats *are* rodents. But careful observers can see the president is playing three-dimensional chess while his opponents are playing checkers — or some other overused faux witty metaphor pundits like to apply.

The upshot simply is that President Trump is smarter than you. He’s speaking in code to his supporters (all of whom also are smarter than you). He *wants* his detractors to think he’s an incompetent, corrupt, cretinous, amoral con man from Queens who found himself rocketed into the high-dollar New York real estate market by Daddy’s money, only to be shunned by the Manhattan intelligentsia he so desperately wanted to like him. And he wants you to think he doesn’t know that rats are rodents.

What suckers. Trump’s opponents are so far off track.

But Trump *supporters* heard the president’s real message loud and clear. When he called Rep. Elijah Cummings’ (D-Md.) Baltimore district a “rat *and* rodent infested mess,” he was disparaging all the decent hard-working squirrels, prairie dogs, chipmunks, chinchillas,

porcupines, beavers, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, and capybaras — not just the rats (— *thanks to Wikipedia*).

MAGA (Trump slogan: “Make America Great Again”) followers hate the entire furry lot of government-handout-loving, reparations-demanding, equality-seeking, reverse-racist rodents. And Mr. Trump knows exactly how to play to his supporters’ speciesist fears.

I’m Being Sarcastic — or Am I?

The good citizens of America know that labeling all rodents as rats is the height of speciesism. It’s like calling all Arabs terrorists because of 9/11. It’s like calling all African Americans criminals because of Willie Horton.

Of course, the Trumps of the world don’t literally say, “all Arabs are terrorists.” They’re (slightly) more subtle. They promote policies banning members of a certain religion, “calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what the hell is going on.” They tout Willie Horton, a rapist-murderer who is Black, as the face of Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis’ supposed softness on crime — they plaster Horton’s disheveled, frightening mug across the airwaves until George H. W. Bush supporters are scared into equating *Black man* with *fear of crime*.

And they put the words *rat* and *rodent* in the same sentence, which denigrates all rodents.

But I submit to you, my fair-minded readers: This is like saying all Caucasian Christians are domestic terrorists because Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, infamous Caucasians and Christians, bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City killing 168 people including 19 children.

It’s like saying all old white male Kentucky Republicans are Russian assets just because one of them ascended to the position of U.S. Senate majority leader only to continuously block Democratic attempts to pass bills protecting the integrity of American elections from Russian interference. I’m sure there are many fair-skinned geriatric Kentuckian GOP men who support fighting Putin’s interference even though Putin helps their candidate. They all should not be branded un-American and traitorously partisan because of one (“Moscow”) Mitch McConnell.

But Back to the Rats

“Better to have a few rats than to be one.”

(editorial board; “Better to Have a Few Rats Than to Be One”; *The Baltimore Sun*; 7/27/2019.) (referring to President Trump’s dissing of Baltimore)

The top story of this week has been Trump’s desperate attempts to distract the news cycle away from 1) former special counsel Robert Mueller’s recent House testimony, and 2) the subpoenas about to be issued by Chair Elijah Cummings’ (D-Md.) House Oversight Committee. Cummings’ committee is demanding documents and records surrounding private emails and texts exchanged by Ivanka Trump, Jared Kushner, Mick Mulvaney, et al. involving official White House business.

So Donald did what he does best: espouses vile, thinly disguised racism that he thinks is plausibly deniable. Like it or not, he’s honed his bigoted craft to a fine art, thinly disguised and (he thinks) plausibly deniable.

As many political analysts have determined, Trump has no realistic path to reelection other than racist Hail Marys repeatedly thrown the length of the field to the end zone, i.e., the Electoral College. But don’t make the mistake of thinking he’s playing three-dimensional chess, or cosmic Minecraft, or nuclear Fortnite. (Wait — he *is* playing nuclear Fortnite.) Donald is throwing racist Hail Marys because he’s comfortable with them. It’s not strategy, it’s *the man*. Nothing comes more natural to this guy than hate largely in the form of racism.

“After four days of assailing Democratic Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland and describing Baltimore as a ‘living hell,’ President Trump was asked to explain his strategy. ‘There’s no strategy. I have no strategy. There’s zero strategy,’ he told reporters Tuesday. ‘It’s very simple. [I hate uppity Blacks.’ (— *writer’s embellishment*)]”

(Ballhaus, Rebecca & Lucey, Catherine; “Trump Allies See Personal Grudge, Not Political Strategy, in Twitter Attacks on Baltimore, Cummings”; *The Wall Street Journal*; 7/31/2019.)

The word is that most of the president's closest advisers are downright begging him to stop his racist non-strategy. This is how you know it's not three-dimensional chess. Trump cannot stop his self-destructive tendencies because it just feels too darn good.

I Leave You With the Final Word From *The Baltimore Sun* Editorial

“In pointing to the 7th, the president ... was returning to an old standby of attacking an African American lawmaker from a majority Black district on the most emotional and bigoted of arguments. It was only surprising that there wasn't room for a few classic phrases like ‘you people’ or ‘welfare queens’ or ‘crime-ridden ghettos’ or a suggestion that the congressman ‘go back’ to where he came from. ...

“Finally, while we would not sink to name-calling in the Trumpian manner ... we would tell the most dishonest man to ever occupy the Oval Office, the mocker of war heroes, the gleeful grabber of women's private parts, the serial bankrupter of businesses, the useful idiot of Vladimir Putin, and the guy who insisted there are ‘good people’ among murderous neo-Nazis, that he's still not fooling most Americans into believing he's even slightly competent in his current post. Or that he possesses a scintilla of integrity. Better to have some vermin living in your neighborhood than to be one.”

(Ibid.; editorial board; 7/27/2019.)

The upshot here is that President Trump hates rats and disparages all rodents, no matter the color of their fur or the content of their character. Conversely, Democrats believe even rats are not beyond redemption. Democrats believe even rats are God's rodent children. Perhaps after Mr. Trump is turned out of office and jailed for obstruction of justice, money laundering, and hush-money payoffs to pornographic paramours, he'll find Jesus. Perhaps Donald will minister to other incompetent, corrupt, cretinous, amoral con men who found themselves rocketed into high finance by Daddy's money, only to be shunned by the intelligentsia they so desperately wanted to like them.■

Mandate of Heaven

October 10, 2019

“I believe ... the president of the United States is in danger of losing the mandate of heaven if he permits this to happen. ... The president, who allowed [Washington Post columnist Jamal] Khashoggi to be cut into pieces, without any repercussions whatsoever, is now allowing the Christians and the Kurds to be massacred by the Turks.”

(Robertson, Pat, televangelist, founder of *Christian Broadcasting Network*; CBN's *The 700 Club*; 10/7/2019.) (*decrying President Trump's announcement that he is pulling U.S. troops out of northeastern Syria*)

So President Donald Trump has a mandate from heaven — and he might lose it over his troop withdrawal from Syria, according to self-appointed Jehovian mouthpiece Pat Robertson.

U.S. Troops in Syria

The president made news Sunday when he decided to pull U.S. troops out of northeastern Syria, which borders Turkey. He has toyed with this idea for many months, finally causing last-remaining-Trump-administration-voice-of-reason Defense Secretary James Mattis to resign in protest this past December. Immediately after a call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan last Sunday afternoon, and with no consultation with his advisers, Trump pulled the trigger. He did this to please Turkish President Erdoğan (there are two Trump hotels in Istanbul), please Russian President Putin (who wants more influence in the region), distract from his impeachment saga, or all three.

One of the day's headlines came from a quote by a National Security Council official: “Trump Got ‘Rolled’ and Outmaneuvered by Erdoğan.”

The primary problem with this troop withdrawal is that our Kurdish allies who have fought alongside U.S. forces and led the fight against ISIS in the region for the past several years now are left possibly to be annihilated by their enemies, the Turks. Turkey hates the Kurds more than it

hates ISIS. GOP leaders have found their vertebrae on Syria and joined with Democrats to slam Trump for his rash, foolish foreign policy shift (and gift) (and grift).

Americans are left to wonder why our president always seems to put Russia's (and here again, Turkey's) foreign policy goals over U.S. national security.

Heavenly Mandate, per Pat Robertson

Let's review what Pat Robertson means by Donald possibly losing his "mandate of heaven" — that is, if the Holy Spirit hasn't already withdrawn it. This heavenly mandate means that everything President Trump has done so far is ordained (or excused) by God to achieve some ultimate Yahwehian purpose.

Donald had a mandate from God to stand up for all men accused of sexual assault and other misconduct. So God directed 24 women of assorted backgrounds, who did not know each other, to contrive fictitious accusations of sexual assault and other misconduct against candidate and President Trump so he could make empty threats to sue them all.

Donald had a mandate from God to put thousands of migrant children in cages without basic hygiene, medical attention, or beds because they should have stopped their desperate parents from seeking a better life in America.

Donald had a mandate from God to create lifelong emotional trauma in those thousands of migrant children by separating them from their parents for weeks or months. Just for kicks, the Heavenly Father mandated that many hundreds of those children get lost in the system's incompetence, never to be reunited with their families again.

Donald had a mandate from God to send many sick migrants, including children, back to their countries of origin even though they had deportation exemptions so they could receive life-saving medical treatment only available in the U.S. But then the Creator had to back down because even many Christians and other good people fought the Trumpian efforts to sentence these immigrants to certain, needless death.

Donald had a mandate from God to eliminate U.S. government efforts to fight climate change and protect the environment — to keep American residents, workers, and consumers safe — so Donald could participate in corrupt financial backscratching with his rich corporate friends.

You’ve heard of the “prosperity gospel”? God erased the part in the *Bible* about stewardship of His grace and creation.

Donald had a mandate from God to take health care insurance away from many of those poor and working poor who now have it because He only helps those who help themselves (*and* those who inherit \$400 million from their rich daddies but tell the world they’re “self-made”).

Donald had a “populist” mandate from God to fool working people into thinking he cared about and supported them. The Almighty threw that one in because He’s a fun-loving practical joker.

Pat Robertson’s Quandary

Let’s recap. Pat Robertson indicates that God is OK with — and even mandated — the following: serial sexual assault; massive caging of children like animals; ripping thousands of children from their parents for weeks and months, many permanently; depriving life-saving treatment for certain immigrants on a whim; allowing irreversible damage to Earth; reversing life-saving regulations that protect American workers and consumers; and taking health care away from millions of poor and working-poor families.

But the one thing God *won’t* stand for — the one thing that could cause The Lord to withdraw His heavenly mandate from Donald — is the deaths of Christian (and maybe some other) Kurds who have helped U.S. forces fight off ISIS for the past few years. Because ISIS threatens Christians. And others, I assume, are good people.

Don’t get me wrong: Fighting ISIS is a good thing. Protecting Christian (and other) Kurds who have helped protect us is a good thing.

I’m just glad to see that Pat Robertson (and God) draw the Trumpian heavenly mandate line somewhere.■

To the (Locked-Down) Class of 2020

May 21, 2020

No Presidential Role Model (or Soup) for You

COVID-19 Deaths

2/06/20 - U.S.: 1 | World: 620

3/05/20 - U.S.: 12 | World: 3,293

4/02/20 - U.S.: 5,137 | World: 48,284

5/07/20 - U.S.: 73,431 | World: 264,189

5/21/20 - U.S.: 93,439 | World: 328,565

(COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University; 5/21/2020.)

Looking Back

Last Saturday night I watched the national virtual graduation ceremony for 2020 high school seniors. Their literal ceremony, prom, and standard end-of-year senior shenanigans were preempted by a once-in-a-century deadly pandemic. Didn't recognize half the performing artists. To be expected. Did recognize the keynote speaker, Barack Obama. So nice to see his comforting face and hear his reassuring tone.

As those of us born before 2002 approach the anniversary of our own high school graduation, I can't help but review the time gone by. Contrary to the universal admonition not to beat oneself up over past mistakes and poor decisions, I still find myself nursing self-inflicted bruises and aching bones over taking the wrong forks in the roads (*— thanks to Yogi Berra, New York Yankees*). So many things I would've done differently, except for meeting and marrying my tremendous partner of 38 years who has kept me and the family as steady as possible.

But I'm where I am now. Don't you wish you could grab those 2020 seniors by the throat and point them in the right direction? No, I know: Most will find their own right direction. And as several parents on the show averred, they've learned more from their graduating offspring than vice versa.

So this is my goal going forward: to resist set-in-my-ways age inertia, to keep learning from others, especially young adults, and to keep strengthening my empathy muscle. I might not have recognized the young artists H.E.R. and Bad Bunny, but I'm up on Malala.

Role Models

Many of the graduating 2020 seniors will be role models in the years to come. In the meantime, *they* need good role models *now*. Sadly, the current president is not one.

In 1993 NBA star Charles Barkley, then a Phoenix Sun, famously proclaimed:

"I'm not paid to be a role model. I'm paid to wreak havoc on the basketball court."

Barkley had been embroiled in several un-role-model-like incidents including attempting to spit on a racial-slur-slinging heckler sitting courtside during a game. Charles' celebrity spittle found its way onto an innocent young girl's blouse. The incident made news at the time. To his credit Mr. Barkley later tracked down the girl and her family, apologized, and befriended them with complementary Suns tickets.

Shortly after Charles Barkley's not-a-role-model declaration, a fellow NBA star, Utah Jazz power forward Karl Malone (aka "The Mailman" because he delivered on the court), responded in a June 14, 1993, *Sports Illustrated* column titled "One Role Model to Another":

"Charles ... I don't think it's your decision to make. We don't choose to be role models, we are chosen. Our only choice is whether to be a good role model or a bad one."

Ultimately Barkley role-modeled behavior to which we all wish our kids would aspire: He made a mistake, owned it, apologized for it, and made amends. In the years since, Charles Barkley has

been a mixed role-modeling bag, a sometimes-rhetorical brawler but known as a man of humor and honesty.

It has been noted famously, even by some supporters, that President Trump is *not* a role model mothers and fathers want their kids to look up to. In fact many parents of juveniles rush to change the television channel if the president is speaking and their children come into the room.

My contention is that you can't think a president's policies are good if you also don't think he or she is a good role model for kids. The two are inextricably intertwined, joined at the hip, and several other redundant phrases meaning *tightly connected*. I'm with Karl Malone. To paraphrase: "Presidents don't choose to be role models, they are chosen. Their only choice is whether to be a good role model or a bad one."

In pandemic news this week, a statistic (and life) slapped me upside the head. The United States makes up 4.3% of the world's population, but it accounts for 28.4% of the world's COVID-19 death toll.

What else do you need to know to question President Trump's pandemic response?■

White Evangelicals Unmoved

July 30, 2020

COVID-19 Deaths

2/06/20 - U.S.: 1 | World: 620

3/05/20 - U.S.: 12 | World: 3,293

4/02/20 - U.S.: 5,137 | World: 48,284

5/07/20 - U.S.: 73,431 | World: 264,189

6/04/20 - U.S.: 107,175 | World: 386,464

7/02/20 - U.S.: 128,062 | World: 516,726

7/30/20 - U.S.: 150,716 | World: 667,693

- Conservatively estimated Trump malfeasance deaths: 75,358

(Glanz, James & Robertson, Campbell; “Lockdown Delays Cost at Least 36,000 Lives, Data Show”; *The New York Times*; 5/20/2020.)

(COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University; 7/30/2020.)

Poll of White Evangelicals

According to the *Christian Broadcasting Network*’s reporting of a (CBN-respected) Pew Research Center poll this month, President Trump’s approval rating among Caucasian evangelicals has dropped to 72%. But 82% say they’re at least leaning toward reelecting the president in November. (Lipka, Michael & Smith, Gregory A.; “White Evangelical Approval of Trump Slips, but Eight-in-Ten Say They Would Vote for Him”; *PewResearch.org*; 7/1/2020.)

This is virtually the same number (81%) that supported Donald in 2016.

Among white evangelicals, 10% are admitting to disapproval of Mr. Trump but likely still voting for him. Most of the 72% who “approve” aren’t admitting any disapproval and are supporting him blindly.

For what reason?

I recently was disheartened by a social media comment from a friend, a white evangelical Christian who I thought, hoped, was one of the 18-19% wanting Trump out of office. She put an arrow through my heart with this (her first political) post:

“Trump may not always say the right things but he is getting more done than all of the other politicians combined, and he doesn’t even take a paycheck. He has my vote!”

This is like saying,

“Jim Jones may not always say the right things but he’s sent more souls to heaven at one time than all of the other pastors combined, and he provides the Kool-Aid free. He has my vote!”

I know. Jim Jones used Flavor Aid not Kool-Aid.

Of course, the no-paycheck line easily is explained away: Trump uses this as a misleading bragging point because he takes in 1,000 times his presidential salary through illegal foreign and domestic emoluments clauses violations and other corrupt opportunities enabled by the office.

This respected friend’s blindness to reality weighed on me for days. I responded respectfully with my list of 20-plus Trump depravities foisted upon America. But nothing got through. She ended our thread on the friendly falsely equivalent, “Let’s agree to disagree.”

Why Are so Many Caucasian Christians Unmoved?

White evangelicals, I beg you to consider these facts with an open mind.

Unnecessary Pandemic Deaths

These numbers are conservatively extrapolated from Columbia University research and Johns Hopkins University's COVID-19 Dashboard: Donald has allowed a conservatively estimated 3,762 unnecessary pandemic deaths this week, alone, and over 75,000 to date.

How? Why?

By consistently, still, playing down the coronavirus and spreading dangerous disinformation to restart the economy early solely for reelection to avoid almost certain indictment. He's refused to nationalize health guidelines, testing, treatment supply production, and the supply chain. He's demanding all school districts reopen without limitations at the height of a pandemic, without any guidance, threatening their funding if they don't. He's risking the lives of millions of children across the country for political gain.

Child Separation

Donald has separated thousands of migrant minors including babies, toddlers, and other young children from their families for months, locking them up in overcrowded prison conditions, causing lifelong-lasting trauma. Hundreds of these children have been separated permanently through government incompetence, the failure to track their families' locations. And this barbaric policy continues.

The adults who brought them to the U.S. might have broken laws. But the children are innocent human beings put through the horror of losing their parents in a strange land, not knowing if they'll ever see them again, so the president can "set an example."

This one item on the list, by itself, should have convinced all Christians that President Trump is unfit to lead as a president and a human being.

Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico

Donald intentionally slowed down and withheld aid to the victims of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico because of criticism from one city's desperately-pleading-for-help mayor, distaste for Puerto Ricans, and the mistaken belief that those citizens are something less than American citizens.

There's no estimating how many lives were lost due to lack of water, electricity, food, and medicine because of the president's bias against this U.S. territory.

Cutting Regulations

Donald loves to boast that he's built the economy by eliminating regulations. The fact is the economy already was doing great even under President Obama's protections, before President Trump took over. Most of the regulations Trump has eliminated were there to protect our children and other citizens from 1) illness, accident, and death; 2) destruction of the environment; 3) weakening of the family; 4) predatory lending; and 5) fraudulent, malfeasant banking practices that enabled the 2008 financial crash.

Again, we'll never know how many child and adult lives were lost due to environmental poisons, unchecked climate change, preventable accidents, workplace dangers, hunger, product defects, unfair bankruptcies, or lack of common sense gun safety guidelines.

Many of Your Own Have Seen the Light

White evangelical Christians, 18-19% of your brethren see through the smoke and mirrors and know that Mr. Trump is unfit intellectually and morally to be president. That's not a majority but it's not nothing. About 1 in 5 of your fellow believers knows the truth. Seek him or her out.

For the record, 39% of all other white Protestants and 43% of white Catholics also have seen the anti-Trumpian light. (Ibid.; Lipka & Smith; 7/1/2020.)

As I've said earlier, there's a historically unprecedented number of luminaries from the president's own party who are supporting the opposition candidate in November to stop the frightening horrendous damage President Trump is doing to our country. The Lincoln Project, assembled long before the pandemic, comprises innumerable distinguished Republican and conservative thinkers who are raising money to abort the Trumpian destruction of America.

Virtually all these Republicans (and the 18-19%) are pro-life, anti-Roe-v.-Wade Christians who want more conservative federal and Supreme Court justices. But they also all know that none of these things matter if we allow Donald Trump to continue tearing down the institutions and moral foundation of our country's government.■

Ask Jesus: Christological Christians

April 15, 2026

[PRODUCER:] It was 2011 when Jesus first sat down with us to answer our readers' questions, set the record straight, and chew over His thoughts on humankind. We've had several more interviews with the Beloved Son since then, all conducted by our own Laurie Crusades. At the time of their last meeting, in December 2019, a new U.S. president (Joe Biden) was a month away from taking office. Now, six-and-a-half years later, Laurie and Jesus have a lot to catch up on.

[ANNOUNCER:] Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome: Jesus Christ and Laurie Crusades!

(enthusiastic applause)

[LAURIE:] So Jesus, it was over six years ago that we last chatted. Since then the world has been upended, though not for the first time and not for the last. But here we are in 2026. You have seen an ungodly amount of history go by. I'd like to start with a wide-open question: How can I reconcile what's going on in America and in my personal life with the Word and history of the Bible? How can it all be explained?

[JESUS:] You can't. It can't. Bye, now. Gotta go.

(pin-drop moment; finally, Jesus smiles)

[JESUS:] A little epistemological humor. It is true, however, that knowledge can be highly fragmented, as in our errant Bible. But first let Me say it's so good to talk to you again, Laurie.

[LAURIE:] So what's it all about, Jesus? Is it just for the moment we live? What's it all about, when You sort it out, Jesus?

[JESUS:] As I've explained to you before, Laurie, it's the principles. The principles. You, yourself, discovered that great succinct list of God's Abbreviated Principles for Human Relations: 7 Do's and 14 Don'ts. I have used it a lot, especially when I've needed to get these points across in a hurry.

[LAURIE:] But if the Bible was probably *not* inspired by God, if it's simply, as you've indicated, a collection of inaccurate oral traditions, copied and miscopied over the centuries, how do we know those Do's and Don'ts even mean anything?!?

(Laurie is visibly upset)

[JESUS:] Laurie, My friend, the exact details of who did what where in biblical history certainly are questionable. I was there. I can attest to discrepancies and inaccuracies. But what I'll also attest to is that the *principles* are divinely inspired. They are consistent throughout the stories and Books of the Bible. Sure, some of that Old Testament jazz is way over the top: Blasphemy, adultery, Sabbath work, or mother-cursing should not warrant death, and so on. I think those writers were simply making a point through exaggeration. Let's hope so.

[LAURIE:] So the 7 Do's and 14 Don'ts for human relationships *were* inspired by God?

[JESUS:] Absolutely. However, like your American Constitution, the principles are not always absolute. "Don't steal"? What if your household has no money, no food and the kids are hungry, ICE just shot your uncle and took your father away, and that loaf of bread on the shelf at 7-Eleven could ease your family's suffering for one night? Slavery is OK until the Constitution, and our understanding of the Bible, can catch up with basic humanitarian principles and eliminate the acceptance of that incalculable evil. "Don't witness falsely"? What if your loving sister asks you how her dowdy dress looks after spending weeks cutting and sowing fabric because your family can't afford new clothes? Women and non-Caucasian men can't vote — until the Constitution is changed to correct that abomination. "Don't kill"? What if a man's wife needs an unexpected and unwanted abortion to save *her* life? Morality sometimes is relative, Laurie. And interpretations of

the Bible and the Constitution need to breathe with the times. The concept of relative morality is a precious art form that emerges from humanitarianism.

[LAURIE:] Jesus, I'm not sure how much time You have allotted for us today, but I'd like to take the conversation in a different direction.

[JESUS:] Laurie, I'm here for you. My schedule is wide open, and talking to you publicly like this has been helpful for many others who follow Me.

[LAURIE:] It's about peace of mind. I think that as some of us grow older, negative thoughts seem to circle our brains longer than they used to. We try to be good people with healthy attitudes, but many of us have legitimate hurt feelings over painful experiences in life. Can You reflect on this?

[JESUS:] Over the past decade and more, there's no question that civility, kindness, and consideration have taken a hit in your country. Trumpian-era leadership has set an inhumane tone. People have been given permission to ignore their better angels, just as those leaders do. Latent racists and misogynists are emboldened to come out of the closet and celebrate. Individuals are encouraged to get as much as they can for themselves, in families and legislatures — and white houses. Many young people have been taught that selfishness is OK and gratitude is unnecessary. It's become a badge of honor to walk over others to succeed. Narcissism, greed, dishonesty, and cruelty have become acceptable, normalized.

[LAURIE:] I might add hypocrisy to Your list. I hear of many families with members who wear their Christianity — the Christology part, not the principles — on their sleeves while causing others pain and turmoil. It comes easy for some of them to violate many of "God's Don'ts": Don't cause sinning; Don't cheat; Don't hurry to evil; Don't hypocrite; Don't plan wickedly; Don't sow discord; Don't steal; Don't witness falsely. The goal often is to split family and pressure members to take sides, simply to cover up familial graft and greed. They commonly have a knack for taking advantage of unwitting accomplices' unwillingness to address their *own* pain and dysfunction.

Some family members manipulate other members, with no concern for those members' happiness and emotional health, just to cover up larceny and duplicity.

[JESUS:] I know. And I've been feeling somewhat mortal in My ability to help.

[LAURIE:] Jesus, You *have* tried to help. Sometimes You present valuable life lessons but they're unseen or ignored. Forests are obscured by their trees. I've heard of situations in my group where the exact same hateful behavior carried out by an adult child was boomeranged back to them by *their* equally disturbed, dysfunctional young adult child. But they can't see the connection! They refuse to see the lesson. To paraphrase author Robert Pirsig: "God sends the truth to knock on your door, and you say, 'Go away, I'm looking for the truth,' and so it goes away."

[JESUS:] Denial?

[LAURIE:] Yes, the prime characteristic of severely dysfunctional people: "I'm not the one with a problem." Some family members are what I call Christological Christians, that is, they give attention to the story and history of Your birth and divine essence — Christology — but neglect Your principles. If they could ever open their minds to self-examination they would see that mental health therapy and self-help groups are not in competition with God, they are *gifts* from God.

[JESUS:] Yes, they are.

[LAURIE:] And by allowing ego and denial to get in the way of improving your family's well-being, which could save yourself and your children from the depths of distress and despair, you're actually fighting God.

[JESUS:] You've reminded Me of a pithy aphorism that has stuck with Me since the kiss of Judas: "If you don't confront your demons, they'll end up raising your kids." If only Simon Iscariot had heeded those words. And so much of dealing with personal demons comes through mental health therapy, support groups, and books that encourage self-knowledge to assist parents (who are also adult children) in breaking through their often-monumental denial.

[LAURIE:] Jesus, I never heard the one about the demons, but that is so true. People deny their dysfunction and pass it on to their children in various forms. And through their denial, they are lying to everyone around them.

Critical Thinking

[JESUS:] I think we can say that the ultimate problem is the lie, the witnessing falsely to others and oneself out of ego and selfishness. Let Me share this passage from an anonymous friend:

“The bane of humankind is the malignant lie, employed by the malevolent liar for depraved self-interest, in politics and families. The ability to initiate and sustain the lie takes no special talent or intellect, only the capacity to abandon personal integrity and character.”

[LAURIE:] I definitely agree with that.

[JESUS:] Laurie, your extended family dysfunctional dynamics seem to be a microcosm representing what your country is going through. When we talk about gifts from God, such as emotional health therapy or self-help groups, we must also include the gift of critical thinking.

[LAURIE:] What do You mean?

[JESUS:] Critical thinking is one of My ultimate gifts to humankind. Like some of My other gifts, not everyone appreciates this one. In a nutshell (or a mustard seed if you like), critical thinking is the ability — and *desire* — to differentiate truth and lie, fact and falsity. The key word, here, is *desire*. Anyone can learn the mechanics of *how* to do this. But it takes integrity, embodied by the 7 Do’s and 14 Don’ts, to want to *know* the truth. Some of your loved ones do not want to know the truth about your manipulative family adversaries, just as Donald Trump’s supporters eschew the truth about him.

[LAURIE:] I think I see where You’re going with this.

[JESUS:] There are various reasons why various people don't want to know certain truths, for themselves or those around them. Not every reason is shared by every eschewer of truth. But if I had to zero in on the top end of the list, I might start with *stubbornness*. My philosopher friends frame it as "belief versus knowledge." Many people hang onto their beliefs, often for emotional reasons, long after knowledge has refuted those beliefs. They often *confuse* belief and knowledge. Stephen Colbert, the Plato of his time, coined the term "truthiness," which is believing something to be true because you *want* it to be true, or because it *feels* true, with little regard for fact or reason.

[LAURIE:] Truthiness.

[JESUS:] Again, it's stubbornness. Many people are incapable of admitting they were wrong about something after having taken a stance. Their ego prevents them from doing it. No amount of accuracy, authenticity, facticity, verity, trueness, credibility, correctness, actuality, veracity, trustiness, or any other synonym for *truth* can sway their ego from believing what it wants to believe. (Thank God for My Merriam-Webster thesaurus.) To want the truth, or to get as close as possible, no matter how it might make you *feel*, a person has to be willing to examine their *biases* surrounding the question at hand. You may not like the truth. You may not like the person who represents or delivers the truth. Sometimes the truth hurts. The truth may embarrass you. No matter. You must still *want* the truth.

[LAURIE:] I see this clearly in my family. It's all about bias. It's about manipulation of others' bias through their emotional vulnerability. It's about causing others to sin, hurrying to evil, planning wickedly, maybe some coveting, lots of hypocriting, sowing discord, and witnessing falsely — often under the guise of false piety. And You're right, Jesus: So much of this about bias can be applied to people who continue to support the most anti-Christian-values human being ever to occupy the White House. The way I see it, Mr. Trump has three types of supporters: those who truly like his hateful, hostile policies, those who are still fooled by him, and those who cannot *admit* they were fooled by him.

[JESUS:] Yes. How else to explain continuing support for a president who tried to overturn his reelection loss through a violent, deadly insurrection and attempted coup; who caused hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths through his political manipulation of the government's pandemic response; who separated 5,400 migrant minors — including babies, toddlers, and other young children — from their parents for months, locking them up in squalor, causing lifelong-lasting psychic damage to 6-year-olds wailing for their mothers and fathers, with hundreds of children never reunited because of government ineptitude — and who continues the vicious, inhumane treatment of migrants today; who blackmailed a desperate U.S. ally for false dirt on a political opponent; who is a 34-count convicted felon, an adjudicated sexual assaulter, with numerous civil judgments of fraud against him; who would have faced a litany of other felonies, staved off only because he defrauded the American people and won reelection; and who has used the office of the presidency to illegally enrich himself and his family with many billions of dollars through foreign and domestic emoluments clauses violations and other corrupt opportunities while feigning altruism by boasting of not taking his \$400,000 annual salary.

[LAURIE:] That's quite a list.

[JESUS:] I've got a great memory. And I can document every point! This is not Republican versus Democrat, not conservative versus liberal. This is Culture-of-Life-Party principles versus inhumanity. Remember? What supports a culture of life and what doesn't? And this is critical thinking. I have no bias here. I call balls and strikes, to use an American metaphor. He's been a Democrat, Independent, and now a Republican, depending upon what was expedient at the time. I have no political leanings. But the man, Donald Trump, is corrupt, incompetent, and amoral. You can look at the front page of any national U.S. newspaper, any day of the week, and see a half-dozen reminders of existing and new damage this president is doing to his country. His sole goals are to consolidate power and grift as much as possible while destroying the foundation of your precious republic in the process. And he's learned that he can break virtually any law, violate any constitutional clause, and he's rarely stopped. Any one of a hundred crimes or other outrages committed by him would've meant removal from office, and likely indictment and conviction, for any other president. But Mr. Trump can have two impeachments, 34 felonies, additional future likely convictions, multiple fraud judgments against him, evidence of large-scale corruption

against him, a multitude of credible sexual assault accusations, and your country's electorate still puts him in power — again. If anyone continues to believe I am omnipotent, here is the Great Refutation: I was unable to stop MAGA Trumpism — twice.

Who Speaks for Jesus?

[LAURIE:] But many of his followers believe Mr. Trump has Your support. Pat Robertson said Donald had a “mandate from heaven.” Pastor and televangelist Paula White, his spiritual adviser, told him just last week at the 2026 White House Easter lunch with supportive religious leaders:

“[President Trump,] you were betrayed and arrested and falsely accused. It’s a familiar pattern that our Lord and Savior showed us. ... And sir, because of His Resurrection, you rose up. Because He was victorious, you are victorious. And I believe that the Lord said to tell you this: Because of His victory, you will be victorious in all you put your hands to.”

[JESUS:] She said this!?!

[LAURIE:] Yes she did, Jesus. She was talking about the president's policy victories, but specifically about Your support for his unprovoked attack on Iran. And this isn't just Pastor Paula. She was in a room full of mostly white evangelical and other Christian leaders, including a U.S. Catholic Bishop, who are all cheerleaders for Donald. And You know that President Trump, himself, has invoked Your name. He said it was God who saved him from assassination so he could “make America great again.” And he's said that God wanted the U.S. to attack Iran and annihilate that country if its government won't surrender, i.e., “make a deal.” On Easter, he profanely threatened Iran. Two days after Easter he threatened again, for the world to see, that if Iran doesn't make a deal by 8 p.m., “A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again. I don't want that to happen, but it probably will.” Now brace Yourself, Jesus: A week later, President Trump posted a worldwide image depicting himself as *You* — healing the sick in front of an American flag, the Statue of Liberty, and a group of all-Caucasian followers.

[JESUS:] This makes Me *biblically* angry! I stood by quietly in the past when these Caucasian Christian evangelicals tried to lump Me in with their politics. But nothing has come close to the hypocrisy of the Donald Trump supporters since he first came on the scene. Remember, Laurie, it's not about political parties. It's about the man — the man with literally zero integrity and honor who is vested with the power of supreme confidence artistry. These mostly white evangelicals purport to be My greatest followers. Yet they support a leader and a movement that is the ultimate *antithesis* of what I stand for. Then they lie and say I'm with them! Let Me state the obvious: I don't support corrupt plutocracy. I don't support inciting armed, violent insurrection, then pardoning over 1,000 perpetrators; I don't support Mr. Trump's war of unprovoked aggression. I don't support profane threats of apocalyptic war crimes on Easter. I don't support White House war-promotion videos — complete with "Top Gun" movie snippets, violent video game clips, and bloody Mixed Martial Arts highlights edited in — that glorify massive civilian death and destruction in your president's name. I don't support white Christian nationalism. I don't support American military officers being ordered to tell the rank and file that the attack on Iran is a holy war with Christian God (Me) on their side. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth does not speak for Me. Pastor Paula White does not speak for Me. Franklin Graham, Pat Robertson (rest his soul), Mike Huckabee, Johnnie Moore, Tony Perkins, Jerry Falwell Jr., and other evangelical leaders do not speak for Me! They simply do not speak the truth.

[LAURIE:] Jesus, I've never seen You so passionate.

[JESUS:] Yes, I'm passionate about corruption, incompetence, and amorality hurting so many people on a galactic scale. And I'm praying for the stubborn voters still planning to vote their egos. We — God and America — must do everything we can to counteract this vile cultural force. Every caring person must step up to the extent to which he or she is able. We must stop allowing a depraved grifter totally lacking in empathy to make decisions affecting our planet's greatest superpower, and therefore Earth, itself.

(Jesus pauses, takes a deep breath, and regroups)

[JESUS:] Well, I guess we strayed from the topic of critical thinking — well, yes and no. There's just one more factor I want to mention and I promise this one is not so emotional. *Assumptions*. These are not necessarily controlled by emotion as are most biases. Assumptions are a normal part of figuring things out and moving through your day. The problem comes when a person has trouble reevaluating in the face of updated knowledge to the contrary. A common assumption is presuming honesty from a favored family member, politician, or pundit. If we're not open to the possibility that this person might be erroneous or misleading us about this or that, especially in light of clear conflicting information, this smothers our ability to think critically, that is, to get to the truth even if it means we made a mistake. We must be willing to admit a mistake, whether the resulting truth is harmful or helpful to us.

[LAURIE:] Can You give me a real-life example?

[JESUS:] As a matter of fact, the other day I happened to overhear your adult nephew's response to a television discussion about political leaders' disagreements regarding the U.S.-Iran war. He scoffed, "I hate 'em all, politicians and pundits. They all lie and they're all corrupt. They're all worthless pieces of excrement."

[LAURIE:] My nephew said "excrement"?

[JESUS:] No, he used a colorful synonym. Anyway, in most cases, these kinds of assumptions are primarily lazy thinking, which really upsets Me. It's easier than trying to think through the nuanced or even larger facets of a serious issue that affects your country. It's slothful apathy masquerading as strong opinion. In other cases, people might assume that both sides are equally as bad after giving the issue limited thought or doing some skewed "research." Either way, this is exactly what the dishonest rhetors want the middle electorate to do. Dishonest unprincipled leaders lie to win over their followers. Then they muddy the waters and create chaos to get "independents" — like your nephew — to simply give up on the system. Unprincipled leaders *love* to see voters giving up on the system.

[LAURIE:] Biases and assumptions — and lazy thinking: I totally get it. And as You said: To think critically we need to *want* the truth. We need to maintain a commitment to truth and honesty. And when we consider the value of information coming from a family member, politician, or pundit, we need to weigh *their* commitment to truth and honesty.

[JESUS:] You beat Me to it. Yes, commitment to the truth is the foundation of critical thinking.

Pray and Love

[JESUS:] Laurie, I'm so sorry about all the family turmoil. I wish I could fix it. Unfortunately, most of this stuff is out of My hands.

[LAURIE:] Then what's the use in praying?

[JESUS:] Have you ever experienced a solution to a problem, either immediately or over time after praying?

[LAURIE:] Yes. Many times.

[JESUS:] Well that was much more you than it was Me. I mean, if it was all up to Me, there would be no family dysfunction, no wars, no poverty, no crime, and no MAGA. Unfortunately it doesn't work that way. But praying is not futile. Praying often gives you the opportunity to organize your thoughts and allow new ideas to enter your consciousness. It can encourage My essence to reflect back to you, to guide you. You could say those new thoughts come from Me, the Universe, or your subconscious. Wherever they come from, praying is a vehicle that can allow them to come. And praying also sometimes supports a mysterious exchange of positive spiritual energy, though even I am not totally clear on how this works.

[LAURIE:] So there's no magic fix.

[JESUS:] Keep doing what you're doing. Keep your intentions pure and continue learning throughout your life. Try to starve the drama whenever possible by not feeding into it. The sad truth — and I know you've heard this a thousand times — is that we can't control what others do. And, surprise, neither can I. As My friend Rabbi Harold Kushner said, bad things do happen to good people. I think he probably got it right: God does the best He can, and He's with you in your anguish, but He is not completely empowered to neutralize suffering. He's not omnipotent. Again, how else to explain war, mass shootings, genocide, and two Trump administrations.

[LAURIE:] I try really hard to be a good person.

[JESUS:] I know you do and I want you to keep at it. Here is a final thought that might be the most important of all. I said a moment ago that the ultimate problem is the lie, the witnessing falsely, in families and politics. Well, the flip side of that is the ultimate answer: love. I'm kind of known for this. Just look at your biblical "7 Do's": Do compassion, Do forgive, Do Golden Rule, Do honor parents, Do love neighbor, Do mercy, Do volunteer. They cover the proactive heart of God's Principles for Human Relations. But these are not just principles to apply when it is easy, when everyone is loving you back equally. The trick is to apply these to others — family members *and* political adversaries — who are defying the biblical "Don'ts," those who are consistently cheating, coveting, hurrying to evil, hypocriting, offending, planning wickedly, sowing discord, stealing, and of course, witnessing falsely.

[LAURIE:] But they don't deserve it.

[JESUS:] Being deserving of love or not is the wrong question. Being *in need* of love is the point, the issue. This is love, at its essence but also at its most difficult. Let Me quote My old friend Matthew [5:38-40] quoting Me: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."

[LAURIE:] I recall a different admonition about “eyes for eyes” and “teeth for teeth.” Exodus 21 says it should always be an even swap.

[JESUS:] We’re going with Matthew on this one. Like many other passages in the Bible, I believe ol’ Matthew, quoting Me, used a certain amount of exaggeration to make Our point. I wouldn’t want you to literally expose the other side of your face knowing it was about to be struck. You should protect your other cheek. But the point is to send out love, even in response to an attack, even to your enemies, because that’s what you want to come back to you. Many people have rephrased what I’ve said about love. One author I like is Jerry Jampolsky. He says that human emotions can be distilled down to two, love and fear, and that we can choose which one we want to experience at any given time. He says fear — including anger, resentment, sadness, revenge, grievance, control, judgment — expressed by others or ourselves is “a call of help for love.” Here’s Jerry:

“Everything we think, say, or do reacts on us like a boomerang. When we send [out] ... criticism, fury, or other attack thoughts, they come back to us. When we refrain from making judgments and send out only love, it comes back to us. ... Our goal is to have no thoughts, attitudes, words, or actions that are harmful to others or ourselves.”

Essentially, this is how we reach our ultimate goal: peace of mind, which is how you started this discussion, Laurie. Jerry again:

“Peace of mind as our single goal is the most important motivating force we can have. ... By choosing love more consistently than fear, we can change the nature and quality of our relationships. ... To give is to receive — this is the law of love. ... [W]hen we give our love away to others, we gain, and whatever we give we simultaneously receive.”

[LAURIE:] You’re right, Jesus. Sometimes it’s really helpful to hear these core concepts interpreted by different people. Reminders like these can disrupt the spiral of negative thoughts and despair that many of us experience. I also like Eckhart Tolle. His books have helped me

tremendously at different points in my life. His concepts of the *present moment* and the *pain body* seem to relate to certain things Mr. Jampolsky writes about.

[JESUS:] Yes, Eckhart, another great spiritual author. Writers like Jerry Jampolsky, Eckhart Tolle, M. Scott Peck, and others stimulate us to keep our hearts open. By sending out only love, as difficult as this might be at times, we'll try to inspire misguided family members and Trump supporters to look at their biases and assumptions, understand the pain their actions have caused, and decide to seek truth. Keep voting Culture of Life Party, which *is* love, and we'll all keep praying that the humanitarian pendulum swings back in that direction.

[LAURIE:] I will keep my heart open.

[JESUS:] And stay optimistic. Hey, Laurie, before we go, you know what affirmations are, right?

[LAURIE:] Of course.

[JESUS:] Let Me leave you with two of My optimistic favorites. John Adams was your country's first vice president and second president. He was a Founding Father who hung out with fellow founder Benjamin Franklin. Adams came up with a saying that has held up since his time:

“Every problem is an opportunity in disguise.”

Isn't that cool? It embodies and supports many great personal characteristics such as resilience, positivity, anti-victim mentality, perseverance, creativity. It's the Swiss Army knife of affirmations.

[LAURIE:] That sounds like something out of Ben Franklin's "Poor Richard's Almanac."

[JESUS:] More like "Poor Richard Simmons' Almanac." Isn't that funny? Just kidding. No offense to Richard, may he rest peacefully. He was a great guy and produced a lot of benefit for the world. Here's the other affirmation I mentioned:

“From the wisdom of uncertainty emerge spontaneous solutions. I do my best, expect the best, and let the Universe handle the details.”

This one is a hybrid comprised of concepts from several of my favorite spiritual writers. Many thinkers and sages have examined the metaphysical nature of uncertainty. When all heck is breaking loose and confusion reigns, or you’re experiencing a long-term crisis, it’s easy to start thinking there are no good answers. Some people give up hope. But this is a time to immerse yourself in the uncertainty, to calmly let it envelop you. To soak in it. The key to this is a concept called *detachment*. After you’ve done all you can do to solve a problem but the answer still is not clear, you spiritually detach from the possible outcomes. You stop obsessing over possible negative results. You let the Universe — and Me — handle the details. You’ll often be pleasantly surprised.

[LAURIE:] Thank You, Jesus. I am so, so grateful for Your time.

[JESUS:] Laurie, it is Me who is grateful. Until we meet again.

(Jesus and Laurie clasp hands; audience applauds wildly, stands up in appreciation)■

Epilogue

All right, reader, I misled you in the beginning. But if you've come this far, you now know that this book has a lot to do with Donald Trump and the colossal damage he's done to our country, our psyche, and world order. To obtain that opportunity, he was able to manipulate the members of his Christian base of support so that they believed him instead of their lying eyes.

Approximately 81% of white evangelicals and 60-70% of all other Caucasian Christians lifted Mr. Trump to two presidential terms, the second one even after his astronomical depravity was apparent. He told you he was a Christian. He held Easter brunches with clergy at the White House. He held "Rededicate 250," a federally funded prayer service at the National Mall featuring Scripture, testimony, prayer, and the rededication of our country as a Christian nation under God. He held a *Bible* in the air. Heck, he even *sold Bibles* to you. You believed him. He said he was Christian. Then he consistently defied and defiled most every Commandment and principle of human relations Jesus ever taught. But you still believed him.

He turned us against each other.

He brought out the worst in his followers and corrupted his friends.

He consistently made life worse for the 99%.

He spurned American allies and emboldened enemies.

He brought sweeping criminality, treason, humanitarian atrocity, and untold unnecessary pandemic death.

All the while he challenged you: "Who are you gonna believe, me or your lying eyes?"

You believed him.■