



# Weighing Religion And Evil

BY VINCE TWO EAGLES

Hau Mitakuepi,  
I was recently asked by a friend of mine to venture an opinion as to why people use religion to justify evil acts. I have long wondered about such things myself, having witnessed such acts and having been the victim as well — especially when incarcerated in religious boarding school in my early years.  
When I was a drug/alcohol counselor so many moons ago, I was asked to counsel some young people who were caught up in devil worship. Some workers from the tribal housing reported some strange doings in one of their empty units that was under repair, which upon investigation involved some satanic writings and a dead puppy.  
Before approaching these young people about their involvement, I obtained some reading material on the subject and, among other interesting facts, I was made aware of the fact that evil is a relative term. In other words, what may be an evil act to one culture may not necessarily be to another. For purposes of this discourse, I am going to restrict my thoughts to the more serious acts of wrongdoing that we can pretty much all agree are “acts of evil.”  
It seems that most cultures would agree that mass killing and maiming of other people would qualify here. The recent bombings in Boston, I think, would fit this category to a tee. These cowardly acts of violence put us face to face with the sheer insanity of man’s inhumanity to man, and from all the preliminary reporting being fed to the public, it appears as though these alleged criminals used religion as a means to embolden as well as justify their ghastly deed.  
It seems like every movie I’ve ever seen about war depicts the act of evoking God’s good graces by declaring that “God is on their side.” The other side evokes the same claim. So who’s right? And what if your country or you individually are neutral?  
Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, overworked scientist and Christian philosopher who lived between 1623-1662 and who once wrote, “Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.”



Vince  
**TWO EAGLES**

Or as Mohandas Gandhi put it, “The most heinous and most cruel crimes of which history has record have been committed under the cover of religion or equally noble motives.”  
So why do we do it? Why do we seek religion to justify our evil acts? Do you remember when I said evil is a relative term? Well, so is good. What is one culture’s perceived good is another culture’s evil. We are both good and evil sometimes at once. And what about intent? Does evil have to be intended in order for it to be truly evil? Can we intend good but end up committing evil acts? What is colonization all about?  
The answers seem more to lie at the doorstep of being held accountable and responsible for one’s own actions. If, as Christians sometimes do, one blames the devil for making you do evil, then how do we hold the devil accountable for doing what we’re supposed to be doing? And what if one is not a Christian? Then who do we get to blame?  
It seems to me we do the next best thing and blame each other, but of course, we are held blameless if only in our own mind’s eye because God was on our side. Sometimes I think we use our religious beliefs to justify our wrongdoings as a way to squelch our guilt — but beyond that, it offers us a sort of group permission. Killing other human beings is clearly in that category. What about killing other living things for no reason other than to serve the needs and wants of humans? Is that evil? For many people, it is evil to destroy another living thing just for the sake of killing it. Polluting the environment is a serious act of evil to some people, while those causing the pollution seem not to care. Profits’ first right?  
Is God on the side of the Boston bombers? Most of us think not! Therefore, whether or not these two losers thought they could justify their taking of innocent life for a religious reason, we as a law-abiding people who live by the rule of law must say no! We’re not going to accept your religious faith as justification for what you did, nor should we allow anyone’s personal faith to get in the way of the rule of law we are all bound by.  
And now you know the rez of the story.  
Doksha (later) ...

# The George W. Bush I Knew

BY KATHLEEN PARKER  
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WASHINGTON — In a reprieve from the horror of the most recent terrorist attack, the nation’s attentions turned to the man who declared the war on terrorism, George W. Bush.  
During Thursday’s dedication of his library at Southern Methodist University, nary a word was spoken about the most controversial aspect of his tenure, the Iraq invasion. All living presidents were in attendance and made only generic references to mistakes and regrets familiar to all. Of course Bush famously acknowledges no mistakes or regrets, but rather bequeaths judgment to history and self-doubt to those of lesser conviction.  
This observation, though true, is not the whole story of Bush, however. Nearly everyone who has known Bush up closer than a video clip has a different impression of him than what is more popularly accepted. The arrogant, swaggering caricature of the 43rd president was mostly a shield. Bravado of the “bring ‘em on” variety was more personal jab than foreign policy statement, though one suspects Bush enjoyed the sound of tiny feet scurrying to keyboards in search of deeper meaning.  
Obviously, what a president says and does is fair game for criticism. The way Bush chose to express himself was the way he would be perceived and judged. To act arrogantly is to be arrogant in the public eye. To speak awkwardly is to be awkward.  
But in private, Bush was a very different man. In small groups, he was articulate and confident. When the cameras were off, he was relaxed and natural. Not everyone is made for TV, and this is no criticism. It can be a deficit for public figures, but people who are at one with lights and cameras are sometimes better actors than statesmen.  
Everyone is familiar with Bush’s history and performance. What I offer is an anecdote or two that I think reveal what the cameras and critics could not. These recollections are simply recorded for the sake of biography in the interest of rounding out a more complete picture of a two-term, transformational president who changed our world in ways that won’t be fully understood or judged in our lifetimes.  
July 2007: I have just written a eulogy for a friend who has died in a car crash when I am summoned along with



Kathleen  
**PARKER**

about a dozen other journalists to meet with the president. His director of media affairs, Jeanie Mammo, meets me at the security gate, sees my bloodshot eyes and, having read my column, says how sorry she is. I start babbling something about how I wouldn’t have come except, and she interrupts: “Except that he’s the president of the United States.”  
Yes, that’s it.  
Once in the Roosevelt Room, Bush circles the room, shaking hands with each person, coming to me last. He gives a hug and says, “You’re not alone. I’m right there with you.”  
Somehow I managed not to burst into tears. After the meeting he returned to give me another hug, whereupon I asked a favor. Would he write a note to my friend’s son? Absolutely. In the Oval Office, he asks the boy’s name. Jackson. He writes: “Dear Jackson, I know your heart is broken. I will pray for you. Sincerely, George W. Bush.”  
More or less. Unfortunately, I failed to copy the letter before delivering it to the son at my friend’s funeral.  
I tell this story because it should be part of the public record of this president, not least because such gestures were not rare. Bush often met privately and without fanfare with the families of fallen soldiers. He often visited the wounded without anyone’s knowing. He really did feel others’ pain.  
During a one-on-one interview on Air Force One, I asked him about his hardest days as president. He rejected the question as irrelevant. The hardest day of his life was seeing his father lose re-election, not because the Bush family needed more time in the Rose Garden but because seeing his father, “this great man,” suffer was so painful for the son.  
Every president (thus far) is also just a man, which is to say, human. His frailties and flaws are in plain sight, every gesture a potential weapon of self-destruction. For reasons that are perhaps a characteristic of our untamed nature, we seem intent on elevating presidents only to bring them down.  
Thus it was with Bush, who, our favorite cartoons notwithstanding, was more than a composite of swagger and smirk. He was also a kind man with a gentle heart who should be remembered as such.  
  
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OPINION | OUR VIEW

## Change The School Funding Discussion

The establishment of a legislative study group to examine education funding issues in South Dakota doesn’t mean the answer to finding better funding for schools is necessarily in sight. However, it does offer the chance to at least frame the question in better terms so that the answers can be found.  
Last week, the Executive Board of the state Legislature voted to form a study group that will, according to The Associated Press, “investigate the funding formula and revenue sources” used by the state to fund public schools. The group, whose members have yet to be named, will convene throughout the summer and fall to formulate recommendations that will be submitted to the Legislature next winter.  
This is a good opportunity to finally address an issue that has been plaguing lawmakers and, as a consequence, public education in South Dakota for some time. Frankly, it’s a chance to change the tenor of the dialogue.  
Critics might argue that this proposal, while well meaning, is one step behind the issue. Part of the problem, they might say, is that the state’s funding formula could work if it had been funded as it was supposed to be two years ago, when harsh cuts were enacted in the midst of the recession. This belied the formula mandate that schools annually receive increases of either up to 3 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is smaller. Since then, the schools have received funding as scheduled, but it hasn’t been nearly enough to make up for what was lost two years ago, which undercut the base funding. The school districts will be receiving \$4,626 per student next year instead of the \$4,805 they were receiving before the cuts in 2011. Thus, they are continually shouldering the burden of those 2011 cuts.  
There has been little evidence that this path will change in the Legislature as business is currently conducted. Therefore, the dialogue needs to change. (In a 2012 study conducted by the group School Funding Fairness, South Dakota ranked 45th nationally for funding levels and received an “F” grade for effort, which measures what a state spends on education versus its funding capacity. As an aside, the state did receive a “B” grade for distributing funds to impoverished areas.)  
The study group has a chance to frame the question better — and perhaps, steer the conversation in Pierre in a more productive direction.  
The group is tasked with not only studying the funding formula but also examining revenue sources for schools. As Wade Pogany, executive director of the Associated School Board of South Dakota, put it, “We’re hopeful a big part of the discussion is revenue sources for schools. Not just rearranging the pie, but are there other revenue sources for schools.”  
New sources will likely mean new taxes, which means whatever proposals are produced will bear watching.  
There is also the matter of whether any proposals will actually come forth at all. According to The Associated Press, a task force that studied school funding several years ago had a hard time with issues of revenue streams outside of the school funding formula. So the issue is tricky.  
But this new study group is at least a start toward a new goal. It can reframe the school funding question in fresh terms, and it can perhaps create a blueprint that can move this issue forward. We can always hope, anyway. We certainly can’t continue to stagger along as we are.

kmh

## ONLINE OPINION

The results of the most recent Internet poll on the *Press & Dakotan’s* Web site are as follows:

### LATEST RESULTS:

**Have you ever utilized a payday loan or pawn shop?**  
No .....89%  
Yes .....11%  
**TOTAL VOTES CAST** .....**328**  
*The Press & Dakotan Internet poll is not a scientific survey and reflects the opinions only of those who choose to participate. The results should not be construed as an accurate representation or scientific measurement of public opinion.*

### CURRENT QUESTION:

**Do you believe gay marriage will be legalized nationwide in your lifetime?**  
To vote in the *Press & Dakotan’s* Internet poll, log on to our website at [www.yankton.net](http://www.yankton.net).

## TODAY IN HISTORY

**By The Associated Press**  
Today is Tuesday, April 30, the 120th day of 2013. There are 245 days left in the year.  
**Today’s Highlight in History:** On April 30, 1973, President Richard Nixon announced the resignations of top aides H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst and White House counsel John Dean, who was actually fired.  
**On this date:** In 1789, George Washington took office in New York as the first president of the United States.  
In 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France for 60 million francs, the equivalent of about \$15 million.  
In 1812, Louisiana became the 18th state of the Union.  
In 1863, the design of the Great Seal of the Confederate States of America was approved by the Confederate Congress.  
In 1900, engineer John Luther “Casey” Jones of the Illinois Central Railroad died in a train wreck near Vaughan, Miss., after staying at the controls in a successful effort to save the passengers.  
In 1938, a precursor to the cartoon character Bugs Bunny first appeared in the Warner Bros. animated short “Porky’s Hare Hunt.”  
In 1939, the New York World’s Fair officially opened with a ceremony that included an address by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.  
In 1945, as Russian troops approached his Berlin bunker, Adolf Hitler committed suicide along with his wife of one day, Eva Braun.  
In 1968, New York City police forcibly removed student demonstrators occupying five buildings at Columbia University.  
In 1983, blues singer and guitarist Muddy Waters died in Westmont, Ill., at age 68.  
In 1988, Gen. Manuel Noriega, waving a machete, vowed at a rally to keep fighting U.S. efforts to oust him as Panama’s military ruler.  
In 1993, top-ranked women’s tennis player Monica Seles was stabbed in the back during a match in Hamburg, Germany, by a man who described himself as a fan of second-ranked German player Steffi Graf. (The man, convicted of causing grievous bodily harm, was given a suspended sentence.)  
**Ten years ago:** International mediators presented Israeli and Palestinian leaders with a new Middle East “road map,” a U.S.-backed blueprint for ending 31 months of violence and establishing a Palestinian state. Mahmoud Abbas took office as Palestinian prime minister. The U.S. Navy withdrew from its disputed Vieques bombing range in Puerto Rico, prompting celebrations by islanders.  
**Five years ago:** The Federal Reserve cut interest rates for a seventh straight time, reducing the federal funds rate a quarter-point to 2 percent. An avalanche in Italy’s northwestern Alps killed five French ski-mountaineers.  
**One year ago:** President Barack Obama and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, meeting at the White House, decried aggressive acts from North Korea, including a recent failed rocket launch, and vowed to maintain a unified front against such provocations. A ferry carrying more than 300 people capsized in a river in northeast India, killing some 100 people and leaving about as many missing.  
**Today’s Birthdays:** Actress Cloris Leachman is 87. Singer Willie Nelson is 80. Actor Burt Young is 73. Singer Bobby Vee is 70. Movie director Allan Arkush is 65. Actor Perry King is 65. Singer Merrill Osmond is 60. Movie director Jane Campion is 59. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper is 54. Actor Paul Gross is 54. Basketball Hall of Famer Isiah Thomas is 52. Country musician Robert Reynolds (The Mavericks) is 51. Actor Adrian Pasdar is 48. Rapper Turbo B (Snapi) is 46. Rock musician Clark Vogeler is 44. Rhythm-and-blues singer Chris “Choc” Dalyrimple (Soul For Real) is 42. Rock musician Chris Henderson (3 Doors Down) is 42. Country singer Carolyn Dawn Johnson is 42. Actress Lisa Dean Ryan is 41. Rhythm-and-blues singer Akon is 40. Rhythm-and-blues singer Jeff Timmons (98 Degrees) is 40. Actor Johnny Galecki is 38. Singer-musician Cole Deggs (Cole Deggs and the Lonesome) is 37. Actor Kunal Nayyar is 32. Rapper Lloyd Banks is 31. Actress Kirsten Dunst is 31. Country singer Tyler Wilkinson (The Wilkinson) is 29. Actress Dianna Agron is 27.  
**Thought for Today:** “Upper classes are a nation’s past; the middle class is its future.” — Ayn Rand, Russian-born author (1905-1982).

## FROM THE BIBLE

*The Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis*

## YOUR LETTERS

### Water Quality Concerns

John Magnuson, Yankton

If you are bumming a bit about your low “T” or the long winter, maybe we should take a break and have a nice cold glass of tap water.  
It’s been said water is the only drink for a wise man. There isn’t, but with all the talk of constitutional rights, there ought to be an amendment guaranteeing every American a perfectly pure, clear and cold glass of water. At the least, every city and county should make it a law to bring us a perfect glass of water without any impurities. That’s why it is pleasing to hear that the city is discussing a water update from 1929 technology.  
When it comes to drinking water, what concerns us is purity, cost and availability. I scratch my head when I get postcards from the water department listing all the

chemical impurities in the water supply that are over the FDA recommendations.  
Now we all know that we shouldn’t be drinking this stuff but we believe it probably won’t hurt us. But is there any kind of link between cancer rates in South Dakota and our drinking water? Some think so. We know that some toxins are very slow acting and are not immediately harmful. But with constant exposure over many years, there can be risks. How long have you been drinking the water?  
It’s great hearing about the city considering improvements and wanting to have extra water available for industry in case it moves here. But what about developing a water system that is as pure as technically possible with absolutely no health risks? This should be front and center, and as voters, we should demand it. Then maybe it could be bottled and someone could make a buck.

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