

“Mississippi Church Pushes Back Against History of Racism” by Zoe Erler, *by Faith*, Q1.18; “A Mouthful of Bluff” by Joel Belz, *World magazine*, April 14, 2018; “Look Out. Christianity Will Soon be Labeled ‘Hate Speech’ ” by David Rupert, *Red Letter Believers: Salt and Light*, at Patheos’ Evangelical channel, April 16, 2018; “Did Evangelicals ‘Kidnap’ the Word Evangelical?” by Chris Gehrz, *Anxious Bench* at Patheos’ Evangelical channel, April 24, 2018.

**M**artin Luther King, Jr. was murdered 50 years ago this year. In those fifty years, blacks and whites have been born and died who never knew of King in his lifetime. They didn’t experience the worst of Jim Crow because Dr. King worked for racial integration by biblical principles of neighbor love.

In the magazine of the historically Southern-rooted Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), Erler, also born after King’s murder, reports on a PCA church in Mississippi, where: “Slowly, God has begun drawing people from diverse backgrounds.” In 2018! She’s not blaming God for the *slow going*. She notes, among the caring church members, “one young woman has started bringing the children of her African-American neighbors” to church and notes, “an interracial couple has felt comfortable enough to stick around”.

Erler reports that a recent PCA pastor recalls the time when elders were unwilling to invite a black man to their mission conference since, as an elder at that time “replied matter-of-factly, ‘he’s black’ ”. Of course, white members had their Bible proof texts to rationalize *culturally grounded* racism. Erler quotes a long-time member’s admitting: “We were a conceited church. But God has changed that, and we are welcoming to everyone now.”

Yet, each year, PCA’s General Assembly piles Overture upon Overture against *same-sex* couples – rationalizing this with Bible verses that replace earlier verses condemning *interracial* couples. Will the latest oppression end before another half century passes?

Meanwhile, Pew Research finds that 6 percent of PCA’s *unmarried couples* live together.

In “A Mouthful of Bluff”, Belz, a pioneer PCA elder, former PCA moderator, and the founder of *World magazine*, talks of “lying”. He recalls a 25-year-old incident of a boy on a school bus. He lied to the driver when asked if he was chewing gum. The driver then asked if he knew The Ten Commandments and the boy shot back proudly, but in ignorance: “Freedom of the Press!” Belz uses this to illustrate his concern that, “it’s no longer honesty that we exalt as a national virtue. Instead, these days it has become one’s ability to fib his way out of a political quagmire that wins.”

Well, isn’t that what *World* has done for decades with same-sex marriage and “ex-gay” frauds? Belz and his editor-in-chief, Marvin Olasky, with others in the PCA, were original signers of 2017’s lamentable Nashville Statement. There’ve always been excuses for what Belz calls, “fibbing” one’s way out of quagmires to win. That is taken to be no less necessary when it comes to antigay church politics.

Tragically, in PCA’s nearly half a century, same-sex oriented Christians have been born and have died in the context of the PCA’s and *World’s* self-willed, self-serving ignorance that makes the school bus boy’s “fib” merely something to smile about.

For decades, *World* has deliberately bypassed the best biblical scholarship on homosexuality. And recently, *World’s* editor-in-chief botched the Bible’s story of Adam and Eve. No one at *World* caught his mistake. In mocking a new Simon & Schuster book on the Bible, he quotes the book’s saying: “Disobeying God’s rule (even just touching the tree!) would result in death”. Olasky replies: “Hmm –

that’s what the serpent told Eve”. No, that’s what Eve, in her concocted gripe, told the serpent. Olasky goes on to say, “it’s hard to trust [a book on the Bible] that gets something basic so wrong.” Olasky and *World* get far more relevant things wrong about the everyday lives of same-sex oriented folks than misquoting Eve’s self-serving misquoting of God.

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. King’s murder, Ravi Zacharias writes that, “the struggle MLK was up against brings to mind the words of a member of the British Parliament describing the battle William Wilberforce waged in England against slavery: ‘It was like pushing back a storm from a raging Atlantic with a mop and a bucket.’ ” He notes that he’s writing from his homeland, India, a few miles from where Mahatma Gandhi was murdered. He painfully knows that what Gandhi saw of the racism of Christians in South Africa “drove him away from the Christian faith.”

Folks are still repulsed by the racism, homophobia and other violations of the Sermon on the Mount, by some “Christian leaders”. But the leaders in the fight against the slave trade, slavery and racial segregation were Christians who took the Sermon on the Mount seriously.

Rupert, a communication specialist, claims, “the world hates *us* [i.e., Christians] because *we* have standards”. Pharisees “had standards”. *Jesus* said the world hates *us* because it hates *him*. (John 15:18ff) Of course, people *mock us* for *not living* what we *preach*. And the criticism is often deserved. Still, behind their faultfinding over our own hypocrisy is *their rebellion against him*. Says Rupert: “For 2000 years we have preached a lifestyle that is free from adultery, bestiality, pedophilia, polygamy, polyandry, pornography, and other societal norms that are being promoted in the name of tolerance.” We may have *preached* it. Did we always *live* it? *Our not living* it, is fodder for the world’s faulting *us*, but its fervent hatred is really over Christ. Rupert complains: “Right now, our stand for traditional marriage – the same marriage that has been the norm throughout every society in the world until a mere 10 years ago – is being labeled ‘hate speech’.” What he claims as, “traditional marriage” ignores traditional marriage of Bible days including some of what’s in his list of *today’s* sexual lifestyles. Those olden days had polygamy, child brides arranged by wheeling-and-dealing fathers, levirate marriage between widows and brothers-in-law, etc. Need we recall that “Christian” tradition of banning *interracial* marriage before the secular rulings of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America?

Gehrz teaches history at evangelical Bethel University. He tackles common confusion over the word, “evangelical”. And, that’s necessary. Ever since EC’s founding in 1975, antigay evangelicals have accused EC of misappropriation and LGBT folks misinterpret us under the tutelage of the Religious Right and secular media. Gehrz rightly notes that the term comes from the *Good News* of Jesus’ death and resurrection – as EC means it.

