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God and Caesar: Is Peaceful Coexistence Possible?

“Good evening, all. Last week, I spent two very rewarding hours with several of you in preparation for this evening’s topic on religion and politics. Throughout our discussion, we unveiled apparent contradictions and seemingly strange bedfellows. We asked ourselves, partly in jest, if Jesus Christ could have influenced the Founding Fathers in inserting the Establishment Clause in our constitution. After all, Jesus himself commanded to give Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.

“Was Jesus indicating that he favored establishing a wall of separation between the two spheres of life, the religious and the secular, so that the activities of church and state be kept independent from one another?

“Or, was he simply suggesting that there was nothing wrong with believers abiding by laws handed down by the state while fulfilling the obligations that citizenship imposed on them?

“On the other hand, the Founding Fathers, who in one way or another believed in an almighty deity, seemingly made their intentions clear about the relationship between religion and government: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof*, reads the very First Article of the Bill of Rights added to the Constitution as a prerequisite for its approval. In this first amendment, the religious issue precedes freedom of speech, of the press, and freedom of assembly. A random act, perhaps, but in reality the Fathers were rightfully concerned about this symbiotic relationship. After all, their ancestors as well as some of them had left their land in part because of religious persecution.

“Here were the enablers of a new nation indicating that government needed to remain impartial by not favoring or supporting one religion over another—in effect, telling us that all faiths deserve equal support—as some believe; or that government was required to remain completely secular while expressing no support whatsoever for any religion at all, as others claim.

“The Fathers, nonetheless, stated that while the state was required to accept limitations in the area of religion, when it came to citizenship it was going to be a free-for-all activity; that there could be no wall of separation between citizens and the secular sphere, which includes politics.

“Separation of church and state, what does it mean today? What should it mean? How problematic is it? Would there be less conflict if we could somehow bridge the existing gap, or do we need to widen it more?”

“Captain Francis, why don’t you provide us with a brief panoramic view of the problem?”

“I’ll give it a try. I think that even when the intentions of the Founding Fathers were to prevent serious religious conflict, they must still have realized that the First Amendment provided society with the seeds of inevitable tension if and when key circumstances were to arise.

“There’s little doubt that in a pluralistic democracy the nature and diversity of religions and believers are a potential source of political turmoil. For example, there is a constant tension surrounding the commandment to share one’s affection between God and neighbors. This tension—the particular or private versus the social—leads to a conflict between the temporal and the afterlife that is inherent within most religious faiths. Inevitably, this tension spills over onto the social and political arenas. If we then add the various faiths and values that ensue from the First Amendment allowing for the free exercise of religious views, it is to be expected that these views would clash with one another and vis-à-vis non-believers. Such is the nature of the conflict.”

“I think you’re right, Captain,” I said, “but while it’s no secret that religion and politics had been at odds with each other throughout the young history of the republic, what’s being debated nowadays is why the conflict has intensified in recent years.”

“I’ll give you one possible view,” he replied. “According to one author, the current controversy arose thirty-something years ago, as a reaction to decades of cultural and judicially-sponsored secularism. Religious leaders had failed to recognize that cultural secularism was spreading a gospel of its own that in many ways was inimical to religious values; God, they felt, was being omitted from the public arena. Some of these religious forces reacted and began to fight back. In doing so, religion began to infringe on what the author refers to as *an up-to-then peaceful secular turf that is unwilling to cede ground*.¹”

“Ms. Lewis, do you accept this view?” I asked.

“To some extent, yes, I do” she replied. “And I think there are several social phenomena here at work that allows us to understand the nature of the conflict. Modern society is definitely becoming more secularized, and that means three things: first, many people are being turned off by old fashioned religion while becoming more attracted by the seductive effects of modern society with its emphasis on what I would call *the adoration of the self*, that stresses personal looks, sensuality, relaxed sexual norms, technological gadgets,

fashion, social status, and the like.

“Second, mainstream religion is undergoing deep changes seeking to maintain a precarious balance between the spiritual and the temporal, in effect, seeking to understand and relate to the modern world more effectively instead of opposing its challenges. And finally, there are many conservative believers who feel deeply threatened by these modern forces, who feel that the only way to safeguard their traditional values is to recapture the ground that is being lost. Each of these forces has their own agenda, and their common battleground is the political arena.”

“I see. Does this mean that adding a religious dimension to our political dialogue is a welcomed phenomenon?”

“The problem I see is that injecting religion into social and political issues will generate divisions,” said Mr. Brandon.

“Is yours an argument to invalidate religious freedom?” I asked. Can we truly say that allowing religion to become more involved in the public arena and in politics will result in making the existing conflict more acute?

“Let’s place the issue in perspective. Whatever degree of conflict we have experienced throughout our history, has it been that brutal? Have we ever experienced serious religious persecutions in this country? Religious warfare? Inquisitions? Pogroms? Controversy, yes, but even then, nothing to brag about, I think. Let’s face it, from a religious standpoint, we are a very civilized nation, and I believe that our history backs up this claim.”

“That might be the case, sir, and yet, a lot is being said about how religion is dividing society today,” claimed Mr. Brandon. “There’s a preoccupation as to whether religious views could lead us into becoming less civilized; more violent, perhaps. After all, look how extremist religious beliefs have triggered violence in the Middle East, the Near East, Africa, and Asia. And, the wars we are fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, don’t they have religious underpinnings as well?”

“Granted, Mr. Brandon, but does that mean that we should consider barring religious discussions in politics because religion is simply too volatile?” I asked. “Do we fear that religious-driven violence could ensue and spread even within our borders? We could, of course, amend the constitution to abolish religion from the public discourse, but I’m afraid the aftermath would create even more violence than Prohibition ever did.

“On the other hand, given that religious expression within our country has been, for the most part, free of violence, don’t you think the way our society handles religion and politics can serve as a model for other nations and cultures?”

“At the same time, there are those who live and die maintaining that religion has no business in the political discourse,” said Ms. Vanhurst, “namely because of the turmoil it creates. Those violent demonstrations that erupted over the Vietnam war and the racial violence of past decades, weren’t they driven, for the most part, by very secular, non-religious strife?”

“I think that’s a good point,” observed Ms. Williamson. “Although ironically, if we look closer we’ll notice that arguments in favor and against the Viet-

nam war, as well as many of the issues lying beneath racial violence, reflected moral and religious themes: peace, security, freedom, justice, discrimination.”

“Interesting!” I said. Any other views on the matter?”

“I’ll add another dimension to our current religious controversy,” replied the captain. “Today, religious divisiveness in the United States is not only inter-denominational or among faiths; lately, differences of opinion have arisen within Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Presbyterians, and Fundamentalists. From this standpoint alone, one can only wonder why religion should be so significant in politics. It’s not as if homogeneous religious blocs can be counted on to vote for a certain party; not anymore. Such heterogeneity of views has added to the conflict.

“I think that religion has become a focal point in political debates across the board. How one’s faith should be interpreted and lived in the secular sphere has emerged as a catalyst for political action. People are beginning to discuss secular issues from a religious perspective; or rather from various religious perspectives. Take a look at the political panorama today. The Christian Right movement, and its new creation—the Tea Party—has been rather successful in bringing the issue of religion to the political fore. Nonetheless, likely because of its successes at electing candidates and on account of its position on cultural issues, the movement has brought about the wrath, not only from the very liberal, as well as reasonable criticism from quite moderate religious and political figures, too.²

“Then, you have humanists questioning the constitutional propriety of religious symbols in government-funded lands or activities; the Supreme Court rendering decisions on religious issues that pleases no one; Presidents Bush and Obama supporting funding of faith-based community groups to do social work; citizens in a town in Pennsylvania voting out of office ardent religious believers who sought to include the theory of Intelligent Privately-funded preachers being given the green light to spread the Gospel within the premises of the Armed Forces; Kentucky legislators being asked to publicly profess their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their savior as a means to be elected.”

“We get it, Captain,” I said. “May we then conclude that religion is a hotly debated topic in politics today? If so, I’d like to start this evening’s discussion by exploring the issue of faith, and whether it should have a place in politics. Ms. Lewis, you will represent the Left, correct?”

“I guess so.”

“Very well, and you, Captain Francis, you have said that you’re a man of faith with rather traditional moral values. You will argue the conservative viewpoint. First, however, I’d like Ms. Lewis to explain to us who integrates this so-called ‘Left’ on religious matters. Are we talking about atheists, agnostics?”

“Not necessarily.” she replied. “Actually, this loosely uncoordinated movement is far broader, and in some respect brings interesting incongruities. Until very recently, the ‘Left’ has been characterized by a dislike toward the use of religious symbols in public as well as by its abstention of religious language

while discussing political issues. However, what brings this amorphous collection together is that it doesn't see eye-to-eye with the Christian Right's agenda."

"May we call them secular humanists?" I asked.

"Yes and No. There are many devoted believers in this group," she said. "Some among them are very active politically, and yet others are quite passive. I think that because most of them react to the Christian Right, with some exceptions, they are likely to vote Democratic."

"So, this issue seems to be divided between conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats," I said. "Okay, now, tell me Ms. Lewis, from your standpoint as a confirmed humanist, why does it bother you when a believer argues political issues from a religious viewpoint? It would seem that anyone, including the 'Left,' ought to be able to do the same, correct?"

"I realize, sir, that anyone can insert their religious beliefs into a discussion of political issues; the question is, do we gain anything by doing so? Or does it simply complicate the discussion?"

"You feel as if the Christian Right is forcing you to discuss politics on their terms, Ms. Lewis. On the other hand, through your insistence that they shouldn't, aren't you in fact forcing them to discuss politics on your terms?"

"Yes, you may be right, but what if I refuse to go along with their terms and they refuse to go along with mine?"

"I guess that would put an end to the political dialogue," I claimed. "It means that political discourse would only take place through the ballot box. My impression, however, is that if one group sees itself losing ground it will very soon switch its strategy in order to gain voters."

"That's exactly what seems to be happening!" she replied. "All of a sudden, Democrats have discovered that God brings in votes and are using religion to win political office. One social commentator, however, believes that this attempt to create what he calls a *biblical theocracy* in the end will *threaten our democratic discourse*.³"

"Do you think it will, Ms. Vanhurst?" I asked.

"I don't think so," she said. "What I think may happen is that in their earnest attempts to win votes both the Right and the Left may create a political environment more characterized by self-righteousness and hypocrisy than anything else. To begin with, the Democratic strategy leaves them vulnerable to charges that they are cynically becoming the newly born-again Christians and are exploiting God to serve their ends. Take, for example, Democrats in Georgia and Alabama who began to promote Bible classes in public schools early in 2006, an election year, for obvious political purposes. One Democrat even admitted that Democrats are not willing to give up the South, and if it's religion it takes to win, they have plenty to provide voters. Republicans, on the other hand, resorted to name calling and labeled Democrats 'Pharisees,' in order to denigrate the political competition."⁴

"Ms. Vanhurst, what do you consider proper religious expression?" I asked.

"Well, I'm not too religious myself, largely on account of the hypocrisy I

see among many believers. Nonetheless, although I realize that religious expression is a fundamental right in our political system, I think there's something really awful about using religion to bring in the votes.

"If I were a truly religious person, my political behavior would be an affirmation of my faith and not just a vehicle to get people into public office. I think that what we could be witnessing here are the two parties willing to sacrifice religious values at the altar of politics. So, there may be a religious revival going on, but one that is largely more political than religious. And, in the end, what do we stand to gain from it?"

"Other than to the affirmation of our constitutional rights, we don't know yet, do we?" I said.

"Well, if I remember correctly, children of the same God fought and burned each other during the Reformation and the Counter Reformation," Ms. Lewis noted, "not over a piece of land, not because someone had invaded the other's territory, but over one's right to air his beliefs. They fought each other over beliefs!"

"You're right, but that's the power that religious beliefs can unleash, particularly in a very religious environment," said Mr. Hunt. "But today the struggle is somewhat more mundane. We live in a more secularized society, and both parties and the organizations that support them are more after voters than souls. The debate is more about ways of living our lives on earth than getting to heaven."

"But don't you think that politicians who use religion run a risk of turning off many non-believers, and perhaps, even some believers as well, either because of their self-righteousness or their hypocrisy?" she replied.

"You seem to equate religious behavior with self-righteousness and hypocrisy," noted Mr. Hunt. "I agree that many of us can easily fall into such tendencies, but not everyone who considers himself or herself religious or spiritual believes he is superior to others. Same thing with hypocrisy; sometimes—not always—true believers hide their flaws not because they're hypocritical but because they're ashamed of them.

"I agree that the actions of 'religious' politicians can turn people off if voters denote insincerity in them. Mind you, I think it will be difficult for politicians to attempt to show sincerity of belief."

"Why, Mr. Hunt?" I asked.

"Too much cynicism, brought largely by political scandals. Winning political office will always be the assumed motive behind any candidate's effort to be elected. But, when moral scandals happen people will unavoidably point to hypocrisy, even when it's only a matter of human weakness. Let's face it, religion and morality place a great burden on politicians because they have to own up to their values, so voters place high expectations on them. Unfortunately when an elected official slips, it's faith and religion that pay dearly.

"Cynicism is a form of ignorance because it displaces the blame onto the wrong source," added Mr. Hunt. When cynicism becomes excessive, it

evokes some degree of arrogance, because through its satire it suggests self righteousness. Through his sardonic demeanor toward religion and faith, the cynic suggests to the audience that his attitude is more ethical and proper, which, of course, is not always the case.”

“How are these attitudes affecting the political debate?” I asked.

“The debate has become more intolerant,” he replied. “There seems to be an inability, maybe unwillingness, on all sides to understand each other. Beliefs have become too entrenched, too rigid, and too ideological. And as you have reminded us, sir, ideology tends to narrow the mind; it makes behavior more unyielding, because its followers tend to believe—need to believe—that they have the absolute truth. So why bother to listen to impostors? These attitudes will threaten any discourse, whether political or religious.”

“It certainly could,” now said Ms. Lewis. “The concept of God is a powerful motivator, particularly when He is believed to be on both sides of the argument. That should tell us that the injection of religion in politics is perhaps ill-ordained, although, perhaps, unavoidable.”

“Be that as it may, I think the argument is moot, Ms. Lewis, because we’re not amending the Constitution any time soon to abolish public religious expression,” I explained. “The question is how we deal with the revival of religion that is taking place in politics. Anyone? Mr. Hunt.”

“In my view, what threatens the political discourse is the claim that both factions think that God speaks only through them. This would suggest that the conflict will continue as long as one or both groups refuse to accept that God may reveal Himself or speak through the opposition, too.”

“What is the solution, to leave religious beliefs out of the political discussion?” I asked.

“Not necessarily,” he replied. “We don’t want to resort to restricting one’s freedom of speech. What’s needed is not to set aside one’s faith but to engage in a constructive dialogue, one in which we seriously consider the other side, too.”

“Fair enough,” I said. “However, that entails having to rise above partisan ideology and politics.”

“Yes, and that’s the obstacle they need to overcome,” said Mr. Hunt.

“I want to go on and ask Ms. Lewis, who seems to dislike the idea that religion has no place in politics, what is one to do if personal faith takes them into political activism?”

“That’s something I haven’t been able to understand,” she replied. “I realize that it’s mostly conservative Christians who bring their religious views into politics, and yet, there’s a strong conservative sector of the population that doesn’t feel the urge to do that. They are believers, they go to church but they don’t go around brandishing their beliefs everywhere they go as their religious colleagues do.”

“Brandishing?” I asked. “Do you mean like showing off, flaunting their beliefs?”

“Yes, you hear about them on the radio and TV; you read about them in newspapers. These believers project an attitude that they are superior to everyone else.”

“Kind of like in-your-face Christianity?” I inquired.

“Yes! It is very arrogant,” she claimed. “Maybe they don’t realize it, but I don’t think they are winning too many converts the way they go about preaching.”

“I understand, Ms. Lewis,” I said. “But I would like to make a distinction based on my experience. You may be referring to some of the most visible and vocal leaders of the Christian Right, and now the Tea Party. Somehow, they end up sounding self-righteous and pompous. Nonetheless, this has not been my experience with conservative Christians I know or with your typical Evangelical Christian in our towns and cities. These people are as fine a bunch of human beings as they come. So, I wonder if it might not be the case that the grassroots is getting a bad rap on account of the leadership.”

“I don’t know,” she replied sounding somewhat puzzled. “Take a look at the attitude of those proselytizing inside the Air Force Academy, almost with impunity!” she said.

“Good point,” I said. “Any takers? Mr. Dickerson, would you like to argue this issue?”

“Sure. I can see that such apparent zealousness would bother me. But at the same time, I have to realize that it’s not as if they are committing a crime or even insulting others. Their actions are much more uplifting than pretending to be decent folks while stealing from the public or hanging around the neighborhood vandalizing houses. I can see that they may become pedantic if they overdo their stuff, namely if they don’t respect my desire not to be preached at. But I can understand their behavior. Doesn’t their Christian faith tell them to go forth and preach the Gospel? Can I fault them for being true to their convictions?”

“They are harassing others, Andy,” claimed Ms. Lewis.

“And so the government will have to come up with guidelines akin to our sexual harassment policies in order to minimize the conflict. For example, if people initially don’t mind whenever these individuals engage them, to me that’s a green light for these potential converts to be talked into heaven if they wish. But, once anyone makes it clear from the very beginning of the conversation that he or she doesn’t want to listen, then this proselytizer should do as the Gospel says and wipe off his sandals and go on to find someone else who’s willing to listen.”

“It’s not that simple,” she replied. “In first place why should religious preachers engage in proselytizing activities, thereby preventing students and employees from doing what they are there to do, which is to study and to work! Second, don’t these actions invite other faiths, including New Age humanists, to proselytize, too? I admire their zeal, but someone has to prevent these kinds of disruptions. Moreover, some students may find it difficult or uncomfortable trying to assert themselves by turning down individuals who

are putting them on the spot unnecessarily.”

“I guess that you may have a point there,” replied Mr. Dickerson. “However, I see proselytism no different than a tele-marketer or a political activist seeking to sell you something or win adherents to his or her party. These activities are almost inevitable in life. What you’re suggesting is that they shouldn’t be taking place at work or within the academies. Okay, I’ll buy that, but we ought to understand that outside the academies or the work place, people will have to assert themselves and learn to say, No. I mean we simply can’t prevent anyone from knocking at your door to sell you something, including a belief.”

“I agree. Nonetheless, the issue gets a bit more complicated,” said Ms. Lewis. “Take, for example, the action taken by the House of Representatives while passing its 2006 defense authorization bill. The majority on the Armed Services Committee tacked a provision on military chaplains that would allow them to pray at public meetings and ceremonies in accordance with their particular faith, which in that case it meant to pray in the name of Jesus.

“These chaplains should have known that they were not there only to serve Christians,” she continued. “There are Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, and who knows how many others who believe that God has manifested to them in a different fashion through no fault of their own.

“Basically, government provisions like these are about force-feeding Jesus down people’s throats, thereby violating the principle of respecting one’s religious beliefs. How does it help a Jew or a Muslim to attend a ceremony that is blessed in the name of Jesus? Or, if we wanted to be thorough, why not admit into the Armed Forces people who only believe in Christ? At least, why not be consistent?”

Everyone became amused by her attempt to stretch her sarcasm to show how unreasonable and insensitive this mode of thinking can become.

“Granted, this sounds ridiculous, but, at the very least, or rather fortunately, there were those who opposed this provision including the chief of Navy chaplains, a Catholic priest, and the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces,” replied Mr. Dickerson.

“Why would they have done that?” asked Mr. Edson. “Could they fear some form of diluted Christianity perhaps?”

“My take is that they stretched their faith in a show of religious respect toward others in order to make it more inclusive,” replied Ms. Lewis. “They decided that they didn’t regard an exclusive, spiritual country club as being very Christian.”

“Mr. Dickerson, would you care to reply?” I asked.

“Not really, except to observe that the action by the Republican House committee was very close to having been authoritarian and not too far in the behavioral spectrum from radical Muslim Fundamentalists.”

“Do we sense an ill-intent in the House’s provision?” I asked.

“Of course not,” replied Ms. Lewis, “but does it matter if the provision is well intended? I realize that these individuals are all probably God-fearing, or shall I say, Jesus-fearing people. But an ardent faith should not blind us to a

basic tenet of that faith: respect for other people's beliefs; the Armed Forces should respect the conscience of those it has chosen to admit within its institutions, or else they should restrict their admission."

"Thank you. Let me go on to something else. Ms. Vanhurst, how do you feel about politicians or public figures that bring out their religious beliefs in public?" I asked.

"I would think that any elected official is entitled to express his or her views in religious terms," she replied. "There's nothing in the Constitution that forbids it. Also, does it matter if one elected official argues his position relying on his faith while another one argues his from an atheistic point of view?"

"Nothing in the Separation clause suggests that a secular or atheist viewpoint is more constitutionally valid. So, why should an elected official's religious position matter at all? If I agree with his view, should I not vote for him once I find out that his religion is backing his vote?"

"I'm sure Ms. Lewis probably wouldn't mind hearing a politician defend abortion on the basis of his faith, since she is in favor of abortion. And Ms. Williamson could care less if it were an atheist politician condemning abortion, because she's against abortion. Also, it shouldn't matter whether the issue or the religious belief guides my vote. What I ultimately care is for someone to represent my beliefs and my values, regardless of whether he's an atheist or a believer."

"Mr. Wasserman," I called out.

"I think we need to get over this issue of religious involvement in politics; it's not unconstitutional; it's not politically incorrect; and it's not religiously improper. Religion is a vehicle of ideas, beliefs, and values, just like any other philosophy or political movement.

"I realize that the way the amendment is written lends itself to ambiguity which is why people tend to misinterpret it. But logic and a bit of common sense, I think, should take care of much of that ambiguity. Besides, religious views on all political issues nowadays cut both ways. Let me give an example of religion incorrectly rubbing some people the wrong way.

"I read an article in the paper about a woman who blamed President Bush and unknown forces or individuals for her pregnancy by allowing religion to seep into politics. According to her, religion played a role in the Federal Drug Administration's indecision regarding the availability of Plan B or the so-called 'morning after' pill. She claimed that one day *in a sudden rush of passion*, [she] *failed to insert* [her] *diaphragm*, and since the administration had not approved Plan B she became pregnant and had no choice but to have an abortion.⁵ Her veiled recommendation was that government should restrain the exercise of religion among elected officials, and presumably among believers to prevent these kinds of incidents from happening.

"Setting aside what this seemingly intelligent woman—I believe she said she was an attorney—had to go through, I'm sure that she didn't realize that there

probably were religious elected officials and believers who supported Plan B, only that their views had not prevailed until much later. I imagine that she believed that only atheists supported Plan B. This is the type of misunderstandings we're facing today."

"Ms. Lewis, go ahead," I said.

"I wanted to ask Ms. Vanhurst, if she's suggesting that it's only religious ignorance that is causing all the conflict in politics."

"No, of course not, ignorance is only part of the problem," replied Ms. Vanhurst. "What I'm saying is that the conflict is inevitable because of the nature and diversity of religious beliefs, as the captain indicated, and the fact that religious freedom is an essential part of what we are; the conflict is not going to go away. What we have to do is to prevent it from becoming a divisive element. We have to look for ways to identify common means to address the issues. We don't want to go back to the Christian religious wars we had in Europe anymore than imitate sectarian violence in the Middle East. I mean, is it too absurd to suggest that fighting and killing in the name of God is anything but downright stupid!"

"Look, suppose Congress passes a law prohibiting abortion, and then we find out that the religious beliefs of those who voted for the measure coincided with their opposition to abortion. Would their votes have violated the First Amendment? Should we ask members of Congress to set aside their personal values, values that are the outcome of one's faith, on grounds that their beliefs pose a conflict of interest? On what basis should we then ask them to vote? Suppose there are atheists in Congress who happen to be against abortion and they vote accordingly; would that make their votes more constitutional? This is such a non-issue!"

"Melanie," Ms. Lewis called out, "may I remind you that there are principled people who set aside their personal religious values to comply with their legal duties. I mean, unless you think they are not principled."

"May I ask what exactly are you talking about, Leslie?"

"Tim Kaine, during his campaign for the governorship in Virginia, publicly announced that although he opposed the death penalty on account of his faith—a faith that according to him has taught him that life is sacred—he would enforce and carry out the death penalty because he would respect the law. So, if he can do it, why can't others?"

"I know some politicians do it; I just wonder how they get away with doing it," she replied.

"Why do you say that?"

"Leslie, I believe Tim Kaine is an honorable man, but I do question the logic of his decision. According to him life is not only important, it's more than important, it is sacred for Pete's sake! I presume he meant that it's his life that's sacred, not others'. Now, if he believes that taxes, transportation, and education issues are more sacred than life, then I can understand the logic of his position; otherwise, I can't. Anything that is sacred is paramount, so how can he

set something that is so sacred aside?”

“Come on, Leslie,” snapped back Ms Lewis. “Isn’t this an example of giving Caesar what belongs to Caesar and God what belongs to God?”

“Going by what the governor himself said he believes, what he said he would do was more like surrendering to Caesar what belongs to God,” Ms. Vanhurst replied.

“Okay, now that you two ladies have made your points, let’s go on,” I said. If there are other religious incongruities anyone wants to discuss, now’s the time.”

“Yeah, we’re talking about religious issues, right? Well, what about undocumented immigration,” began Mr. Edson.

“What about it?” I asked.

“Well, I find the Christian Right’s response on this issue very confusing,” he said.

“What exactly is it that you find confusing, Mr. Edson?” I asked again.

“Look, I’m no expert on religious matters, and I could be wrong, but if there’s a political issue that calls for a religious response is the one on undocumented immigrants I don’t mean to say that illegal immigration is only a religious issue. We can debate the merits or demerits of this issue from political, legal, economic, social, even cultural points of view, and likely will find very reasonable positions on both sides of the fence.

“But if my beliefs are based on Judeo-Christian values, how can I fail to miss the religious dimension on this issue? Even more so, how can my religious beliefs not predominate over my political, economic, or legal views on this issue, no matter how much aversion I may have toward undocumented immigrants?”

“Michael,” said Mr. Wasserman. “You need to realize that many of our constituents are demanding that we put an end to illegal immigration.”

“I know that,” Mr. Edson replied. “But my question has to do with the attitude that people reflect in how they want to go about doing so. From a religious standpoint, the issue is whether those who call themselves Christians can walk the talk or not. Look, if we were referring to people who nonchalantly come into our country on vacation or business and don’t want to go through the trouble of getting a visa, I would understand someone’s opposition, and anger.

“I would even understand the anger among people whose religious values play second fiddle to political and economic values, or to *nativist* feelings; they don’t want their taxes to pay for people who are here illegally; they don’t like the whole business of the melting pot; or simply don’t like those who violate our borders and our laws! I can understand those views.

“But, we’re talking about people whose primary reason for crossing our borders illegally is not to attain a higher standard of living, but simply to escape the state of misery and despair that has brought them here as well as the need to help relatives they have left behind!

“You know, if the majority of these people were criminals or even selfish individuals who are simply looking after themselves, I would definitely rethink my views. But, do we know that these illegal immigrants send billions of dollars

back home to support their families; money they could have kept for themselves, money they earn doing mostly manual, low paying work? Aren't these people among the poorest of the poor, people who would have preferred to stay at home with their parents, spouses, and children instead of having to travel to a foreign land and put up with discrimination, humiliation, and persecution?

"Doesn't the image of a pregnant woman traveling on a donkey with her husband to give birth far away from their home, only to end up in a barn after being turned down time and time again because no one would help them out, ring a bell? Don't Christians relive this image every Christmas? If helping those in need, if the example of Christmas is not a Christian value, what is?"

"I can understand non-believers opposing illegal immigrants for a wide variety of reasons. But, people who call themselves Christians, going as far as to criminalize such behavior, deny health care to children, persecute them, while others who also call themselves Christians keep silence; that is somewhat confusing to me. I even read that a member of a Christian organization defending its opposition to illegal immigrants has gone as far as to say that the protection of national borders is a biblical principle!"

"In which Bible version does that passage appear?" asked Mr. Hunt.

"You're asking me? I don't think such a version exists, but if it does, it must be a pretty loose version," replied Mr. Edson.

"So, if I read you correctly, you're not appealing to human sentiments but to the logical flow of values that should emerge from one's understanding of his or her faith," I said.

"Both!" he replied. "As a matter of fact, one doesn't need to be religious, Christian or anything else, to project this view. I'm not too religious, but I do have feelings and values that tell me that I'm supposed to help those in need, and these illegal immigrants certainly need our help. In this case, my point is also directed at what seems to be a contradiction between one's belief and his or her behavior."

"While I would have to agree with you in principle," I said, "don't you think that following 9/11, it would be irresponsible of our government not to seal our borders?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, perhaps I didn't explain myself too well," replied Mr. Edson. "What you're now asking is a totally different question. I not only agree that we have to seal the borders completely; we should have done that the day after 9/11, but namely out of concerns for terrorism and drug smuggling. As a society, we can't make ourselves vulnerable in the process of helping others; that's neither fair nor responsible citizenship. What I said refers to poor people who are already here trying to earn a living and trying to help their families back home."

"Any objection to what Mr. Edson has said?" I asked

"How about a prejudice n my part?" said Mr. Dickerson.

"Sure! It's a sign of wisdom and emotional maturity to question our own prejudices. Go ahead, Mr. Dickerson," I said.

"I'm in favor of legalizing those who are already here, largely because we as a

nation and as a government perhaps have not done enough of what might have been required for these people to stay in their countries in first place. Also, I have to agree with Michael, if I have to choose between staying in my homeland with my family and migrating in order to earn a lousy living in a strange land, I would opt for staying in my country.

“I think many of us don’t realize what it means to leave one’s family; it’s not anything like going to college in another country. And yet, I admit that I’m bothered by this arrogance on the part of many, certainly not all, who believe that they’re entitled to be here, that they have the right to stay here, and so you find them arrogantly claiming a non-existing right.

“I’m not saying they have to beg for our government to grant them legal stay, but do they have to be so pushy about it? Don’t they realize that their behavior turns off many who otherwise would support them?”

“You bring out two important points,” I said. “Even as a legal immigrant myself, it was tough for me to leave my country, and even tougher to be accepted, although I looked just like any other white American kid in high school. So, for you to feel that illegal immigrants deserve a hand, Mr. Dickerson, requires a special sensibility, and I admire that.

“I also agree with your second statement. After all, if it’s the goodness of our government and our people that allows illegal immigrants to stay in the country, I would think that illegal immigrants should be mindful that their desire and need to stay should not be demanded but requested. We’re talking about respect and consideration instead of defiance and insolence.

“Having said this, let us try to understand, not justify, but to understand their attitude. It’s important to realize that, since its inception the Christian religion looked favorably upon immigration as a basic human right, even though the concept of human rights did not exist at the time. Remember, if the first Jewish Christians had not migrated to alien lands, there might not have been a Christian religion in this country. And, we all know that the Roman emperors were not among the most hospitable of hosts.

“The early Christians, of all peoples, learned how difficult it was to have to migrate into an alien land. If today’s migrations are driven by human necessity rather than by choice, I think that if I were in the shoes of one of these illegal immigrants, I would feel a deep sense of fear and anger if I thought that I was going to be deported back to those conditions that forced me to leave my home in the first place.

“So, one very natural response to fear and anger, unfortunately, is arrogance and defiance, the more so when it is collectively expressed. In the end, although this attitude you talk about bothers me, too, Mr. Dickerson, I need to be able to view it through the needs and fears of the immigrant in order to understand it. And to do this, I need to overcome my own prejudice.

“Granted that our prejudices sometimes satisfy us in a perverted sense, just like anger sometimes make us feel good; but you now have the choice of either taking pleasure on your prejudice or overcoming it altogether and opting instead for a more humane response toward others. Think about it.”

“Gotta question,” said Mr. Brandon. “Given what you have said, sir, what do we tell those law-abiding citizens who insist that our borders and our laws need to be respected? After all, insisting that our borders be respected is a valid argument, so what do we tell those congressmen and senators, and others who believe that these people should be deported and wait for their turn to return once they have been properly authorized?”

“I can see that those who approach this issue from a legalistic standpoint will focus, logically, on something that we’re taught at home and at school: not to cut in front of the line,” I said. “This behavior shows contempt and disrespect for others who made the effort to get to the show ahead of others.

“My only problem with this approach is that these persons don’t realize that we’re not talking about getting in line to get tickets to the ball game or a concert. I see this issue from a highly humane standpoint. I guess that I could try to explain to legalists that there’s something about misery and poverty that don’t go well with human beings. We could tell them that the problem lies in that people don’t find hunger too chic; that, nowadays, for one reason or another, but people just don’t seem to like hunger and poverty.”

“You’re not taking the argument seriously, sir,” replied Mr. Brandon.

“But I am! Mr. Brandon. Tell me, how do you explain to people who need to feed their families and feed themselves that they shouldn’t have crossed the border illegally! Mind you, I’m not defending contempt for our laws, for we need to be a nation of laws. I’m talking about distinguishing between cutting in front of the line at the ball game and doing so because you and your family are poor and hungry.

“I would ask these legalists what they would do if they were in the shoes of illegal immigrants. Frankly, if I have to explain all this to people who call themselves honorable and Christians, there must be something wrong somewhere. Moreover, what would you say about the attitude of immigrants who already have established themselves in the country but want to put an end to legal migration. These people want to shut down the same channels that allowed them to come into the United States, because they think that more immigrants, like them, would not be good for the country.⁶ How can anyone possibly argue against such brazen acts of selfishness and insensitivity on the part of those who want to close the door behind them once they themselves have made it in?”

“Sir, if I may, what about this whole issue that took place a few years ago while Congress was debating the immigration bill; someone came up with a Spanish version of our National Anthem? As a symbol of their struggle” asked Ms. Williamson. “Wouldn’t you agree that this was kind of insulting?”

“Well, I don’t know if the intention was to be insulting,” I replied, “but I can see how we can perceive it as such. I think it was rather brassy and certainly not the most imaginative or politically clever way of gaining supporters to one’s cause.”

“But why should it be perceived as being insensitive?” asked Ms. Vanhurst. “After all, the national anthem has been played in quite a few musical formats, including rock’n roll style with electric guitars.”

“I think that if you to take into account other aspects, then, yes, I believe the action can be insolent,” I replied. “Without thinking if their action could represent an affront to many Americans, some politically clueless individuals offer an un-requested version of a nationally sacred symbol in a different language to the rest of the nation, as if saying, ‘we don’t have to do it your way, we’ll do it our way!’

“Are the lyrics respectful? Yes, very much so, but that’s beside the point. Perhaps people don’t understand that among the most unifying cultural elements within a nation, along with its borders and its patriotic symbols, language is the most significant one. And yet, in this case, all three elements, borders, patriotic symbol, and language, were brushed aside; probably unconsciously, maybe stupidly, but in a very concrete manner. Can I blame many for feeling sour about this incident? I can’t, I myself felt pretty bad about it.”

“Sir, you’re ranting,” Ms. Vanhurst said softly.

“You’re right, I’m blowing off steam. Okay, I need someone to quiet me down. Any comments?”

“Very well, if there are no other comments along these lines, I would like to ask a question to either Mr. Edson or Ms. Vanhurst. Both of you indicated that there should be greater correspondence between religious belief and political behavior; that contradictions between the two suggest hypocrisy or ignorance.”

“In some instances, yes, it’s hypocrisy,” said Ms. Vanhurst, “but not always, and we have to be careful not to judge, since we don’t know anything about the individual’s internal motivations.

“I would say the behavior is hypocritical if one is fully conscious of the contradiction and does nothing about it. However, it’s common for people to be unaware of the relationship between one’s behavior and the value or principle he is violating. Sometimes, partisan ideologies politicize our beliefs and we need to be reminded of the contradiction.

“Moreover, sometimes, even after being reminded of the existing contradiction, once we’ve taken a public stand, it takes time for us to come to terms with our behavior. Elected officials may even find it difficult or inconvenient to do so, despite their desire to correct themselves, because they would be afraid of being called *flip-floppers*; they could lose their elections and find themselves joining the ranks of the unemployed. Also, there may be cases in which sheer obstinacy, ignorance or simply one’s own limitations, may prevent us from establishing this one-to-one relationship between beliefs and behavior.”

“Your turn, Mr. Edson, tell me, when we point out inconsistencies in others’ behavior, given that no one is perfect, isn’t that kind of the pot calling the kettle black?”

“I think it is,” he replied.

“You think it is?” I asked. “What I meant to ask is, doesn’t the pot have little credibility in calling out the kettle, Mr. Edson?”

“Yes it does, sir. But, if being pots and kettles means that we’re not allowed to call on each other’s mistakes, how can there ever be moral progress?”

“You tell me, Mr. Edson.”

“Well, I think we recover that credibility to the extent that we are able to recognize our mistakes and then work to change our attitudes and behavior,” he said.

“That’s right, Mr. Edson.” I replied. “That’s the burden on those who call out for consistency in others. We have to try to be consistent ourselves.”

“That’s quite a difficult task,” he said.

“Amen to that, Mr. Edson. That was my point.”

“Any other questions?”

“Yes, I believe we diverted a bit from the issue we were discussing,” advised Mr. Brandon, “so I’d like to go back to the fine line separating what’s legal and illegal from what’s wise or unwise in religion and politics.”

“Go ahead,” I remarked.

“There was this story in the newspaper,” he began saying, “about a group of Christian clergymen who had complained to the Internal Revenue Service that two churches in Ohio had broken federal government regulations, not by bringing religion into politics, but by bringing politics into religion; in other words, by holding political activities and expressly endorsing one candidate in state elections.⁷ Are the activities proper? Are they right?”

“Captain?” I called out.

“I don’t see any problems with members of the clergy preaching to their flocks about morality in politics; politics is a legitimate area in which religion should exercise its responsibility. How can it not? Politics is about policies that influence norms, values, attitudes, behavior. And religion is not only about praying; it’s also about acting and behaving in accordance with God’s commandments. So, if a preacher believes a social issue, even one that may have become politicized, is immoral or unethical he or she has the moral obligation to deal with it from the pulpit if necessary.”

“Can he go as far as to denounce the politicians supporting the issue?” asked Mr. Brandon. “And, what happens if two blocks away you have another pastor taking the opposite view and telling its members that it’s their moral obligation to support those politicians who represent their beliefs?”

The captain looked bewildered; he frowned, rolled his eyes, and shook his head. “That’s what going on today.”

“May I?” asked Mr. Radusky. “It is a tricky question that likely will demand rhetorical gymnastics on the part of the preacher in order to meet the legal requirements. In principle, I would have to say that one can’t separate the issue from those who are supporting it. At the same time, I think the audience is smart enough to be able to make the connection between the

issue and those supporting it, so the preacher might not have to risk his church's non-profit status while complying with his moral duty. Ultimately, if the religious community as a whole feels strong enough about specific issues, than it's time to walk the talk! I would put principle over revenues and let God take care of the rest.

"As to having another church leader preaching the opposite message two blocks away, I can see God resigned at the sight of his believers fighting among themselves to see who's his true interlocutor, but then, this is something we've been doing for over two thousand years. Other than that, such behavior is inevitable and has nothing to do with the Constitution."

"Very well, let's go to another issue."

"Hold on, please, there's something else I'd like to add about this story," said Ms. Lewis.

"Go ahead," I replied.

"Mr. Hunt spoke about the danger of politicizing one's faith, whereby the believer becomes very defensive, closes ranks with his peers and begins to perceive those who oppose his views as his enemies. I noticed traces of this type of attitude in the story.

"The story indicated that a member of one of the two accused churches called the clergymen's complaint to the IRS a *smear tactic*, and an *attempt to destroy men of God*. Further, the accused church itself issued a statement indicating that the complaint was also the work of left-wing clergy.

"Well, here we notice how ideology affects the faith as well as politics. Does it really matter who does the complaining if the allegations were found to be true? The comment suggests that if a *right-wing* clergyman had witnessed the incident he would have looked the other way, which wouldn't have been very honest. At the same time, it is ironic that the comment regards the complaint as a *smear tactic* because it came from *left-wingers*, which in itself it's a smear, for the term is being used in a derogatory manner.

"Another indication of how defensive these churches became throughout this incident is seen in a statement from the candidate in question, who called those who issued the complaint, *bullies* who were *trying to run God out of the public square*. Well, it doesn't take a smart fellow to realize that those who were allegedly trying to destroy those men of God and run God out of politics were clergy- men themselves! So, here we have religious leaders denouncing members of their own faith as enemies of God, simply because one group views the other's activities as *being politically illegal*."

"I would have loved to have seen God's face at that moment," remarked Mr. Radusky.

"Moving on, let's discuss additional religiously-oriented attitudes that have created problems in today's political environment. Let's start with the concept of tolerance. Some people argue that tolerating a diversity of beliefs, particularly those that differ from or oppose their own, compromises one's loyalty and fidelity to his or her beliefs. It would be like committing apostasy.

Hence, they claim that they have to vigorously defend their beliefs in the public arena by strongly opposing those of others.

“Tolerance, on the other hand, is said to be a democratic value that must be defended. So, what do we stand to gain by standing up for tolerance if we have to sacrifice our beliefs in the process?”

“I think there is a misconception regarding tolerance,” argued Mr. Hunt. “Tolerance is often confused with having to endorse that which you’re being asked to tolerate, and that is false. All it means is don’t kill, burn, drag or stone to death someone with whom you disagree or dislike; it means to grant others the same rights you grant yourself, as long as those rights don’t threaten your physical survival and your freedom. Actually, tolerance is both a religious and humanist principle for it’s based on respecting the dignity and freedom of God’s created children. When we refuse to tolerate and respect others’ beliefs, we create those conditions that brought us the religious wars in past centuries. It also fuels the type of Muslim extremism that we are witnessing today and our responses to it.”

“In that case, how do we legislate tolerance?” I asked.

“I don’t think we can,” said Mr. Hunt. “We can pass laws proscribing wrongful behavior, hoping that tolerance will be infused into peoples’ hearts and minds. Tolerance is an internal attitude that grows, not out of laws, but out of respect for others who are different from you, as long as such differences, as I said, don’t threaten one’s physical security and one’s freedom.”

“Would anyone care to argue Mr. Hunt’s point?”

“That means that I have to put up with things I don’t like about other people,” said Mr. Edson.

“That’s true, but let us not forget that other people would have to accept what they don’t like about you,” I reminded him. “It’s part of the social contract. It’s either that or you both engage in a shoot-out.

“Why don’t we go on to explore another question: when would it be imprudent—not illegal, but imprudent—to combine religion and politics? Prudence has been called the virtue *par excellence* in politics. The question addresses action, behavior that, while not illegal, could create problems for religion or for politics, or both. Anyone, Mr. Hunt.”

“I would think that anything said or done by religious believers that gratuitously insults, ridicules or injures other religions and/or people has no place in politics, or in society, for that matter,” said Mr. Hunt.

“This type of behavior is not only inflammatory; it also projects attitudes that don’t seem to be too religious to begin with, and not in line with American values. We stand for respect towards people including their religious beliefs. When we gratuitously offend people’s religious beliefs we stop honoring our own civic values. And, of course, then you have the consequences. History provides us with a myriad of examples in which an individual says or does something atrocious and believers linked to the imprudent party get a bad rap because of the ‘guilty-by-association’ syndrome.

“Besides, there are already enough individuals who don’t seem to care about offending other people’s religious sensibilities and who will stir hatred, create confusion, or make inappropriate jokes. I don’t think religious or political leaders need to add to this type of behavior,” added Mr. Hunt.

“More political correctness?” said Mr. Edson. “Tell me, how you would square that view with the concept of freedom of speech in a democracy?”

“For those who are not religious or don’t take religion seriously, then yes, what I’m saying implies political correctness,” said Mr. Hunt, “which in this case stands for civil and respectful behavior toward other people’s beliefs. This is what we teach in our schools and in the public arena.

“Somehow, some people have a distorted vision of what freedom of speech means. Yes, we do have a constitutional right to freedom of speech that unfortunately includes the right to be disrespectful and to dishonor the values we believe in. But, my constitutional right to freedom of speech does not give me the *moral* right to disrespect another person’s dignity or his and her convictions, whether they are religious or atheistic. In this regard we need to educate those who attempt to disfigure American values, which as I said, include respect for people’s dignity and for their religious convictions.

“Now, for those who maintain that their faith is very important, then the issue is about acting in accordance with their beliefs. This is how our religious beliefs teach us to behave. Our religious beliefs, then, ought to condition our freedom of speech, for they tell us not to misuse our freedom to injure others, physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

“None of the major religions that I know of prescribe offending people’s beliefs or injuring their sensibilities in order to make a point. We all witnessed the violence that erupted among angry mobs of Muslims on other continents because of caricatures that political cartoonists drew of Mohammed, the founder of the religion of Islam and regarded by Muslims as a prophet of God. A Danish newspaper had published the caricature as a daring manifestation of freedom of speech.

“Those responsible for this incident seemed to have said to themselves, ‘No one can tell me what to say or not to say; this is my culture and we reserve the right to offend whomever we wish to offend.’ These individuals didn’t think or care much about how their actions could have affected other people’s feelings or what the political ramifications might have been regarding already strained relations between the Muslim world and Western democracies.”

“What brought about the incident, Mr. Hunt, cultural differences, political differences, perhaps?” I asked

“Neither one, I think” he replied. “This was not about two cultures that don’t understand each other. It was rather a clash over different human values.”

“Could you possibly add to that?” I requested.

“I think that in the publisher’s estimation, freedom of speech outweigh respect for other people’s dignity and their religious beliefs. The publisher felt that he had the right to do so and he demanded respect for his right. The problem in our western democracies is that we tend to value individual

rights far more than we value consideration and respect for other peoples' beliefs. Everyone wants his rights to be respected. But, if everyone insists on having their rights respected, who will do the respecting? It doesn't dawn on us that if I want my rights respected perhaps I should start by respecting the rights of others."

"I think that the incident was provoked by two different understandings of political reality. In this incident sensitivity was set aside and replaced by a flawed representation of democracy and freedom of speech."

"Why flawed?" again asked Mr. Edson, irked by Mr. Hunt's characterization.

"Michael, in a narrow-minded sense, these newspaper editors and cartoonists didn't see anything wrong with their actions. They were behaving in accordance with cultural values that allow mocking all religious beliefs, not just Muslim, largely because those who behave in such manner are not too respectful of other people's beliefs.

"Now, suppose we reverse the scenarios a bit. How would these publishers and cartoonists react if someone were to publish cartoons that offend their loved ones; caricatures referring to their wives as harlots and their children as little more than idiotic beings? I realize I'm taking a chance, because there may be individuals who might not care at all if their loved ones were mocked in public, but my bet is that they would feel mortified and offended because, likely, they love and respect their families. This is the type of reflection they should have made, initially: how would I feel if others were to do the same to me? These individuals showed no respect toward human values."

"Could that have been the intent of the Founding Fathers; absolute freedom of speech?" asked Mr. Dickerson.

"I have wondered if the Founding Fathers had in their minds that freedom of speech ought to include the right to contravene those other rights they told us were given to us by our *creator*. To misuse our freedom to injure people's dignity does not make any sense. Those who use freedom of speech to legitimize immoral and irreligious behavior degrade themselves and the values we represent. This is not about laws; it is about our moral actions."

"So, basically you would justify the mob behavior of extremist Muslims who engage in violence because they feel offended that the Prophet Muhammad has been insulted," said Ms. Williamson.

"Idiocy and disrespect begets more idiocy and more disrespect, Ms. Williamson," said Mr. Hunt. "I wouldn't call these extremists *Muslims* anymore than I would call *Christians* or *Jewish* those who burn books that others regard as sacred, or those who mock other peoples' religious beliefs. Their idiocy does not allow them to see the extent to which they disfigure their own faith through their actions."

"Any other instances in which it would be imprudent to mix religion and politics? Yes, Mr. Edson."

"It occurs to me, how prudent is it for religious or political leaders, Christians, Jewish, or Muslims to support war in the name of religion?"

Suppose our leaders begin to tell us that we should embark into American jihads because God's telling them it's the right thing to do."

"Let me place the question in a more neutral form," I said. "Is it prudent for religious and political leaders to argue in favor *or* against war in the name of God? Ms. Vanhurst?"

"That's a very thorny question. We've heard people say that God speaks to them through private revelation. I presume that this can happen. But we also know that mentally ill people have indicated that God ordered them to drown their children, too. And, while I'm told that psychologists and psychiatrists can distinguish between those who are mentally ill and those who are not, they can't tell if a particularly religious vision is the result of God's revelation or is instead an individual's predisposition to believe the way he or she does. So, in politics, we have no other choice but to take the religious or political leader at his word.

"Nonetheless, I think that there is a great risk involved in bringing God into the war equation. Suppose the head of government makes his decision to go to war because he wholeheartedly believes that such is God's will, and so he informs the country, expecting that the majority will back him up. Religious leaders who identify themselves with the president follow through and extend their support. Many people join the bandwagon and decide to support the president based on their faith. Subsequently, things don't go as expected and the nation loses the war.

"But wait! The same can happen if we abstain from going to war, even when conditions dictate that we should do so, because the political leadership believes that God wants us to remain peaceful. In the mean time, the conflict worsens, forcing the nation to wage war, but in the end is defeated."

"That would be bad for religion, no matter what," remarked Mr. Wasserman. "I presume that the event would initially lead to a theological debate about whose side is God on. And, of course, we would have to expect that the credibility of political leaders and the religious community will be questioned and harshly criticized. Even God won't escape scathing criticism from skeptics and atheists, something that could further erode the value of faith as a social and religious element."

"Should we then conclude that political leaders ought not to consult with God in these instances?" asked Mr. Radusky. "Are we suggesting that faith in God could lead the nation into a big heap of trouble? If so, does that mean that an atheist would make a more prudent leader?"

"Let's see, take Saddam Hussein," replied Ms. Vanhurst. "I don't think he relied too heavily on God when he decided to invade Kuwait in 1990. Also, I don't believe the Soviet leadership invoked any Marxist god before deciding to invade Afghanistan in 1979 or Hitler before he invaded much of Europe. So, whether political leaders rely on God or not wouldn't seem to make much of a difference."

"You believe then, that a leader who makes his decision on war after consulting God doesn't entail any more risk of making a major mistake than if he

chooses not to do so. Is that a fair assessment of your view?" I asked.

"Yes, it is," replied Ms. Vanhurst.

"Would you agree that, perhaps, having God on your side wouldn't hurt?" asked Ms. Williamson.

"I don't think it would hurt. But what happens if my opponent also believes that God is on his side? Then what? May the best God win? Or shall we believe that the real God is the one whose side wins?"

"Without much real information on God's behavior, there isn't much to discuss about religion and decision-making in politics. Let's face it, how do we know that God doesn't reveal himself to an ardent believer? We don't."

"But what if the political leaders were to believe that they were experiencing a personal revelation; should they ignore it?" asked Ms. Williamson.

"I definitely would keep it to myself," replied Ms. Vanhurst, "for the simple reason that it could be the product of my own wishful thinking or my own predisposition. Suppose I publicly proclaim that God is on my side and my side loses. Wouldn't many perceive God to be a loser?"

"I think that faith is important if it provides the leader with inner strength, moral rectitude, and valor; however, in the end, faith alone is not an adequate or wise substitute for reason, common sense, and sound political and military intelligence."

"Thank you, Ms. Vanhurst. Anyone wishes to reply?" I asked.

"My personal experience is quite different," replied the captain. "My faith makes me feel very secure."

"I believe you, Captain," I said, "but I think that what you mean is that you experience a feeling of serenity, an internal peace amidst the world's problems, a feeling that may come from one's faith in God. But remember, we're talking about whether faith alone will provide us with the answers to the problems we encounter in our lives, and my reply to you is that we're not going to be told how to proceed. Political and religious leaders need to understand that, despite their belief that God is providing the answers, there's no certainty that they will not flunk the temporal test."

"Another question, what happens if from a social health standpoint the state imposes laws it deems necessary for a sector of the population whose compliance might violate another sector of the population's conscience. Would that constitute an attack on religion by the state? Mr. Hunt."

"Interesting, sir. We're getting into the question of political obligation, and as we know, there are several theories on under which circumstances should citizens obey the law. None of them is completely satisfactory, but I will take a crack at the question from a different angle: what happens if rather than let the political process and the law decide what is moral, we decide for ourselves to proceed individually and disobey the law? Civil disobedience is a possible path of action. It's not a new concept, and it has been regarded as an ethical response to thorny issues."

“I would start by answering your question: would a law that is in conflict with an aspect of a sector of the population’s faith be considered an attack on religious freedom? Unless you reword the question, sir, the obvious answer in a pluralistic democracy is, No. I think it’s absurd to believe otherwise. In our society, we’re always confronted with such a conflict; it is to be expected, and short of civil disobedience or the political process, there are no other alternatives. Constantly, there are laws that are in contradiction with our values, beginning with how the state uses the taxes we pay. These taxes will be used for things that we find unethical, and again, lest we want to engage in a civil war, we work out the conflicts through the ballot box or through the courts.

“If it were true that all these instances constitute an attack on religious freedom, well, then religion has been under attack for over two hundred years in our country. Sir, the claim of attacks against religious freedom concerns attacks on the first amendment. At least, worldwide, we think of countries where the state forbids freedom of religion or is hostile to religion in general. Usually, these actions are broad in scope; there’s persecution of almost any religious activity. The term does not refer to specific, narrow conflicts involving one of various denominations. Outside of this context, I think talk of the state attacking religious freedom in the United States is a bit demagogic.”

“Okay, let’s go now into the grand finale of the evening: Intelligent Design or *creationism*, as it is also known as. It has to do with religion, science, politics, even about zoology. My questions: Intelligent Design (ID), a scientific theory or not? Should it be taught in public schools? Does it belong in school at all? Mr. Wasserman, you’re one of today’s presenters.”

“Yes. It’s being said that ID, although it doesn’t mention religion or God, is a pseudo-scientific form of Creationism, the Bible’s version of how creation came about. Its teaching in public schools has been forbidden by the courts.

“Most recently, in January 2006, in *Kitzmiller v Dover*, the judge affirmed this view, branding Intelligent Design a religious belief and banning its teaching altogether in public schools. What’s going to happen next is anyone’s guess, but we know that other states are still eager to test the waters, somehow, and depending on the outcome, others likely will follow.”

“What was so special about this court case, Mr. Wasserman?” I asked.

“What called my attention about the Dover case was that it represented a judicial decision of a **scientific question** by a non-scientist who was attempting to define what science is and what is not. Given that the scientific and religious communities are divided on this issue—both among and within themselves—the question I asked myself was whether it is appropriate for a non-scientist to decide what science is and what is not.

“Now, whether ID is a scientific theory or not, I think that I can safely state that the majority of non-believers and evolution scientists think that ID is

nothing like a scientific theory. On the other hand, what these scientists think doesn't seem to matter much to believers themselves. According to a Pew Forum survey, sixty-four percent of Americans, for example, seem to believe in Creationism and are in favor of adding it to public schools curriculums along with evolution. Moreover, thirty-eight percent, not a small percentage, want Creationism to replace evolution in schools altogether!¹⁰ So, we have two problems: it appears that faith and science are permanently irreconcilable, and the other, science hasn't been able to gain much credibility among many believers."

"I presume you're referring to the fact that the majority of evolution scientists overwhelmingly reject the scientific status of ID," I said. "I realize that in science a theory doesn't become scientific through majority rule, but shouldn't a preponderance of opinion at least carry significant weight among those who are not scientists?"

"The problem is," he replied, "that dealing with ID is a bit difficult. Scientists examine a scientific theory by testing meaning hypotheses and prediction. The problem, these scientists say, is that ID in its present form has not been able to generate meaningful testable hypotheses or formulate verifiable predictions. So, the only recourse that scientists who disagree with ID have is to reject the logic behind ID. At this point, I would say that those who reject ID on these grounds are correct. All that ID can do for the moment—and I stress for the moment—is simply to point out evolution's inability to explain certain phenomena and on that basis argue that evolution, as a theory is flawed."

"I understand, Mr. Wasserman, but let me rephrase the question," I said. "Is the theory of evolution so flawed as to be truly discredited, and if so, why is it still supported by most scientists?"

"Sir, not being a scientist myself I cannot state whether the theory of evolution is inherently flawed. All I can say is that, as of today, evolution is the pre-eminent scientific theory studying and explaining creation. Evolution enjoys a great deal of credibility among scientists and science teachers all over the world. As a theory, evolution has been able to generate innumerable testable hypotheses, and its findings have been accepted by worldwide by the scientific community. My understanding is that it still needs to be able to fill a couple of gaps here and there to be at the same level with the Laws of Thermodynamics or Newton's Law of Gravity, particularly when it comes to explaining how human life was created.

"Now, as to your initial question, whether such a widely held scientific theory *ought* to be respected by those of us citizens who don't understand much about it to begin with, my answer is that insofar as there is nothing better to explain creation, then Yes, it ought to be respected.

"I say this because so far, nothing has come close to challenging the validity of its findings. ID has issued a challenge, but in my view it's rather a weak one. Its primary challenge states that evolution can't explain, say Y factor; ID then

makes the assumption, more like a leap of faith, that X factor provides the explanation to Y factor, except that ID can't present any verifiable evidence or scientific explanation about X.

"So, to claim that evolutionary theory is flawed because it can't explain an aspect of creation, and then go on to assert that such claim validates ID's scientific assumptions is, in my view, not a logical conclusion."

"What seems to be the problem, then, Mr. Wasserman?" I asked.

"I don't know for sure, but this is what I have been able to gather. When facing seriously reliable scientific data, we neophytes need to, at the very least, pay attention to its findings, as you suggest. In principle it's the reasonable thing to do, meaning that to behave differently would suggest either ignorance, arrogance or both.

"The problem lies in the reason or reasons why many people oppose evolution. Evolution's findings are in apparent contradiction with the biblical explanation in the Book of Genesis regarding how and when creation took place. I say apparent because if Genesis is accepted as a lyrical or metaphorical interpretation of creation, as countless believers do, then there's no inherent conflict between evolution and faith in God or in God's revelation to humankind.

"Evolution maintains that the Earth was created millions of years ago, and that human beings came about, in line with Charles Darwin's initial propositions, as a result of natural selection and the evolution of the species. On the other hand, those who accept the Book of Genesis literally believe that God created the Earth, man and woman, and all other animals about five or six thousand years ago. According to those who interpret Genesis literally, if God can neither lie or be mistaken, the theory of evolution is either a big fabrication or a scientific misconception.

"Now, if Genesis's literal version could be empirically proven beyond all doubt, I guess scientists would have to go back to the drawing boards and re-evaluate evolution's findings. And, I think this is one of ID's goals: to make scientists take a closer and more critical look at the theory of evolution by widening its scope.

"There's another point, however, that I think plays a role in this issue. Evolution scientists have reacted very strongly and in a very defensive manner to ID's attempt to make headways in our culture, and that concerns me. In my mind, their reaction to ID appears to be completely out of proportion to the certainty with which they view evolution and with the esteem and validation the theory is embraced worldwide. Part of the reason, I think, is that these scientists see ID as an effort to bring religion into the classroom."

"What exactly are you suggesting," I asked.

"Just that there's more than a simple unwillingness on the part of these scientists to give room to ID; I sense fear and revulsion on their part at the possibility that a cover for religion and faith could possibly win over reason and science. If we think about it, this would be like the Galileo episode in reverse!"

“But, could you blame them for not wanting science to lose ground to belief, Mr. Wasserman,” I replied.

“Not at all, sir. But I presume that the realization that evolution scientists are losing the cultural battle for minds in this country, according to the polls, has to worry them. So, it’s not only that they just don’t want to lose the battle; they want to vanquish the opposition, badly.

“I can’t quite put my finger on it; it’s like evolution scientists project this sense of insecurity mixed with anger, which by the way, it’s the same attitude that Fundamentalists have of fearing that science will weaken or destroy their faith.”

“But as scientists, shouldn’t their attitudes be one of openness to that which is new, no matter where it comes from?” I asked.

“Yes. In reality, evolution scientists shouldn’t care what the motives are on the part of those pushing ID. As a matter of fact, they should welcome new challenges. What concerns me, however, is that when the challenge shows up, quite a few scientists circle the wagons, including some evolution scientists who are believers.”

“I think it might help us to understand this issue if we see it from a different perspective,” offered Mr. Hunt, one of the other presenters. “Thomas Kuhn’s classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, provides us with as sound an explanation as any on why scientists tend to reject new challenges. Kuhn sees this need on the part of scientists to defend an existing paradigm, in this case evolution, as inevitable from a human standpoint. He thinks, however, that this is actually very positive for it allows scientists the opportunity to fully develop their theories. Actually, Kuhn accounts for this type of non-premeditated behavior among scientists as being responsible for scientific progress.

“Further, Kuhn believes that scientists tend to cling to their existing theories in order to preserve their sense of identity so they won’t be thrown into a scientific trash bin and be forgotten, once and if their theories are discarded. Again, this is a very natural human reaction.”¹¹

“But, isn’t Kuhn validating a close-minded attitude that is the opposite of what Dr. Planas has suggested in class?” asked Ms. Bynum.

“He is validating a process as he sees it happening,” said Mr. Hunt. “And insofar as the process has been responsible for scientific progress throughout history, he would argue that such stubbornness is something that tends to be positive. I don’t think that Kuhn would go as far as to advocate that scientists should take out bayonets and dig trenches or that scientists should wear blinders; human nature, he would have argued, takes care of that.”

“Where does that leave open-mindedness as a means for scientists to precipitate scientific revolutions in their fields?” asked Mr. Brandon.

“Well, now we’re dealing with conscious, willful behavior. For this to happen, scientists would have to be very discriminating in their attitudes and not waste time over flimsy challenges, but let me give you an example.

“Some time ago, a federally-funded study that scientists described as *unusual*, suggested that there might be a correlation between daydreaming and Alzheimer’s disease. To scientists studying this disease, the study’s findings came from beyond the left-field fence. The new findings, according to experts, go against the prevailing view that intellectual activity is important in preventing Alzheimer’s disease. And yet, this is how an expert who does research in Alzheimer’s disease was quoted in the story while reacting to the findings:

[O]ther neuroscientists agreed the work was intriguing—and joked about its implications. ‘There goes half my day,’ said [one] about his own propensity for creative musing. ‘It is really going out on a limb,’ he added of the new study. ‘But for the sake of generating discussion, it is interesting. It is useful to get people thinking along these lines.’¹²

“Although this scientist was suggesting that the findings be taken with a grain of salt, what is interesting here was his suggestion that an open-minded attitude could generate confidence among others to continue a type of research that may or may not lead to an earlier than normal treatment or cure for a disease that affects many people. Just imagine the potential adverse impact if scientists in this field were to ridicule and reject these findings! Scientific peers would be too embarrassed and inhibited into doing any further studies.”

“Good point! Mr. Hunt,” I said.

“I’d like to raise another issue, if I may,” said Ms. Lewis. “Kuhn also argues that paradigms don’t change overnight. Scientific revolutions, he says, only take place when there’s a state of discontent with the current paradigm or when anomalies are detected or when new questions can’t be adequately answered. Are you by any chance suggesting that evolutionary theory is facing these kind of crises ... that ID has launched a legitimate challenge to evolution?”

“Kind of,” replied Mr. Wasserman. “Let me see how I explain this. Among believers, there are many Christian scientists who accept evolution as a scientific explanation of how life on earth came about, and they find no conflict between their faith and the theory of evolution. The Catholic Church, which prides itself in maintaining a vigorous and amicable intellectual relationship with the international scientific community, to the point of housing the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the grounds of Vatican City, has for many years accepted evolution theory. Pope John Paul II, in his 1996 address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, not only reiterated Pius XII’s view in 1950 that there was no opposition between evolution and faith; he indicated:

(N)ew knowledge has led to the recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a

significant argument in favor of this theory.”¹³

“But, Pope Benedict XVI back-pedaled on this issue,” said Ms. Williamson.

“He muddled the issue, for sure,” said Mr. Wasserman. “I have a timeline of what was said and by whom. I’ll give it to each of you and you can read it afterwards on your own. (Timeline appears at the end of the chapter).¹⁴”

“Any reason why the Church can’t make it simple for everyone to understand?” said Ms. Williamson.

“I agree,” replied Mr. Wasserman. “However, if we read John Paul II’s 1996 address to the Pontifical Academy, we notice that there might not be any confusion at all. The main reason why Fundamentalists reject evolution is that they believe that the theory denies—or rather fails to accept—that God is the originator of human life. But, in all fairness, the theory of evolution does not, and it cannot, make such an assertion from a scientific standpoint. Implicitly, suggestively, culturally, yes it can, but certainly not scientifically.

“Anyhow, John Paul II did make an important distinction in his address when he said that one could speak of various theories of evolution depending on the type of explanations they advance and the philosophies on which they are based. And he expressly ruled out any theory of evolution based on philosophies *that consider the spirit as emerging from the forces of living matter*,¹⁵ if only because to state the opposite—that the spirit in human life emerges from living matter—is the task of philosophy or theology insofar as science is unable to empirically verify such a statement.”

“This would suggest that there shouldn’t be any conflict whatsoever between faith and evolution,” remarked Mr. Edson.

“I think the word *whatsoever* might be problematic, Mr. Edson,” said Mr. Wasserman.

“Well, I think it’s more than just a word,” said Ms. Williamson. “I’m not worried whether evolution theory is right or wrong; I’m concerned that its findings are demeaning to the dignity of human beings. How does one explain to his kids that monkeys are our ancestors? That we evolve from animals!”

“My immediate suggestion to you, Ms. Williamson, would be to take a course on evolution theory so that you might be able to understand the process first,” I remarked. “Other than that, is there anyone here who wants to address the issue? Ms. Vanhurst?”

“It’s my impression that much of this conflict has to do with realities that many are not prepared to accept because they cause us a great deal of discomfort. But while many don’t like to hear it, there isn’t much anyone can do about the fact that, biologically speaking, we belong to the animal kingdom.

“As humans, we share too many characteristics with other animals to deny what we are: we are the highest most sublime form of living beings, although animals no less. Such recognition may not do wonders to our ego, Ms. Williamson, but it will provide us with a heavy dosage of much needed humility.

“To begin with, could anyone deny that our internal structure and composition and those of lower animals are very similar? Further, didn’t we all learn in high school that we share all basic biological functions with animals? Both animals and humans need to sleep and eat in order to survive, although humans are somewhat neater at doing both. As with animals, human beings, including kings and presidents, urinate and defecate, too, although, again, we’re cleaner, and many of us, particularly in developed countries, practice high levels of hygiene. Then we come to sex and reproduction. I hate to break it to you, and I realize that this is not what we want to hear, but I’m sure you’ve seen how dogs copulate. Well, there’s nothing angelical in the way humans have sex in their privacy. We’re somewhat noisier, far more creative, also hurtful, but in the end, biologically speaking, there’s no difference. Sexual intercourse among humans has never been a stoic experience, even during repressed Victorian times. You can filter this aspect all you want to, but it seems that God has chosen the same method for animals and humans to reproduce. You would have thought that God could have chosen more mystical means for us to populate the world, but he didn’t. Even in the midst of the most pure sentiments of love, we’re as erotic as animals, even, more so. Shall I go on?”

“It’s not necessary,” I said. “Thank you for the primer on sex education, Ms. Vanhurst. I, too, realize how one must feel having to learn that we may have evolved from lower living organisms, Ms. Williamson. I also understand, and I hope you do, too, that the evidence seems overwhelming.”

“I still don’t understand why there is so much commotion over ID and evolution?” said Mr. Edson. “Hey, if I can get it, I’m sure others can, too.”

“There’s a great deal of validity behind that commotion,” I said, “and what surprises me is that we haven’t been able to grasp it or to deal with it without so much acrimony.”

“There’s not much we can do if some people are predisposed and insist on believing in a certain manner!” said Ms. Vanhurst.”

“I differ, Ms. Vanhurst,” I replied, “I think the conflict can be resolved if we all to try to meet people’s needs half way. What is it that troubles a few people in Dover, Pennsylvania, or a lot of people in Kansas, or a great number of people throughout the nation? They are concerned with the cultural outcome of evolution being taught in public schools because they sense an unfair competition; one, they feel they can’t win, between science and their efforts to educate their children according to their beliefs. This, in my view is a reasonable concern.

“Earlier, Mr. Wasserman said that evolution theory cannot make scientific pronouncements regarding the existence or non-existence of God. Well, culturally speaking it’s a different ball game.

“Take Darwin’s most popularly famous manuscript, *The Origins of the Species*. What does the word *origin* stand for? The dictionary shows that it means *something that creates, causes, or gives rise to another*. The term *applies to*

*the things or persons from which something is ultimately derived and often to the causes operating before the thing itself comes into being.*¹⁶ So, the title itself, while limited to observable phenomena and, in the absence of any statement involving a supreme being, suggests that God had no role in our creation.

“While evolutionary theory may scientifically tell us how life came into being, it cannot tell us why it happened; how matter came into existence, or even what preceding cause led to the Big Bang.

“In the classroom, students may correctly hear that humans evolve from lower organisms, and possibly hear scientific explanations on how the Big Bang theory might have started the process of evolution, and that’s it.

“But there’s no mention of God in the process, as there shouldn’t be, because that would take the direction of the course into philosophy or theology. So in order to keep biology in the classroom within its proper scientific parameters, the discussion should properly end there.

“Kids would go home having learned that they are biologically related to chimpanzees, which, at least they are cute animals. It could have been worse. Meanwhile, parents who desire to educate their children in accordance with religious values would tell their kids that God created life, but they realize that what they teach their kids is being negated by what kids learn in school. And this is where the problem lies.

“In high school, students are precocious in more ways than one. They’re sponge-smart, open-minded, and naïve; that’s their natural condition at that stage. Some will reflect and accept what culture tells them, and schools teach them that science is credible; that scientific pronouncements are to be taken seriously; and that scientists are among the most respected members of society.

“Students themselves will participate in concrete, tangible, experiments in biology and chemistry where they will be told that science can prove things before their very eyes. Well, if we want students to succeed in science, could we possibly tell them that none of this is correct when in fact, it is?

“So, in this setting, what chances do these parents have to successfully educate their children in the belief that a loving yet ‘invisible’ God exist, if their views have to compete with scientific, empirically verifiable, concrete pronouncements suggesting that the origins of human life and the creation of the earth can be adequately explained only through evolutionary theory?

“Let’s now look at the other side of the coin. In many instances parental influence will hold sway. Kids who are less precocious and more fearful of their parents, or parents who have instilled the fear and wrath of God in them while warning them that science is the Anti-Christ, will be taught to accept faith in God and to reject science. We then find these students demonstrating with their parents against evolution and science in public schools and in favor of teaching the Book of Genesis. Now, what are the chances that these kids will be among our future scientists of America, either as engineers, physicists, geologists, biologists, astronauts, doctors, or teachers? Slim at best.

“And finally, we may have other students who will end up confused and uninterested in either faith or science. Certainly, there are many parents who don’t bother, or who choose not to educate their children in their faith, or any faith; and we must respect that, lest we pass an ordinance that parents who don’t teach their children about God, shall be thrown into jail.

“So, what really concerns me are those millions of parents who want a fair chance at educating their children in their faith but realize that it will be an uphill battle because one side of the question is being presented as the valid answer. I’m also concerned about those children who are being inculcated that science is not to be trusted; that science is an enemy of faith.

“While there might not yet be a paradigm crisis over the issue of evolution, there is, indeed, a cultural crisis that evolution scientists have not been able, and likely will not be able to resolve: that the majority of Americans either refuse to accept evolution theory and/or want ID taught in schools. If this view prevails, it will affect the teaching of science itself, and neither the executive nor the legislative nor the judiciary in their full regalia will be able to fix the problem.”

“So, what do you do?” asked Mr. Edson.

“Frankly, I don’t see why teachers can’t provide a clear and concise explanation on the limitations of religion and faith when it comes to science as well as an explanation on the limitations of evolutionary theory as it wanders into philosophy or theology. Why should these types of explanations in the classroom irk anyone? How could they possibly affect the teaching of evolution?”

“Evolution scientists believe that telling students that evolutionary theory can’t provide meaningful scientific explanations about God and the creation of human life on earth will somehow sow doubt in the minds of students regarding evolution. They believe that such explanations might be taken as an endorsement of religion. These beliefs, which the courts have made their own, project a ridiculous bias and an incredible intellectual and pedagogical ignorance.

“At the Dover trial, none other than a professor of sociology, author of books on philosophy and the history of science, and a critic of ID conceded, admitted, asserted that ID is linked to Creationism and is more of a ‘fringe’ concept. At the same time, and probably for the same reasons, he stated that ID is in need of ‘affirmative action’ within the scientific community. Let me quote from the story in the newspaper. This professor believes that,

The cards are stacked against radical views. Science was a much freer field in the old days. Under current conditions, Intelligent Design cannot develop to the point where it can be tested in the scientific community, which has become a ‘dogmatic’ and ‘self-perpetuating elite network.’¹⁷

“This is what I’m talking about. Truly, I’m more interested in there being a more open-minded attitude on the part of evolution’s scientists than in finding out whether ID will make any headway as a theory. Only if we can ensure the former will we be able to answer questions on Intelligent Design intelligently.”

“But, if evolution scientists and teachers were to allow such explanations in the classroom, wouldn’t that be considered a concession to creationism?” asked Mr. Edson.

“Certainly not a scientific concession,” I said, jumping into the exchange. “First of all, these explanations would set clear lines of demarcations for each field of study. Second, it would be a cultural compromise, one that would bridge the gap between two groups that are seeking to destroy one another in a cultural war in which there will be no winner. If the opposing forces do not see this, then we’ll simply have to expect more conflict.

“Any other questions? Great! I’m exhausted. I believe we have covered this issue rather thoroughly, so, let’s bring the evening to an end, and prepare ourselves for next week’s topic.

“Have a good evening.”

Endnotes

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⁴ Democrats in 2 Southern States Push Bills on Bible Study, *The New York Times*, January 27, 2006.

⁵ L. Dana, “What Happens When There Is No Plan B?” *The Washington Post*, Outlook, June 4, 2006.

⁶ “Dissonant Voices Inside the Border,” *The Washington Post*, May 11, 2006.

⁷ “Ohio Churches’ Political Activities Challenged,” *The Washington Post*, April 25, 2006.

⁸ Weiner, Stacy, “A Leap of Faith,” *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2006.

⁹ “Prayer Doesn’t Aid Recovery, Study Finds,” *The Washington Post*, March 31, 2006.

¹⁰ “Public Divided on Origins of Life,” *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, August 30, 2005.

¹¹ Kuhn, Thomas S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹² “Study Looks Into Roots of Alzheimer’s,” *The Washington Post*, August 24, 2005.

¹³ Pope John Paul II, “Address of Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,” October 22, 1996, online.

¹⁴ In April 2005, *The New York Times* reported that Pope Benedict had remarked that human beings *are not some causal and meaningless product of evolution*, an idea that dovetails with a major tenet of Intelligent Design.

In July 2005, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, a confidant of the Pope, wrote an article in *The New York Times*, seemingly calling into question John Paul II’s views on evolution. But three months later, in October, the director of the Vatican Observatory, Fr. George Coyne, wrote an article critical of Cardinal Schönborn’s statement against evolution. Days later the cardinal issued a clarification to his July statement indicating that he had not questioned the science but a culture of evolution that denies the role

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of God in creation.

On November 3, the Vatican's president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Cardinal Paul Poupard, made statements that many interpreted as being in favor of evolutionary theory and expressly against Intelligent Design. One week later, amidst the Dover, Pennsylvania, trial, Pope Benedict referred to the creation of the universe as an *intelligent project*.

Days later, Fr. Coyne again issued additional comments indicating that the Pope's remarks are not to be interpreted as an endorsement of Intelligent Design, stating that *Intelligent Design isn't science, even if it pretends to be*. And, finally, in January 2006, the Vatican's newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, not known for publishing articles that stray off the Church's doctrine published a piece by a professor of evolutionary biology at the University of Bologna in which he praises the Dover decision against Intelligent Design.

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¹⁵ Pope John Paul II.

¹⁶ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

¹⁷ "Professor Pushes 'Fringe' Idea," *The Patriot-News*, October 25, 2005.