



## First Thoughts



Are you off to a good start in 2009? At the Crosswinds Foundation we have hit the ground running.

In this first issue of *CrossingCurrents*, for 2009 we want to share a few thoughts on the state of race relations in America. We are also excited about a new project we have in the works - a documentary that will address this subject in greater detail. We'll be keeping you updated on this important project and in the next few months sharing how you might be of help.

In this month's issue we are also taking a look at some of the spiritual statistics released in a recent Harris poll. The cultural shifts in regards to issues of faith continue. Our article in this issue on Oprah and Spirituality is indicative of this.

One final note, as I shared with you last issue, our staff member, Don Malin is departing this month for his second tour of duty in the Middle East (he will be serving in Afghanistan). Please keep Don and our other service men and women in your prayers. We are making plans for Don to give us periodic reports about life in the service and in a Muslim country and will share these with you as Don is able to make his reports.

We hope you are finding Crosswinds to be of help to you in your own education and ministry experience. Let us know if you have any questions, or would like for us to address a particular topic or subject.

With Best Regards,

Bob Waldrep  
President, Crosswinds Foundation

## Becoming a Post-Racial America? By Bob Waldrep

No matter what one's political affiliation, as we again observe the transfer of the presidency, it would be difficult not to acknowledge the particular historical significance of this moment. Without question, President-elect Obama's inauguration is evidence of the tremendous advances we have made, as a nation, in regards to race relations. Some have even begun to refer to this as a post-racial America.

However, this is still up in the air. The question remains as to how much farther we must yet travel to truly be "one people" and "one America". Christians, in particular must be willing to address this question.

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## Missing Articles From Past Issues

Just let us know and we will be glad to send copies of those you would like to have. Some of the topics we have covered:

- President Bush, Faith, and Culture
- Atheists and Christmas
- Coming Soon to a Bus Near You



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Dr. Martin Luther King once said, "You have allowed segregation to creep into the doors of the church. How can such a division exist in the true Body of Christ? You must face the tragic fact that when you stand at 11:00 on Sunday morning to sing "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name" and "Dear Lord and Father of all Mankind," you stand in the most segregated hour of Christian America. They tell me that there is more integration in the entertaining world and other secular agencies than there is in the Christian church. How appalling that is." (Paul's Letter to American Christians, 1956)

These words were spoken over fifty years ago and, unfortunately, still ring true today. As Dr. King recognized, the Christian Church should be at the forefront in racial reconciliation, not bringing up the rear. If we cannot worship together in our Churches, how shall we ever walk together in our social and community structures?

Concerning the role of the church, Dr. King said, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. (Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, 1963)

As we remember Dr. King, on this day that commemorates his birth, and as we prepare to observe the oath of office being given to our first African-American President, let us celebrate how far we

have come. However, let us also not forget that there is still a ways yet to travel.

Surely, in these days of good will, we are not so naïve as to think racism will not continue to rear its ugly head. Let us pray that it will not be so in the Church and that God will give us the grace and power to be part of the solution and deal with it quickly and decisively.

Those who call themselves Christian must strive to see that it is never again said that any institution or agency has surpassed the Church in establishing racial equality and harmony. And, though we may have different cultural backgrounds that make us distinct, may it never again be the color of our skin that separates and divides us; especially at 11:00 on Sunday morning.



The day before President Obama took the oath of office I acknowledged in my blog the magnitude of the historical moment and that it was, truly, evidence we have made great advancement as a country when it comes to race. However, I also wrote, "The question remains as to how much farther we must yet travel to truly be "one people" and "one America"."

At least some of the pundits would have us to think that

the trip is not that far, proclaiming we are already in a "post-racial" America. Certainly the President did not say or do anything that might lead us to believe otherwise. Yet, the reminder of darker times was still there as evidenced in the Inaugural's closing prayer by Rev Joseph Lowery, which he concluded with:

"Lord, in the memory of all the saints who from their labors rest, and in the joy of a new beginning, we ask you to help us work for that day when black will not be asked to get back, when brown can stick around, when yellow will be mellow, when the red man can get ahead, man, and when white will embrace what is right.

Let all those who do justice and love mercy say amen." [Endquote]

To this there was a resounding Amen from the audience, which Rev. Lowery had them repeat two more times for emphasis. As I heard the last line of his prayer and noted the laughter of the crowd as he spoke this refrain, I could not help but think that we may still be bogged down too much in the past; and, that such old-school rhetoric is not helpful as we move forward. It appeared the President agrees with this as he seemed to visibly wince as these lines were delivered.

The thoughts expressed by Rev Lowery are not new. They are found in songs and choruses of the past. Some of which became part of the history of the civil rights effort. One is the song *Black, Brown, and White* written by, blues singer, Big Bill Broonzy in 1949 as an attack on racism:

*This little song that I'm singin' about,  
 People, you all know that it's true,  
 If you're black and gotta work for livin',  
 Now, this is what they will say to you,  
 They says: "If you was white, You's alright,  
 If you was brown, Stick around,  
 But if you's black, oh, brother, Get back, get back, get back."  
 I was in a place one night,  
 They was all havin' fun,  
 They was all buyin' beer and wine,  
 But they would not sell me none.  
 They said: "If you was white, You's alright,  
 If you was brown, You could stick around,  
 But as you's black, hmm, hmm, brother, Get back, get back, get back."  
 I went to an employment office,  
 I got a number and I got in line,  
 They called everybody's number,  
 But they never did call mine.  
 They said: "If you was white, You's alright  
 If you was brown, You could stick around,*

*But as you's black, hmm, hmm, brother, Get back, get back, get back.  
 Me and a man was workin' side by side,  
 Now, this is what it meant:  
 They was payin' him a dollar an hour,  
 And they was payin' me fifty cent.  
 They said: "If you was white, You'd be alright,  
 If you was brown, You could stick around,  
 But as you's black, oh, brother, Get back, get back, get back.  
 I helped win sweet victories,  
 With my plow and hoe,  
 Now, I want you to tell me, brother,  
 What you gonna do 'bout the old Jim Crow?  
 Now, if you is white, You's alright,  
 If you's brown, Stick around,  
 But if you's black, oh, brother, Get back, get back, get back.*

A website dedicated to Bill Broonzy researched these lyrics and offers that its roots go even further back (the following is from <http://www.broonzy.com>): "It was an old rhyme in black oral culture before Bill and others changed the subject from

intra-racial to inter-racial color caste, by editing it. To quote from a review of mine in Blues & Rhythm:

Big Bill abridges an old rhyme, which John Cowley suggests he may have got from Zora Neale Hurston via Alan Lomax. In Hurston's Story In Harlem Slang (American Mercury, July 1942), one pimp says to another: Man, I don't deal in no coal. Know what I tell 'em? If they's white, they's right! If they's yellow, they's mellow! If they's brown, they can stick around. But if they come black, they better git way back! (Im indebted to Konrad Nowakowski for this reference.)

Personally, I suspect that the first line originally started 'If they's bright...' (light-skinned black) rather than 'white.' In other words, it originally expressed internalized racism, as Brenda Dixon Gottschild notes in Dancing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era<sup>1</sup> (New York, Palgrave, 2000; p. 135):

Internalized racism ensures that the values encapsulated in this vernacular rhyme serve as an insidious self-fulfilling prophecy:

*If you're white, you're right. If*



Statistical data reflecting some of the findings regarding the cultural footprints of Americans.

- 75% of Americans believe in heaven.
- 73% of Americans believe in angels
- 71% of Americans believe Jesus is the son of God
- 62% of Americans believe in hell
- 51% of Americans believe in the devil
- 47% of Americans believe in Darwin's theory of evolution
- 40% of Americans believe in creationism
- 55% of Americans believe most, or all of the Old Testament
- 54% of Americans believe most, or all of the New Testament (However, only 37% of Americans believe all the OT texts and 36% believe all the NT texts are the "Word of God")



*you're yellow, you're mellow. If you're brown, stay down [sometimes changed to 'stick around'] But if you're black, stay back.*

Her endnote is interesting:

According to folklorist Roger Abrahams, the words to this refrain, as sung by the Almanac Singers in the 1940s, did not include the second line, 'If you're yellow, you're mellow,' but the group was responsible for spreading the 3-line version of the rhyme in a song frequently performed in northern, leftist labor movement concerts. (Telephone conversation, 1 December 1999) The origin of the saying is unclear,

but it seems probable that it is African American." [Endquote]

The Civil Rights movement owes much to Rev Lowery and others who, early on in the movement, joined with Dr. King and helped define and establish the course that has led us to the election of an African-American President.

Without question, much of the progress we have made as a nation was built on their labors.

It is also true that history is not something we should ignore or forget. It reminds us where we came from and where we have

been. It can also remind us of the roads that must not be taken again and point us toward a better way and better days. However, it is not always something to be clung to.

If we are going to truly become post-racial then we have much to do and the rhetoric of old must be done away with. Perhaps, to move forward, we may need to quit singing the songs of the past. This is particularly true in the Church and among those who would take the mantle of Reverend, Pastor, Church leader, Christian - no matter what the pigmentation of one's skin.

## Oprah and Spirituality by Bob Waldrep



Earlier this month Oprah devoted a week of programs to, "Oprah's Best Life Series". The topics included weight, health, finances, relationships, and, of course, one topic Oprah can't stay away from - your spirit. That show featured Rev. Ed Bacon, pastor of All Saint Episcopal Church in Pasadena (the Oprah website describes this as, "a liberal and progressive church in both its theology and politics"), Elizabeth Lesser, co-founder of Omega Institute (this is rooted in Eastern meditation and has its origins in Sufism - a mystical offshoot of Islam), and Michael Beckwith, spiritual director of Agape International Spiritual Center (he is also a teacher in the New Age book and DVD, *The Secret*).

As you can see, missing from Oprah's discussion of "your" spirit is any evangelical Christian representative. Of course, it is not surprising for Ms. Winfrey to exclude that voice when discussing spiritual matter since it is not her particular perspective.

So, what was she promoting on this particular program and her webcast follow up "Finding Your Spiritual Path" with these same teachers? Following are some excerpts of the discussions.

### Concerning God

The Rev. Bacon: When we are connected with the divine intelligence, which is all there is, we become intelligent and we become connected with all there is. We experience the all-ness, the oneness, the wholeness that God is and that we are inside, all the community of cells within us and with one another and with all the people in the world.

The view Bacon expresses is one held by others on the panel, as well. It is the idea that all is God and God is all and is much more compatible with Eastern religions than with Christianity. Of course, to hold such a view one must reinterpret, or dismiss, the Bible. Here is how Oprah and her panel handles it.

### Concerning the Bible

"Oprah: I was always told the Bible was God's holy word.

Michael: Right, but it's actually the inspired word of man. The inspiration of man about God. And if you read the Bible, open up any Bible, it will say "version." "This is the King James Version."

**Oprah:** That's right. That's right.

**Michael:** It's the King James Version of the Bible. It's not the Bible. You can't find the real Bible. All you have are the versions that have been passed down. So people are putting their faith in versions.

**Oprah:** Say that again. The inspired words-words of men about God.

**Michael:** About God. That's what you're reading. So at any moment, you know, you have an aha!, you have an inspiration about the presence of God.

**Oprah:** I just had an aha! just then.

**Michael:** You lay it down, you know, it becomes your Bible. It becomes that moment of inspiration. So you compile all of that. It has history.

**Oprah:** Yes."

Note that not only is this dismissive of the Bible, but it also elevates the ability of the individual to become his own standard of truth by having "an aha" moment. Oprah shared a personal experience that illustrates, telling the story of her departure from the Christian Church over twenty five years which began with an "aha" moment. One that would lead her to the same conclusion about God being a universal energy or divine intelligence expressed by Bacon.

"**Oprah:** For me the biggest spiritual big moment was what I was describing earlier, that moment sitting in church listening to the preacher talk about the condemnation and judgmental God and me having that aha! epiphanal moment that how can God be love and condemning at the same time and then starting that path to recognize that God-God, all universal energy, all that is God, really does want me to have my best life and that that is why I'm here. To seek that and to achieve it to the best of my ability in co-creation with the greater good that is God. That was my big revelation. And so I can accept the abundance that is offered because that's why it's offered to us. Yeah. Yes, you?"

In other words, they are saying that if anything rings true with you, it is true; an objective standard by which it might be measured - such as the Bible - is not necessary. The statistical trends related to the Bible seem to indicate this is becoming a prevalent view [see Culture Tracks]. While most in our culture still believe in the Bible a much smaller percentage believe that all the texts are actually the Word of God. This trend should grow as our children are raised with such views.

In fact, during the webcast, one person asked Oprah how she should expose her children to spirituality. The answer, approved by Oprah, was as follows.

### Concerning Children and Spirituality

**Elizabeth:** You can say to them, "I think about this all the time too. Let's go on this adventure together. Let's read from this book together." You know, there are wonderful books for children, different teaching tales from the Bible, from Buddha, from the Greek myths, and you could have a time every night where you read different stories together and talk about the big issues and let them know that you are someone they can come to with their questions, even if you don't have the answer, and say, "We're going to seek for this together."

**Oprah:** I think that's a really interesting thing because, you know, I think parents usually, and I think what you're feeling, too, Victoria, parents usually want to have the answer for their kids. They want to be able to say this is it and this is what we believe as a family. But you're right. It is a spiritual adventure for everybody."

The idea presented here is not to train your children in a particular religious tradition but to expose them to a variety of spiritual streams. Interestingly, though Elizabeth Lesser recognizes there are big issues in life, she cannot direct us to a solution, other than to study religious works that offer conflicting answers. Little wonder we are raising a spiritually schizophrenic generation.

The advice given regarding church is just as bad.

"**Oprah:** How do you find a church like yours? Maybe not with a choir as good, but-

**Michael:** You know, you can look up the Science of Mind, there's Unity.

**Elizabeth:** Unity Church.

**Oprah:** Unity Churches, yeah.

Elizabeth: Unity Churches are all over the place.

**Oprah:** Yeah.

**Elizabeth:** As are Unitarian Churches.

**Michael:** Right.

**Oprah:** By Unity, it means they accept all religions, right?

**Michael:** Unity embraces the teachings of Jesus, but not necessarily from a dogmatic point of view. The same thing with the Science of Mind. It's taking your life-it's a religion that gives you back to yourself."

The recommendation here is if you must go to church, find one that embraces all religions as true. The mind science churches, of which Michael Beckwith's Church is one, sprung up in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. They were basically the forerunners of the Metaphysical and New Age Churches of today.

So why does Oprah continue to teach this relativistic/New Age understanding of spirituality? In part it is due to her own spiritual journey. But more importantly, it is due to her own sense of self. Oprah has said that as a child she wanted to be a missionary. Through television, that childhood dream has been realized.

### Concerning Oprah's Ministry

**The Rev. Bacon:** ...I believe that every person is a minister. Everybody is an instrument. Everyone is an instrument.

**Oprah:** Well, this show for me for years has been a ministry.

**Oprah:** And that's when the show changed. The show changed for me when it stopped being-so that may have also been a great spiritual moment. The moment I recognized and literally had a meeting and said, "I'm not going to take this-you know, I'm going to take the high road. I'm going to stop doing confrontational television." And a lot of my sponsors and other television stations in different cities at the time were very upset with me. And I said, "I will either take this path or I will get out of television." So that was a-that was a big moment when I made the decision that I was going to use television for what I believed to be a greater good than be used by television. So that's-that's I think when a lot of things changed.

**Michael:** And that's changed millions and millions and millions of lives.

**Oprah:** Yeah. And changed my ability to stay in it. I wouldn't have been able to stay in it or stay with it.

There is little doubt that Beckwith is right. It may not be millions, but many lives have been changed through Oprah's show. Certainly, it is undeniable that she has done much good and has had a positive impact on the personal lives of many people throughout the world. However, Beckwith refers to the underlying basis of this impact being her spiritual views.

I fear he is right on this point and her influence has been far reaching in helping to move our culture away from the worship of the one true God. And though we may not agree with her views, you must admit her zeal for her views and willingness to promote them are admirable. I think the reason for her being so vocal is because she genuinely believes these views can change the world.

Should those who have trusted Christ be any less devoted to sharing the hope of the gospel? We may not have as large a platform as Oprah, but we should be just as passionate in our faith. For while Oprah might offer her brand of "truth", her "ahas", we who are Christians offer the one who is the truth - the Savior!

Jesus came to deliver us from sin and give us life. Now, that's good news worth sharing.

[To read more about Oprah, her spiritual teachers, and the mind science church refer to *The Truth Behind the Secret*, coauthored by Bob Waldrep. Order at: [www.crosswindstore.org](http://www.crosswindstore.org).]