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When Politics Dominates Religion: A Theological Critique of Televangelist Rod Parsley

Leigh Rogers

Since George W. Bush became president as well as since 9/11, the use of Christian language and symbols in political rhetoric has intensified. Words like “mission,” “good and evil,” and references to biblical passages have popped up in State of the Union speeches, political campaigns and government statements. Not coincidentally, we are also seeing more partisan political activism within the Church system itself. Pastors of churches large and small are standing behind particular candidates for office, and openly telling their parishioners for whom to vote. We are caught between placing God in a political, public realm, where God belongs, and the prospect of using God for our own actions and ideologies. Is it logical to say America has ties to certain religious backgrounds such as Christianity, which justifies a direct claim on what is politically moral?

Rod Parsley, senior pastor at his own World Harvest Church in Columbus, Ohio, serves as an example of conservative politics within the church. His “stardom” on national television, recognition from President Bush and other religious leaders, and unique methodology for a political agenda all show him to be a major player in present and future religio-political operations. The concern for this man’s attentiveness to politics is not for his conservative Christianity, nor for his fervent religiosity imbedded in public life. Rather, it arose out of a concern for his use of the Gospel for partisanship, for a particular political agenda.

Who Is Rod Parsley?

Rod Parsley was a man born in rural, poor Kentucky who raised himself out of poverty and started his own church at age nineteen. He dropped out of Bible College because he felt a calling to God, and has continued to preach in Columbus, Ohio since that time. Now, he boasts a 12,000 membership at his own World Harvest Church in Canal Winchester, near Columbus, and broadcasts his messages to five-hundred channels around the world. World Harvest Church also incorporates a K-12 Preparatory school, a Bible College, and a $38 million annual income, making it not just a hometown church, but its own broader com-
community. His church also funds many organizations and religious think tanks such as Reformation Ohio, the Center for Moral Clarity, as well as conferences such as Patriot Pastors, a gathering of thousands of ministers throughout the country promoting “family values” in their congregations. Rod Parsley is now frequently at the side of the President of the United States, along with other religious leaders like James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson, for White House bill-signings such as the recent bill banning partial-birth abortions.

To glimpse into Rod Parsley’s world, it took a visit to World Harvest Church. One October Sunday, I attended his weekly church service. When I walked inside, there was a giant standup poster of the U.S. Constitution overlaid with Bible verses and Rod Parsley quotes. It was the perfect visual image of religion literally overlaid in American politics. Walking around, there were posters, banners and paraphernalia of Rod Parsley. As a Christian church, one would expect religious relics or symbols. There were no pictures, images or relics of Jesus or the cross. Journalist Dan Williamson noted during a visit to World Harvest that “it’s hard to spot any religious symbols, such as representations of Jesus, but there are lots of photos of Parsley, including those on the large Silent No More promotional posters sprinkled about” (Williamson, Columbus Monthly, Aug 2005). Parsley himself, not Jesus—or even God—is clearly the focal point of the establishment.

Strictly at ten the curtains went up and the music started, revealing a large stage with two dozen dancing teenagers, a full band, and a choir on the second tier of the stage. It was sensory overload. The band was intense, the choir was powerful, the lights were shining everywhere—and to top it off, about two dozen teenagers from the Harvest Prep School were dancing around the stage in matching outfits at what seemed a hundred miles per hour. The audience immediately started dancing along with the group, doing their own little God-inspired jig, or singing along in the most “anti-hymnal” sense. The spectacle was outrageous, but also kind of addictive, since it clearly incorporated an element of entertainment.

After half an hour of singing and dancing, Rod Parsley finally emerged. He got up on stage and immediately started talking. “Find five people near you and say ‘Thank you’ to them,” he said. When we thought it was just a greeting, he said, “Now find five more people, and thank them.” So we wandered around more to thank others. Lastly, Parsley said, “Now bring the thanks to God.” As soon as the word “God” was spoken, everyone turned their eyes and arms upward in praise. And it wasn’t just a few dozen people; it was literally everybody.
Parsley then went into a thirty-minute long sentence. “God is the Word and we must listen to God’s mouth and God’s mouth must be transferred into our mouths…” This went on for half an hour, and none of it made sense. There was no major theme or pattern in his message. However, the man didn’t miss a beat. He didn’t stutter, stall for more than a single second, whether the context of the words were incoherent. The man definitely spoke with authority, and definitely his sense of power, regardless of clarity. Looking around at the audience, it wasn’t hard to notice that no one was strictly listening or agreeing with the content of his words. Rather, what was clear was their focus on how he said the words. The crowd did respond, but not to what he was saying; the nods, Amens, Hallelujahs, and raised arms came when the band drum-rolled into Parsley’s every crescendo, building the momentum and fervor of the sermon and the crowd, each playing off the other.

We went from the “mouth of God” to giving a trophy to his “aviation ministry” (i.e., personal pilot) to singing a song with his daughter to debriefing the “Raise the Standard” conference. Nevertheless, the congregation demanded to suspend the two and a half hour sermon to watch a five minute video clip about how Parsley was the next Moses, Elijah, Samson, and Isaiah. “Just like these men followed their calling to God, so did Rod Parsley,” the video said. The video skipped over Jesus; the real man of God was Rod Parsley himself. The video was more like a campaign commercial, as if he were running for office. Opening with broad, baseline music, it displayed the stars and stripes and incorporated the repetitive rhetoric like any presidential candidate: Parsley “stands up for American values, saves innocent unborn babies and demands a marriage Amendment in the United States Constitution.” Finally, after over three hours of extended church service at World Harvest, we were permitted to leave.

**Rod Parsley’s Tactics**

Rod Parsley calls his congregation to turn America into a “Christian nation.” With his organization called “Reformation Ohio,” it seeks to register 400,000 evangelical voters as well as converting 100,000 people before the May 2006 congressional election in Ohio. Parsley has very strong ties to Kenneth Blackwell, the 2006 Republican candidate for Ohio governor, despite it being against the law to overtly support any candidate of any office based on its tax-free status.

Because Parsley outwardly hopes to turn America into a Christian nation, one approach he takes is called Dominion theology. Sara Diamond defines it as “Christians, and Christians alone, are Biblically mandated to occupy all secular
institutions until Christ returns” (246). It is taken from Genesis 1:26 that states: “And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have dominion over the fish, the birds, and all the animals, domestic and wild, large and small” (New International Version). One scholar, Christian Smith, came up with reasons for what “Christian America” really means. One is “religious freedom.” It is the idea that “America was once a Christian nation…and was founded by people who sought religious liberty and worked to establish religious freedom” (Smith 26). Also, they want “principles of government,” meaning “that the basic laws and structures of the U.S. government reflect or embody important Christian principles,” or a representative voice in government (29). Lastly, however, is the notion of an “acceptable public expression of religion,” encompassing the idea that “in America’s past the public expression of religious symbols and customs was deemed moral and acceptable” (35). This, of course, implies that Christians should be allowed to display their faith in all public and private spheres of life—including the judicial courts, classroom, and workplace.

The other theme is “Health and Wealth theology.” Everyone has seen the charismatic minister on television that places his hand on an elderly person in a wheelchair and states, “By God’s grace be healed!” The person then convulses and stands up without aid proclaiming the work of the Lord. Everyone has also heard of ministers telling their congregations that a large house or fancy car is a sign of God bestowing prosperity upon them. By description, this is the definition of Health and Wealth theology, or the concept that God grants health and wealth to the most faithful. Health and Wealth theology arose out of the Scriptures, specifically Isaiah 53 which states, “by his stripes we are healed.” The theology explains that “if you want it, God will give it.”

In a Harper’s article, “Soldiers of Christ II,” Chris Hedges opens with his story about two women proselytizing in “country clubs, golf courses, because, that is where people feel comfortable” (55). This exemplifies how these individuals “are picture-perfect members of a new Christian elite, showy, proud of how God has blessed them with material wealth and privilege, and hooked into the culture of celebrity and power” (56). The message also implies that Christians should be capitalists: “They’re pro-free markets, they’re pro-private property. That’s what evangelicals stand for” (“Soldiers of Christ I” 9). Regardless of what Jesus actually preached, Christians “like the benefits, risks and the excitement of a free market society. They like the stimulation of a new brand,” like all consumers (9). Capitalism can thus shape religion into Health and Wealth theology: one needs both the dominant moral principles attributed to Christianity and the array
of choices available to the average American consumer to satisfy spiritual needs. Affluence is further justified in a church setting; one is validated of their economic status, their superfluous bargain buys, and their lofty expenditures all under a sacred space. Health and Wealth provides, then, a “Baskin Robbins mentality” that services varieties of “flavors” designed for pleasing everyone (10).

Civil Religion as Backdrop for Religious Nationalism

Throughout U.S. history, there have been many ways religion has taken shape in the nation. The United States is rich in religious history, mostly Protestant Christian history, and some say founded on “Christian” ideals. As sociologist Robert Bellah puts it, “the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension” (“Civil Religion in America” 24). Thus, integral for our understanding of faith and nation in America is the concept of “civil religion.” Civil religion is the undertone behind phrases like “God bless America” and “In God we trust.” It is something that everyone knows and hears, but often is subtle enough that it lacks face value or an identity. Bellah defines it in his book The Broken Covenant as “that religious dimension through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality” (3). This religious dimension is “expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals” alongside nationalistic sentiments (“Civil Religion in America” 24). In other words, civil religion is the binding of national values in transcendent meaning.

Recently, since the terrorist attacks on September 11, the election of a president with strong Christian convictions, and pastors such as Rod Parsley open to ideas of American Providence, civil religion has surfaced to a higher level than before. After an event such as 9/11 civil religion provides a particular meaning to justify national or collective values. Since America’s overarching world dominance and possible vulnerability after 9/11, many people want to assert America’s continued strength as a nation. Rod Parsley believes that God is calling America to participate in the new response it has toward terrorism, as well as establish a new language for things such as “values” and “morality.”

However, civil religion in the 21st Century has increasingly become one of partisan and nationalist agendas, reworked to promote certain ideologies, something with which Bellah disagreed. He argues there is “good” and “bad” civil religion and the conflict he found with its function related to its use of symbols of the Christian faith. Civil religion, he argues, was fine to use symbols of the Judeo-Christian tradition, or even empty “God” language. However, he draws the line when civil religion uses Christianity solely to “fuse God, country
and flag” into nationalist agendas antithetical to authentic Christian faith—that is, faith in a prophetic setting which retains the original meaning and context of that symbol (“Civil Religion in America” 41). In other words, prophetic civil religion must retain the uniqueness of symbols or events of the faith—like the Christ event or exodus—and confirm their meaning as residing explicitly within the faith itself, not outside of it. Any other use of Christian symbols not serving the purpose of the faith itself, Bellah insists, becomes idolatrous.

It is still possible for civil religion to function in America, as long as the particular symbols of the faith are not usurped into a worship of America. However, the use of Christian symbols for the worship of America is exactly what Rod Parsley does. As we have seen, his message is for a political end, for God to be legitimated throughout American politics. It plucks the symbols from the faith tradition and places them within a separate political agenda. Curbing this intention is the role of the third time of trial. The third time of trial opens the doors for a “communalism of intention” (Bellah 110). In other words, he wants to allow symbols of faith to be “open” in a way that facilitates many, not just one particular religion’s symbols as a part of the American identity and civil religion. This will curb any attempt at elevating one particular faith’s symbols from dominating. As well as utilizing faith symbols solely for one particular nationalistic purpose. It seems, therefore, that what Rod Parsley argues for is not necessarily the purpose of God. God isn’t just placed in all aspects of society, but specifically in the White House, and it is the Christianity of a politician that matters most.

Rod Parsley and Empire

Rod Parsley believes that 9/11 was a punishment from God upon the nation for our wrongdoings, thus endorsing what Mark Lewis Taylor calls a “dominant rhetoric of evil.” Politically, a “dominant rhetoric of evil” is necessary for control and power because it “is placed before citizens with great drama, accenting citizens’ sacrifice, determination, and courage” (18). In other words, it programs into people’s heads that they should decide which side they’re on, and makes it clear which side they should be on (theirs). Taylor notes that each of these themes “represents a simplistic narrowing of vision” (18).

Of course, no rhetoric of evil can be complete without the context through which terrorism has occurred. The experience of 9/11 still haunts us all, but to understand the rhetoric one must understand how the event molds the nation’s consciousness into the dominion ideology. As we have seen, rhetoric of evil labels evil as distinct from the good, “against” America, and specific to our time.
One way of doing this, Taylor says, is mythologizing the event—by turning the history of the day into a story that can be told over and over to reinforce the victimization of America in order to justify the nation’s acquisition of power.

First, Taylor distinguishes between the historic moment of 9/11 and the mythic moment of 9/11. The historic moment of 9/11 is what actually took place that day: 2,973 people died, two planes hit the twin towers in New York City and the Pentagon, and Osama Bin Laden admittedly planned the attacks. The economy struggled, airports shut down, and every person in the world stopped to turn on their televisions and attempt to understand what was going on. In the weeks after, heightened security demands were placed all over the country.

The mythic moment, however, is the symbolic impact the event had on our nation: how America isn’t really as indestructible as it once thought; that America might not be as “blessed” by God as everyone said. Taylor distinguishes between two kinds of myths surrounding the event of 9/11: the first is the idea of “American Exceptionalism,” or the recurring “blessing of our nation.” However, “the morning in America on September 11, 2001 ruptured this mythic view” (41). This myth was replaced with the second myth, that of the “mythic moment” of 9/11. The “mythic moment” was the emotional and symbolic response to the event—a symbolic realization that America wasn’t as powerful as she thought she was. In this sense, something about America, as represented in the first myth, was delegitimated; for a brief period, the dominant consciousness was broken.

While the myth was ruptured after the event, it was by no means completely destroyed; “indeed the myth would surge with new strength” in the rhetoric and initiatives taken by the Bush administration and religious leaders to mold the exceptionalist agenda back into the nation and government (35). While it was clear that America wasn’t as perfect and divine as some expressed it to be, the victimization of the event led America to reclaim these symbols in order to reinforce a defensive against the terrorists. Leaders used the myth of 9/11 to reestablish that while America might not be as unique as everyone thought, it does not mean that America cannot still be that divinely sanctioned city on a hill. After 9/11, the attempt for “mythic restoration” took place, for the resurgence of the first myth, American Exceptionalism, to dominate the nation’s worldview.

Stephen H. Webb, in his book *American Providence*, argues that American empire is a sign of God’s favor, and God has placed America with power for a reason: to assist the coming Kingdom and/or the purposes of God. This role based on the will of God is what Webb calls “providence.” Providence is more
or less God’s will determined by a “narrative that teaches us to read history according to a broad but concrete plan” (4). For Webb, the “narrative” has constantly led America down the path for greatness, as evidenced by our nation’s history. The “plan,” then, is the use of America’s destined power to spread freedom (in the form of democracy and capitalism) and Christianity to the world, which ultimately will invoke the Kingdom of God. In a post-9/11 era with an openly Christian president, now is the time to continue pursuing that calling, says Webb (4). Providence, while not aligned exactly parallel to Rod Parsley’s own argument, is still a fundamental factor in his call for American greatness. Parsley advocates providence but in a different, more secular way than Webb does.

A God of history is the first important element of providence. History is a “dramatic account of the unfolding of revelation” of God (4). This is how the Bible is understood, which has revealed God’s nature through God’s actions; therefore, our current history can also reveal God’s nature in the 21st Century. The fact that God is one of history justifies that we as human beings do have a purpose, for, “If we are redeemed in history, then nationality is not irrelevant to God’s purposes” (5). American providence is not meant for America alone; Webb believes that globalism is in fact how we can gauge God’s action in history. Because America is at that forefront, we are serving God’s purpose. If we do not acknowledge providence, we will be alienated from God, since we are not seeking the role we are called to do as Americans and Christians (105).

However, this is where Parsley distinguishes himself from Webb. The goal of providence is not the same. Where Webb focuses on America’s role to God, Parsley implies God has a duty to the nation: “You and I need to be the catalyst for the nation, allowing God to proclaim through us” (Could it Be? 135). This puts the nation as the primary subject, not God, and implies God works through us, for whatever interests we have, whereas Webb claims the nation works for God. Webb states in American Providence that “the geopolitical is not our destiny; God is” (13). This, though in light of a providential message, still keeps nationalistic triumphalism at bay. Parsley, on the other hand, uses God to promote nationalism in such a way that minimizes God next to the nation. Webb uses politics for theological grounds, whereas Parsley uses God for political grounds.

Parsley also views democracy, capitalism, and Christianity triadic whose purpose is secular: reserved from God as the end of politics, and instead as the means to politics. For Parsley, providence merely serves as the means for utilizing God-language to legitimate a political agenda. Unlike Webb, it does not
validate God at the receiving end of America’s rise to power. Because of this, Parsley is more aligned with the secular imperial strategists of the past decade. Rod Parsley follows this trend, maintaining a “religious” argument on secular grounds. He utilizes Christian symbols for an underlying secular argument, such as the election of a specific politician. The rise of American empire in recent times is a critical context for how such agendas become legitimated in society by the secular and religious alike, as outlined by Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer in his book, Saving Christianity from Empire.

In 1992, current members of the Bush Administration such as Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz created the reports “Defense Planning Guidance (DPG)” (53). This document “laid out guidelines for reshaping U.S. foreign policy in a world in which U.S. power was no longer constrained by the defunct Soviet Union” (52, emphasis original). The DPG draft outlined three major goals: “to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival;” aggressive promotion of U.S. interests, including raw materials (oil) and proliferation of WMDs; and unilateralism. Nelson-Pallmeyer notes, “To turn present military advantages into permanent global supremacy and to use supremacy as a basis for achieving tactical objectives, the United States had to act alone” (53). From this statement we get a clear picture of just what American empire wants (global supremacy and promotion of U.S. interests) and how it is going to get it (military force).

A year before 9/11 occurred, the authors of the DPG got together once more (this time comfortably situated inside the second Bush Administration) to create the “Rebuilding America’s Defenses (RAD),” a “blueprint for U.S. global domination through the unilateral use of military power” (53). The use of military force was fundamental, Nelson-Pallmeyer says, because, as he quotes the RAD, “Preserving the desirable strategic situation in which the United States now finds itself requires a globally preeminent military capability both today and in the future” (54, emphasis original). Military strength, therefore, is the basic imperial technique for America to maintain their chokehold around the world. Furthermore, the RAD states that formalization of U.S. dominance would be unrealistic “absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor” (Nelson-Pallmeyer 59). Upon 9/11, the framers of this document got their wish, and a new document was born. Titled The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (NSS or the Strategy), it outlined in 2002 the justifications for going to war unilaterally: “While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively” (Nelson-Pallmeyer 60).
Parsley himself believes “we are in a battle for the heart and soul of America” (79). Since 9/11, Parsley uses the war mentality to justify America’s own position of power and the wars against terrorism and Iraq. “Before there is a time of peace, there is a time of war. That is what we are experiencing right now in America. We are in a global war against terrorism” (Out of the Ashes 35). Similarly, Saddam Hussein is compared with the devil: “Satan will attempt to lure you onto his turf and then deceive you into believing that he cannot be defeated. That is what Saddam Hussein did” (37). By paralleling Saddam Hussein as not only the barrier to America’s mission for greatness in the world, as well as the justification of the Iraq War, Parsley legitimates the current Administration’s call for imperialism.

Theological Critique

A threefold critique of Parsley exposes issues relating to Christianity and Partisan politics: the nature of evil, the role of the future, and the role of the church. First, Mark Lewis Taylor, in *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right*, alludes to the view of evil in conservative Christianity: “In the post-9/11 United States of America, the Christian Right’s universalizing fervor seems to be giving nearly unqualified blessing for the nation’s assumption of an imperial role in the world” (3). Thus, one views itself as all-good and the other as all-evil. However, Taylor notes that evil is not solely evil and good is not solely good. He uses Saint Augustine’s view that “evil is a distortion of the good” (28). A true understanding of good and evil is not dualistic; evil is rather fundamentally a part of the good. In recent times, concepts of evil have surfaced in light of 9/11, which takes the myths of American Exceptionalism and pits all others against it. Parsley “[railing] against the idea that the God of Christianity and the god of Islam are the same being” justifies a dualistic argument for evil (*Silent No More* 3). With this in mind, can we really say that a dualistic vision of evil is practical? Taylor argues that a dualistic approach to evil merely perpetuates the dichotomous mentality empire espouses.

Second, tied to dualistic evil is a “here and now” mentality. A God who can be placed in one’s pocket is the exact god that can be absolutized for unrestricted ends. The future is therefore ignored; all that matters is the present and a God who can fulfill one’s immediate wants. Jurgen Moltmann, in his book *Theology of Hope*, outlines this as ultimately a false and dangerous understanding of God. A German theologian writing in the years after World War II and the Holocaust, Moltmann’s is a social theology of eschatology, or hope for the future coming
kingdom of God. Eschatology is not “the doctrine of the last days,” as traditionally understood; rather, is the radical and continuous unfolding of God’s promises in history. By “unfolding,” Moltmann means not that history is linear or that it is an unfolding of the past, as if it were a rolled out carpet; but an unfolding of the *constant future*, implying a continuous pattern, like the horizon. No matter how much you run toward it, the future is always there, but always ahead of you, and always out of your reach. In this way, eschatology to Moltmann is the source of one’s hope. Hope and faith work together to motivate an individual toward this arriving future. Therefore, eschatology is not otherworldly; it is the very nature of the future’s constant arrival that keeps it from being otherworldly.

Christ is at the center of hope, that resistance to the status quo, because he was the contradiction of present reality. The resurrection is where our hope and faith in the God of promise lies. Because eschatology of the resurrection means hope in the promise of God through Jesus Christ, it sets the stage for history by breaking it open for new possibilities. To contradict the present reality means to partake in a new future constantly arriving discovered solely through the resurrection of Jesus: “The promise of the resurrection...leads at once to love for the true life of the whole imperiled and impaired creation” (225). This also implies a social motivation, to help not one’s self but to take on the world as contrary to the new future.

While Parsley claims health and wealth can save an individual from harm and is a direct sign of God’s working within history, Moltmann claims this is indeterminable and the attempt to conclude the direct workings of God is blasphemy. Authentic faith recognizes the constant unfolding promises of God and not the revelation of God himself. Moltmann challenges a concept he calls “Epiphany.” Epiphanies are any form of theology which claims God as here-and-now, denying God an ever-unfolding history. With Rod Parsley claiming Bush as the new Josiah, rallying behind Ohio gubernatorial candidate Kenneth Blackwell, and present at presidential bill-signings, this hardly situates Parsley as one at odds with present reality. In fact, it situates him quite comfortably with the status quo, in which God can be grasped by or within a social institution such as government.

Third, Health and Wealth theology sidetracks the real issues behind healing and the role of the church. As William R. Herzog II points out in his book *Prophet and Teacher*, there is a large difference between the motivations of current televangelists and Jesus in their healing. Herzog uses parables to understand not a moral story or the relationship between man and God, but an assessment of
the social system. He argues that Jesus’ main reason for healing was to put dignity and personhood into those viewed as societal outcasts, thereby thwarting in protest the Roman Empire and certain Jews aligned with them. Rod Parsley and other televangelists mistake Jesus’ healing as ends in themselves; Herzog argues that healing is a means to an end with a social goal—to lift an untouchable from social and religious impurity and ostracism.

Bill McKibben, in “The Christian Paradox,” questions the “Christianity” of certain congregations in America. The “paradox” is that “America is simultaneously the most professedly Christian nation of the developed nations and the least Christian in its behavior” (McKibben, 32). America has trailed every nation except Italy for the least aid to poor countries, McKibben confesses. The problem with this, he says, is not that we’re bad at charity, but that an “overwhelmingly Christian American nation trails badly in all these categories, categories to which Jesus paid particular attention” (32). This mentality is inseparable from the political agendas of the religious right today. It explains why Rod Parsley would choose George W. Bush over Al Gore or Bill Clinton, when George W. Bush’s tax cuts for the rich can help him keep and legitimate his “$1 million, five-bedroom, 5 1/2 bath house with a swimming pool; a $63,000 Cadillac ESV and a $68,000 Lexus LX470 for himself and his wife, Joni” (Plain Dealer, June 5, 2005).

As McKibben states, all this justifies the American culture we have now, the immediate consumer satisfaction we secretly (or openly) dream of: “the soft-focus consumer gospel of the suburban megachurches is a perfect match for emergent conservative economic notions about personal responsibility instead of collective action” (McKibben 36).

What can the church do to resist the System? First of all, the language of God itself, along with theology, needs a new rendering that can’t be claimed for one side or another. Answering out of the polarized post-2004 Presidential mentality, Jim Wallis in God’s Politics asks, “Will it serve the greater good? Or will it be used for a particular interest or ideology?” We must recognize that God has a public relationship to the world and wishes justice upon it. By asking the question “Is there a politics of God?” he recognizes that “God is personal, but never private” (31).

Also, Taylor’s solution to evil is one of “prophetic spirit,” a concept that turns empire on its head using the Augustinian model of evil. Prophetic spirit is not just a method to counter the Religious Right, but a “way of being.” It is to be a part of all our lives that shapes our notion of the world, allowing us to move forward instead of backward. In prophetic spirit, there are two components that
shape how we see the world: breadth and depth. Breadth helps us “see history as markedly social,” allowing for us to focus on the horizontal relationship God has with the world, as well as the importance to see a God in history (99). Depth means that “prophetic spirit discerns that our temporal existence is textured also by different levels of life, according to which there are different strata of power and empowerment” (100). Both these components expose the suffering of those that Rod Parsley and others might ignore. Prophetic spirit opens breadth and depth of society to a larger vision of America, saving it from a narrow notion of religio-political power.

Prophetic spirit makes us “revolutionary subjects,” or agents of social change, rather than “objects” for use by the empire. Thus, by aligning ourselves with those in the biggest struggles, we can envision a new society where all are justified and none are oppressed; where religion isn’t defined by the status quo but by the Gospel itself, and where the Religious Right cannot encapsulate an entire nationalist agenda. The choice handed out by the rhetoric of the empire and used by Rod Parsley’s secular agenda is tossed aside, and alternative choices which grant real freedom from domination are placed back into the hands of the people. By supporting the uprisings prophetically against the status quo, revolutionary subjects begin the struggle against the Domination System proclaimed so forcefully by Rod Parsley and other Dominionists who wish to seize the “key to the city,” or perhaps the entire city itself.

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