



Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Justice Resources Review of Books and Study Guides

This document contains reviews completed by members of the Council's Commission on Public Witness. This sampling of resources is meant to provide information for congregations that wish to engage in study and dialogue about justice and the church's role.

Documents that have been reviewed:

- [Talking About Good and Bad Without Getting Ugly: A Guide to Moral Persuasion](#)
- [Winning the Race to Unity: Is Racial Reconciliation Really Working?](#)
- [Loving Justice: 12 Studies for Individuals or Groups](#)
- [How Can a Christian Be in Politics? A Guide toward Faithful Politics](#)
- [A Public Faith: A Balanced Approach to Social and Political Action](#)

Talking About Good and Bad Without Getting Ugly: A Guide to Moral Persuasion

Paul Chamberlain, Inter Varsity Press, March 2005, paperback, 126 pp., ISBN: 0-8308-3268-8; review prepared by the Rev. Dr. Bruce Bouchard

It has often been said that one should not talk about religion or politics. Discussing moral issues can be as thorny in today's society where not everyone is on the same page in terms of their values, faith, or a sense of right and wrong.

Whether we want to talk about the good and the bad with others or not, often we must. Friends who are angry at decisions made by our church will not let the matter drop. Others may take issue with how we respond to a son or daughter's actions. Or, they have the need to convert us to their way of thinking. We often do need a guide to ***Talking about the Good and Bad without Getting Ugly.***

Paul Chamberlain provides in this book:

An eye opening view into the changing moral landscape of today's world and even addresses how new technologies mean considering ethical problems that never before existed.

He helps us to understanding how we can hold objective moral principles without becoming dogmatic and intolerant.

He explores the meaning and importance of tolerance.

He asks us to explore what it actually means when we say that we impose our moral ideals on other persons.

He helps us to defend our faith based moral values from the criticism that they are only relevant to those who believe as we do.

In a final chapter, he explores applying moral values to social change through a case study of the anti-slavery work of William Wilberforce.

People from many different faiths and political viewpoints will find Paul Chamberlain's book wise and insightful.

Winning the Race to Unity: Is Racial Reconciliation Really Working?

Clarence F Shuler, M. Div., with Forward by Dr. Willie Richardson, Moody Publishers, 2003, paperback, 336 pp., ISBN 0802481590; review prepared by Milton Leake

In *Winning the Race to Unity* Clarence Shuler offers his perspective on racial separation within the church as a Christian African American. Clarence Shuler contends that our long history of prejudice towards African Americans can't be mended by reconciling blacks and whites to a compassionate relationship that never existed. Instead, he demonstrates in practical, hopeful tones that unity can only be found in the Cross, after Christians relinquish their cultural baggage before a loving Christ.

Clarence Shuler has an M. Div from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is an adjunct professor at Knoxville Theological Seminary and manages Focus on the Family's national outreach to black pastors and their families. He and his wife conduct marriage seminars across the country.

Clarence Shuler is an evangelical writing to white and black evangelicals. He gives practical advice to all on how to relate to one another in developing a cross-cultural relationship. He prefers the term cross-cultural to multicultural. Multicultural simply means that several different races or cultures are present together, but does not imply any interaction. Cross-cultural implies interaction from all and thus learning from all cultures or races that are present. There has to be action, not just a feeling of acceptance within our own community without reaching out to the other race.

The book is challenging, footnoted, with scriptural references and would be a good book to study. Although written for evangelicals, there is a lot there for all of us, of whatever denomination.

Chapter Titles and short statement from Table of Contents

1. **Missing the Mark** - We must refocus our aim if we are to win the Race Game.
2. **Putting on God-Glasses** - A Biblical perspective for developing Cross- Cultural relationships.
3. **Did you know this history?** - How a more accurate understanding of history may change present misconceptions.
4. **What honest Abe really believed in and why it matters** - Lessons we could learn from history.
5. **Is Racial Reconciliation really working?** - (The way everyone wants it to.)
6. **The white Christian problem in America** - The white Christian community cannot continue to do ministry as usual in its approach to minorities.
7. **The Responsibility of Black Christians in the Race Game** - We can't blame whites for everything.
8. **How to relate to the black community** - Some practical steps for fulfilling the great commission.
9. **Winning the Race to Unity** - The rewards of racial unity.
10. **Where do we go from here?** - Will you be part of the problem or part of the solution?

Loving Justice: 12 Studies for Individuals or Groups

Bob and Carol Hunter, InterVarsity Press, 1990, paperback, 59 pp., ISBN 0-83-8-1066-8; review prepared by the Rev. Sandra Strauss

Features:

- Studies are *inductive* vs. *deductive*—the goal is to lead users to discover what the text is saying vs. telling us what it says.
- Questions are designed to elicit more than one word answers—to provoke greater thought about the text.
- Studies are personal—exposing users to promises, assurances, and challenges of God’s Word, with the goal of leading to transformation.
- Studies are able to be used in a variety of contexts.
- Studies can be completed by a group in 45 minutes (good for Sunday School settings).
- Workbook format allows space for answers—good for preparing in advance.
- Leader’s notes are included—leaders are not meant to lecture, but encourage discussion.
- Good suggestions for participants on how to participate constructively.

The authors include a strong statement: “If the church is to regain a powerful hearing, then it must hear the cry of justice from the Scriptures.” Also, “An honest study of the Bible reveals just how far we have strayed from that challenge.” They contend that Scripture is often interpreted by those who are wealthy and elite who miss much of the meaning that would have been obvious to the downtrodden who were the first persons exposed to the words. Thus we are led to look through “new eyes”—more like initial readers might have viewed the text. We are encouraged to put ourselves in the place and situations of people in the passages, and not to make immediate assumptions about the text—e.g., not “spiritualizing” the text to assume that freeing prisoners from bondage means from the “bondage of sin.”

Chapter titles:

1. Does God Care about Injustice? (Habakkuk 1-3)
2. God’s Acceptable Worship (Isaiah 58)
3. God Shows No Partiality (Acts 10)
4. Caring for Our Enemies (Jonah 1-4)
5. A Kingdom of Service (Mark 6:17-44)
6. The Lesser Become Greater (Mark 14:1-11)
7. Prejudice in the Early Church (Acts 6)
8. Challenging Nationalism (Acts 7)
9. Cultural Identity (Exodus 3-4)
10. Choosing the Better Role (Luke 10:38-42)
11. The Temptation of Materialism (Revelation 18:1-24)
12. Putting People Before Products (Matthew 12:1-21)

The studies are quite challenging and appropriate. The authors do a good job of challenging personal comfort levels. The questions direct participants to specific portions of the text to which they apply without telling them how or what to think.

How Can a Christian Be in Politics? A Guide toward Faithful Politics

Roy Herron (Tennessee senator, attorney and former minister), Tyndale House Publishers, March 3, 2005, paperback, 208 pp., ISBN 0842381082; review prepared by Diana Marshall

This book includes discussion questions and recommended readings.

Chapter 1: How Can a Christian Be in Politics?

“Politics involves what we do together to try to make our shared life better, recognizing that sometimes the actual result can be that we make our lives together worse. The organized face of politics is government. Government is the collection of institutions and laws that develop out of the often-messy process of people engaged in politics (the American process of electing our leaders and the process of their serving us.) p. 4

Chapter 2: What does the Bible say?

How will our nation fare if we are judged on whether we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothes the naked, treat the sick, and visit the prisoners? (Matt. 25:31-46) Worse yet, this is how...we will be judged individually. p. 24

...God requires three things of us: doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly. (Micah 6:6-8) These requirements have distinct political implications. We cannot fully do justice in our society without acting politically. And kindness and humility are more powerful concepts that simply being nice; like justice, they should have a public as well as a private expression. If these qualities mark our politics, then politics can indeed be a form of worship. p. 32

Chapter 3: Doing Justice

Doing justice includes taking on the issues of predatory lending, protecting workers, aid to the poor, widows, and the fatherless. ...the biblical intent is clear. Society should be structured so that wealth and power do not all flow permanently into the hands of a few. Those in need should be helped, and the poor should be able to see that there is a way out of poverty. p. 45

The Bible calls us to shape our society in such a way that the poor are provided for and justice is ensured. This is to be a matter of basic political and social structure, not something left to individual charity and to chance. Justice is the opportunity to buy a home and build equity, not just a bed in an emergency shelter. Justice is access to the education and job skills that enable you to feed your family, not just food baskets at Christmas. Justice understands the old saying, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” p. 47-48

Chapter 4: Protecting Life

The legislative process protects life with laws related to Teen Drunk Drivers, Teens and Guns, Catching Killers, Domestic Violence, Organ Transplants, Safety seats for Infants and Seat Belts for Children, Primary Care (in rural areas and inner cities), Whistle Blowers, Abortion and Capital Punishment.

Chapter 5: Defending Freedom

As a legislator, I take an oath not to consent to “any act or thing, whatever, that shall have a tendency to lessen or abridge” the people’s “rights and privileges.” As a citizen, you should make a similar commitment when you vote. p. 76-77

Chapter 6: Characteristics of Faithful Politics

- “Clothe yourselves with compassion”
- “Love is Patient”
- “Be quick to listen”
- “Clothe yourselves with humility”
- “Pray without ceasing”
- “Love your enemies”
 - Politics should be about issues, not personalities or parties. p. 100
- “Speaking the truth in love”
- “Take courage”
- “The fruit of the Spirit is ... joy”
 - How can Christian do politics? Only by the grace of God and with a sense of humor. p. 108

Chapter 7: Beyond Partisanship: Serving God, Not Ideology

Anne Lamott “you can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hate all the same people you do.” p. 112

Compromise and Integrity: A central part of the definition of Integrity is wholeness. ...If we insist uncompromisingly on having our way, we will fuel opposition and fracture the peace of shalom. ...If we really love the truth, we will work to get as much of it into the world as possible, and that may require settling for less than the ideal. ...Most often, positive change only comes gradually, in small increments, with sustained effort, commitment, and yes, compromise. p. 116-117

Chapter 8: Evaluating Politicians and Policies

- Evaluating candidates
 - Character—We should not support a candidate until we have investigated the choices—personal and political—that candidate has made. p. 137 ...Consider which candidates are willing to seek the truth, to understand the complexities and nuances of issues, to put in the time and effort to think through proposals and policies before stating their opinion or making a statement. p. 139
 - Open-mindedness and Humility
 - Courage
 - Compassion
 - Intelligence and Ability
- Evaluating Policies and Proposals
 - ...Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason can help us discern a Christian position on an issue. p. 145

Chapter 9: A Vision of Christian Citizenship

People of faith should attempt to shape our government institutions and laws in accordance with our understanding of God’s will for the human family. p. 152

A Public Faith: A Balanced Approach to Social and Political Action

Charles Drew, Navypress Publishing Group, September 15, 2000, paperback, 144 pp., ISBN 1576832155; review prepared by Alice Hoffman

This is more a personal reflection provoked by this book rather than a review.

Giving Caesar His Due? Recently I had occasion to give serious thought to the Biblical passage that describes Jesus' response to the question put to him by a Pharisee who was hoping to trip him by asking, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not?" (Matthew 22:17)

The occasion for this reflection grew out of a recent experience in which I was given the opportunity to meet with Iraqi trade union leaders. They had been brought to the United States to meet with American labor leaders by an organization called U.S. LAW (U.S. Labor Against the War). I spent the afternoon in conversation with one of them who held a position of leadership within his union. We sat together with the interpreter at an outdoor café where the street was choked with many automobiles and in that environment I was led to a recognition of our own arrogance in that we seem to feel entitled to gasoline to fuel our cars. I said, "We Americans wonder how it can be that our oil got under your sand." That remark resonated with my two Arabic companions and I came to a renewed awareness of the basic immoralities inherent in being an occupying power.

In that context I was rereading the passages which describe the Pharisee's questioning of Jesus. Some theologians interpret the passage as a message as to how to reconcile the sphere of government with spiritual requirements. The argument goes that since God is supreme and rules overall including the powers of government, we therefore must respect Caesar's power as well as the power of God. (A Public Faith by Charles Drew, pp. 60, 61)

But if we read the story by placing Jesus in the context of his time, the story is transformed. Jesus lived in a society occupied by a foreign power, one that had no respect for the religious heritage of the Jews. Moreover, the Pharisee who put the question to him was a Herodian, one who collaborated with the Roman power in order to protect their own wealth and position in other words a quisling. Jesus asked to see the money that is to be paid in tribute. The coin is a Roman denarius, not a Jewish shekel. He said whose face is this on the coin you carry? "Caesars." "Then render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." One can almost imagine Jesus flipping the coin back to the interrogator with disdain. Now we can begin to understand the litany of anger against the Pharisees that follows this story. Jesus said "Woe unto you, you hypocrites and vipers. You are the sons of those who slew the prophets." "The prophets and wise men, some of them you kill and crucify; some of them you shall kill and scourge in your synagogues." You have followed scrupulously the rules of religious practice but "You have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith. You strain out the gnat and swallow the camel." (Matthew 23: 23)

I feel confident that Jesus would not feel that a Christian owed anything like equal allegiance to Caesar and to God. Rather his preaching requires absolute allegiance to God and to loving care for one's neighbors even if adherence to God's requirements means the loss of possessions and family. (Mark 13:12)