

# **A Minister Fights Back on Moral Values.**

Dr. Robin Meyers  
Oklahoma University  
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As some of you know, I am minister of Mayflower Congregational Church in Oklahoma City, an Open and Affirming, Peace and Justice church in northwest Oklahoma City, and professor of Rhetoric at Oklahoma City University.

But you would most likely have encountered me on the pages of the Oklahoma Gazette, where I have been a columnist for six years, and hold the record for the most number of angry letters to the editor. Tonight, I join ranks of those who are angry, because I have watched as the faith I love has been taken over by fundamentalists who claim to speak for Jesus, but whose actions are anything but Christian. We've heard a lot lately about so-called "moral values" as having swung the election to President Bush. Well, I'm a great believer in moral values, but we need to have a discussion, all over this country, about exactly what constitutes a moral value – I mean what are we talking about?

Because we don't get to make them up as we go along, especially not if we are people of faith. We have an inherited tradition of what is right and wrong, and moral is as moral does. Let me give you just a few of the reasons why I take issue with those in power who claim moral values are on their side:

- When you start a war on false pretenses, and then act as if your deceptions are justified because you are doing God's will, and that your critics are either unpatriotic or lacking in faith, there are some of us who have given our lives to teaching and preaching the faith who believe that this is not only not moral, but immoral.
- When you live in a country that has established international rules for waging a just war, build the United Nations on your own soil to enforce them, and then arrogantly break the very rules you set down for the rest of the world, you are doing something immoral.
- When you claim that Jesus is the Lord of your life, and yet fail to acknowledge that your policies ignore his essential teaching, or turn them on their head (you know, Sermon on the Mount stuff like that we must never return violence for violence and that those who live by the sword will die by the sword), you are doing something immoral.
- When you act as if the lives of Iraqi civilians are not as important as the lives of American soldiers, and refuse to even count them, you are doing something immoral.
- When you find a way to avoid combat in Vietnam, and then question the patriotism of someone who volunteered to fight, and came home a hero, you are doing something immoral.
- When you ignore the fundamental teachings of the gospel, which says that the way the strong treat the weak is the ultimate ethical test, by giving tax breaks to the wealthiest among us so the strong will get stronger and the weak will get weaker, you are doing something immoral.

- When you wink at the torture of prisoners, and deprive so-called “enemy combatants” of the rules of the Geneva convention, which your own country helped to establish and insists that other countries follow, you are doing something immoral.
- When you claim that the world can be divided up into the good guys and the evil doers, slice up your own nation into those who are with you, or with the terrorists – and then launch a war which enriches your own friends and seizes control of the oil to which we are addicted, instead of helping us to kick the habit, you are doing something immoral.
- When you fail to veto a single spending bill, but ask us to pay for a war with no exit strategy and no end in sight, creating an enormous deficit that hangs like a great millstone around the necks of our children, you are doing something immoral.
- When you cause most of the rest of the world to hate a country that was once the most loved country in the world, and act like it doesn’t matter what others think of us, only what God thinks of you, you have done something immoral.
- When you use hatred of homosexuals as a wedge issue to turn out record numbers of evangelical voters, and use the Constitution as a tool of discrimination, you are doing something immoral.
- When you favor the death penalty, and yet claim to be a follower of Jesus, who said an eye for an eye was the old way, not the way of the kingdom, you are doing something immoral.
- When you dismantle countless environmental laws designed to protect the earth which is God’s gift to us all, so that the corporations that bought you and paid for your favors will make higher profits while our children breathe dirty air and live in a toxic world, you have done something immoral. The earth belongs to the Lord, not Halliburton.
- When you claim that our God is bigger than their God, and that our killing is righteous, while theirs is evil, we have begun to resemble the enemy we claim to be fighting, and that is immoral. We have met the enemy, and the enemy is us.
- When you tell people that you intend to run and govern as a “compassionate conservative,” using the word which is the essence of all religious faith-compassion, and then show no compassion for anyone who disagrees with you, and no patience with those who cry to you for help, you are doing something immoral.
- When you talk about Jesus constantly, who was a healer of the sick, but do nothing to make sure that anyone who is sick can go to see a doctor, even if she doesn’t have a penny in her pocket, you are doing something immoral.

– When you put judges on the bench who are racist, and will set women back a hundred years, and when you surround yourself with preachers who say gays ought to be killed, you are doing something immoral.

I'm tired of people thinking that because I'm a Christian, I must be a supporter of President Bush, or that because I favor civil rights and gay rights I must not be a person of faith. I'm tired of people saying that I can't support the troops but oppose the war. I heard that when I was your age, when the Vietnam war was raging. We knew that that war was wrong, and you know that this war is wrong – the only question is how many people are going to die before these make-believe Christians are removed from power?

This country is bankrupt. The war is morally bankrupt. The claim of this administration to be Christian is bankrupt. And the only people who can turn things around are people like you – young people who are just beginning to wake up to what is happening to them. It's your country to take back. It's your faith to take back. It's your future to take back.

Don't be afraid to speak out. Don't back down when your friends begin to tell you that the cause is righteous and that the flag should be wrapped around the cross, while the rest of us keep our mouths shut. Real Christians take chances for peace. So do real Jews, and real Muslims, and real Hindus, and real Buddhists – so do all the faith traditions of the world at their heart believe one thing: life is precious. Every human being is precious. Arrogance is the opposite of faith. Greed is the opposite of charity. And believing that one has never made a mistake is the mark of a deluded man, not a man of faith.

And war – war is the greatest failure of the human race – and thus the greatest failure of faith.

There's an old rock and roll song, whose lyrics say it all: War, what is it good for? Absolutely nothing.

And what is the dream of the prophets? That we should study war no more, that we should beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks. Who would Jesus bomb, indeed? How many wars does it take to know that too many people have died? What if they gave a war and nobody came? Maybe one day we will find out.