

This is a written response to some interview questions posed to me by Professor Steve Eskew of University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) who is also a reviewer/critic for *The Omaha Reader Magazine*. Professor Eskew is putting together a review of my book: *The Diluted Church* for his magazine, which serves as a cultural and art review magazine for the Omaha metropolitan area.

Questions & Answers:

Eskew:

- 1) **I hope I'm clear on this but I'd better check: Are you saying that Christians should not necessarily be apolitical, but simply not identify themselves as Christians when they lobby for a particular cause?**

Price:

It is not a matter of being political or apolitical as it is a matter of representing the Kingdom of God in the realms of the kingdoms of men, without being corrupted or distracted with much ado about nothing. Issues are more a means of gaining a following [power] than they are about solving anything. The religious political agenda and platform is the same as it was 40 years ago, with the exception of an ever-widening front [there are more adverse problems attacking the religious conservative mindset now than there was in 1958]. What does this tell us? It tells us that the religious conservative bandwagon and ideals are either ineffective or it tell us that the issues really aren't the issues, but merely symptoms of a deeper problem. If you treat the symptoms rather than the real problem, the symptoms continue, multiply, and variegate. Jacques Ellul, the famous French philosopher, buttresses my point:

The moment Christians make it a habit to understand questions, which the world [non-believers collectively] has elaborated, they adopt at the same time a certain number of ideological positions, responses and doctrines, which also originate in the world...In doing so, Christians achieve an exact confirmation of the analysis of Marx, according to which Christianity is merely a superstructure in a larger organism...This kind of Christianity is then a religion which develops in terms of the world's economic and technological evolution, [in other words its dependant on the world to grow, influence or be identifiable] and whose aim is to provide ideological and moral satisfaction to those who are in fact incapable of changing the situation. It is a substitute.

[comments added for clarity]

Religious people going at the political realm as a means to spread their thinking, fails because their essence is; muted, truncated and controlled by the political stage. In addition, many times religious people advertise positions on myriads of topics, relating them to being "Christian" and God gets a black eye in society for this kind of foolishness. [Is there truly a "Christian" position on the amount of nitrates in drinking water? I don't think so. But because some freak who is always advertising his/her religious affiliations or belief says something on the issue the implication is that their take somehow reflects a religious motive, and voters get the wrong idea.] If one has a religious motive in their political affairs it should be the last thing mentioned, if at all, rather than the first and foremost.

Christ said a lot about culture and society's bad ideas, without saying a word. He went out and did something. The effect was that He was not misrepresented, by a political arena that can't help but modify everything it touches, and the political arena was upstaged. The things Christ did, dealt directly into His eternal purposes rather than an endless humanistic black hole.

Eskew:

- 2) **So, when it comes to such controversial issues as intelligent design versus evolution (being taught in our educational system) and the recent opposition about homosexual themes in mainstream movies, should Christians remain anonymous but still air their complaints?**

Price:

For purposes of setting the stage, the Bible tells us that the church is not a place for everybody in a region in which to gather. It's a group of people committed totally to God and nothing else. In my book I pointed to many texts in the New Testament where Christ and almost every New Testament writer used disassociative language in speaking about themselves in relating to the society around them. So if the church is not the state and the state is not the church, whose society is it? It is the non-believers society, because we have our own in Kingdom. Jesus said, "my kingdom is not of this world and if it were, my servants would be fighting that I would not be delivered up

[to Pontius Pilate the guy Jesus was speaking to] by the religious Jewish political leaders. So if Christians in this country are following Christ, America is no longer their belonging, identity or motivation, but merely a place where they are right now.

Therefore, to take a hard-line on homosexual stuff or the philosophy of origins is a bit arrogant and not mindful that we [believers] are no longer belonging to the realms of men. If Christians weren't seeking a continued belonging with, or the security of having their views upheld or symbolized in society, then these issues would be non-issues to them. Does a guy from Uganda concern himself with whether the US as a country teaches Evolution or is tolerant for homosexuality? No, because these do not reflect on him because he belongs to another place that upholds his ideals and identity. If Christians aren't pushy about their way and knew themselves, what exactly they believed and why, it wouldn't matter what others around them say and do. It wouldn't be a reflection on them or a consequence to them.

Eskew:

3) Could you elaborate a bit about how dogma accommodates various political agendas?

Price:

Dogma is more an arrogant belonging, to an accepted ideal, than it is something a Christian should be using. A real follower of Christ operates from knowing, a conviction that comes from outside us, from God. This "knowing" can never be understood by a non-believer with any kind of intensity or depth.

Religious people have a pride in being "right" according to some *higher ideal* than in uneducated opinions. But if everybody does not hold these ideals and if they are not axiomatic [gravity and its effect is undeniable] then the ideals just as well be uneducated opinions. Religious ideals, which may be accurate to some authentic source; merely become battering rams to force a views acceptance past other people's thinking or processing of a matter. I can claim God and try to use this ploy to bluff my way past your questions and reservations, almost like a trump card in a game. You can say what you want *but I've got God on my side*. One tremendous problem comes about when both sides claim God on their side, as in the Civil War. Dogma pushes any situation into blind battle. Dogma has behind every treachery ever known to man.

Eskew:

4) Correct me if I'm wrong but it sounds like you adhere to a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible. Is it possible that some of the more fantastic stories were "inserted" by politically oriented scholars to make clear a metaphorical Truth or is it more likely that the Force who created an entire universe is easily capable of providing human beings with incredible (LITERALLY miraculous) power? And how has such diverse interpretations helped influence church politics?

Price:

I am not sure I understand your question here entirely. It seems as though there are several questions together here.

I am not a fundamentalist at all, if this is what you mean. The Bible has sections that are metaphorical, allegorical and even literal. The text differentiates for itself, as to which is a proper understanding of a text. In addition, there can be several layers of correct understandings of a text that could be literal and metaphorical all at the same time. The Bible is not complex; applying it to our lives and times is much more complex. In any case the believer is not left to himself, unless they want to be, when it comes to interpretations of scripture. God is able to help us understand fully everything we need to know. According to Christ, we don't need some preacher or theologian to tell us what to think. In many cases these become obstructions to a clear understanding.

The organized church [not to be confused with God's church, as in the definition above] has hatched any number of ridiculous interpretations of the Bible, or even teaching given as authoritative, which have nothing to do with the Bible. One such is the religious community declaring that the earth was flat, when the Bible clearly tells us that it is round.

Certain religious writers have taken events in history and twisted them into being miraculous, thus making the event "the work of God's hand." Not so fast! This throws tremendous impetus behind a thought or event, to where simpleminded people believe and press forward headlong in a direction that is as wrong as can be, but still believed with great faith and sincerity. Religion has inflamed politics for centuries. In fact most of the wars and treachery of history was been committed under the auspices of upholding a *religious belief*.

Eskew:

5) Should the power of prayer pretty much dominate our involvement with political and world affairs?

Price:

Prayer cannot be underplayed in the events of this life, political or personal. But to say pray is *the way*, as in the only thing we should do, is a bit shortsighted. Prayer is far underplayed by the Religious-Right, because they don't really believe that it is effectual. If they did they'd be doing a lot more of it. However, if we are not willing to do some things in the physical realm we might as well be a glove without a hand. Prayer and Action is a double-edged sword. There has to be both but what to do on the action side is tremendously misunderstood and misapplied by the Religious-Right.

We live in a physical world, but true Christians are of another realm. And we should look at this life from a different perspective, of being citizens of a different realm. It's like the difference between 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional. The 3-dimensional perspective has a decided advantage to a 2-dimensional perspective.

Again Jesus did many things [action] in the physical world that spoke much more about truth than going to the political community and trying to make an issue that can be pushed culturally. Lets say that the Sadducees represent the Liberals of today in the New Testament and the Pharisees represent Religious Conservative. Just a casual reading through the gospels, with this perspective in mind, will be revolutionary for the average person. Look at how Jesus related to these groups of the political realm. He didn't shun them. He did respect their position, but He did not bow to them. Many times He brushed them aside while upstaging them, all in the same stroke. He wasn't disrespectful, but He knew His role and how to not be bogged down in their foolishness. The religious conservative has never been able to do this because they automatically bow to the political system first, get bogged down in political foolishness, all for their place at the table of political influence. It would seem that they do not conceive that they, in and of themselves, have any means of influence besides the political stage. Well, they probably don't have the kind necessary to save the day politically, but since when was this area, their area of concern? The question is, is the politics of the day so important to God, or is it more important to religious people that want to profit from it, keep comfortable and safe through it? If you look very far into the motives of the Religious-Right, you will surely find selfishness dressed up in a bunch of ways.

Eskew:

6) What are your aspirations as a potential missionary? Where do you hope to travel and what approach will you use?

Price:

I am a missionary now, even through this book. The institution of church needs missionaries to rescue people from the clutches of religion. There are true followers of Christ already in the institution of "church" but most times they just warm pews and throw money. God's got a different idea for His people than this. I have been to Japan, Germany, Mexico and Romania doing what I do. My family and I have hosted people from all over the world, living with our family as a means to sharing truth by living, not preaching, for more than 6 years. At one point when we lived in Omaha, we had 7 additional people to our kids, living with us. I have been to gay-lesbian pride marches, under people's cars, all to be a light. Light doesn't say much but you can tell when it's around.

Once our kids get finished with High School [they go to *the evil public schools*, please note this is said in humor] we hope to go work overseas where we can be of service to the needy, poor downtrodden and abused. In Jesus' words He did not come to heal [minister] the healthy, but He came to heal the sick. The presupposition in this statement is that "the sick," knew that they were sick and were thus looking for help. America is not lacking for witness, [they don't think they are sick and generally are not looking for solutions] you can't go anywhere in this country and not find some representation about the God of the Bible, even as twisted as many of them may be. Americans are fine with their furious pace and busied life; many don't know their real needs yet. There are billions of people all over the world, who already know their need in the physical sense and are open to the spiritual meaning of the word *need*. Why tell someone, who otherwise cannot be bothered because they are too busy, distracted and who think they are fine, about truth when there are people who know they are not fine, are not too busy or distracted and are desperate to have someone love them?

Eskew:

7) My editor wonders what questions are you hoping the book leaves the average reader with?

Price:

If culture change is what the religious conservatives want, why are they so afraid to change themselves? Why do they assume that culture change should be in their direction? And why are they vehemently opposed any person of faith that would authoritatively question their sense "rightness"?

Why do religious people focus on America and American politics as a field of conquest for their time and effort? Is God hampered in His goals in the world if America is not a "christianized" as it once used to be?

Why do "Christians" spend as much time and energy on trying to protect themselves and only 6% of the world's population that lives in America, when there is 94% of the world's population, most of which are far more needy of physical and spiritual help than the most needy 1/2% of people in this country? Is there such a shortage in America for help that we need to starve an already starving world for it?

Is God better represented by a Republican/Conservative religious platform that just gives lip-service to values we as "Christians" hold to, or is He better represented by Christians doing something on their own, free of the constraints and hassles of the political realm?

If God only recorded 12 to 15 people in the entire history of the Bible, which He used directly for His purposes within the political realms of their day, to do His bidding, then why do religious people today need to spend so much time and energy to try and force a religious agenda by populating parties and institutions with "our people" to get the job done? I bet its because this approach is our own will and not God's. God doesn't believe in futility or forcing people to do what they don't want to do, so why do religious conservatives?

Does God need Democracy, is He hampered by it? If not, why do Christians spend so much time trying to get their way through the democratic process?

If Christ was openly friends with known sinners; prostitutes, extortionist [tax-collectors] and drunkards, then why do "Christians" get so upset about the changes in society that bring homosexuality and abortion and other excessive behaviors close to their daily proximity, unless they see themselves more as puritanical Americans than followers of Christ who are isolationistic, not wanting to be around the dirty rotten world?

How are "Christians" going to account to God for their time and efforts in their political endeavors, when it doesn't produce other people who are willing to follow Christ themselves and the 40 years of effort has been less than successful at anything Christ did tell His followers to be doing?

How are religious conservatives supposed to reach out [in the eternal sense] to people on the other side of the political isle when they spend all their time beating them down, mocking and trying to neutralize them in the temporal sense? Doesn't the focus on the temporal abrogate being successful in the eternal?

Why is the Bible applicable to Religious Conservative on matters of homosexuality and not concerning the absence of any support in Christ or His early followers negatively contrasting the modern religious conservatives' radical political conquests?

Since we can't find Christ or His followers doing what modern "Christians" are doing politically, while they say they are following God, why don't we pitch the Bible entirely? The actions of the religious conservatives declares, unsuspectingly I would suppose, that the Bible is out of date; inapplicable to our modern developments in politics and society.

If religious conservative aren't "raptured out of the world" close to the "end of days" as Evangelicals and Fundamentalists theorize, where will all of their political efforts put them? When will they stop beseeching the political system with their agenda? If they can't see where to stop now, then they are well on their way to ushering in the very system, according to their view of the end of days, which will literally slit their throat if they are still here.