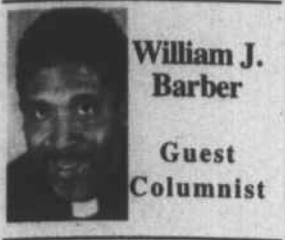


FORUM

A moral action for climate change is needed



William J. Barber
Guest Columnist

This is a prepared address by the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II in Washington, D.C., Sept. 24 at the Moral Action for Climate Change Rally as Pope Francis came the United States:

We gather here today as one human family to raise our moral voices and to welcome Pope Francis and his message that true faith is not a disengagement from the challenges of the world but an embrace of those very challenges.

Truth is, there is no gospel that is not social; no gospel that relieves us of our call to love our neighbors as ourselves; no gospel that lives outside God's admonition to serve the least of these. Pope Francis has made this clear, and for that we thank him.

In this history of the United States, a moral critique has been always been at the center of any challenge to the structural sins of society — slavery, the denial of women's rights, the denial of labor rights, the denial of equal protection under the law, and the denial of voting rights, and the promulgation of unchecked militarism. We have never overcome any of these evils without a moral critique that challenged their grip on the heart and imagination of our society.

A moral critique is still needed today.

We hear Pope Francis's cry that we cannot love our earthly neighbors and yet sit quietly while the Earth herself is made unfit for human habitation. We cannot love humanity and yet give way to forces that

derail the very climate that gives us life. As His Holiness has said, we must acknowledge the "very consistent scientific consensus that we are in the presence of an alarming warming of the climactic system." We cannot be silent in a world "devastated by man's predatory relation with nature." The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein.

We must make a moral demand, shifting the energy supply strategy from coal, oil, natural gas and other fossil fuels to solar, wind, geothermal, and other clean renewable energy sources.

We must establish policies and programs to modernize the national infrastructure for the 21st century, transitioning toward full-employment with millions of new green jobs to help build a sustainable economy. We must provide educational and job training programs, transitional financial assistance and job opportunities for the industry workers displaced due to the transition to a renewable energy-based economy.

We must choose community and care of the earth over chaos and greed.

Not only must we push to protect the Earth's delicate climate balance; we must also challenge the social climate in which the poor live.

The Pope was right when he said in 2013: "The times talk to us of so much poverty in the world, and this is a scandal. Poverty in the world is a scandal. In a world where there is so much wealth, so many resources to feed everyone, it is unfathomable that there are so many hungry children, that there are so many children without an education, so many poor persons. Poverty today is a cry."

Poverty has been attrib-

uted to 4.5 percent of U.S. deaths. That is nearly 120,000 people, each of them created in the image of God. Each of their precious lives matters. Their death is the scandal the Pope is exposing.

It is a moral disgrace that there are 14.7 million poor children and 6.5 million extremely poor children in the United States of America — the world's largest economy.

We know that nearly half of the world's population — more than 3 billion people — live in poverty on less than \$2.50 a day. One billion children worldwide are living in poverty.

According to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty. Eight hundred five million people worldwide do not have enough food to eat.

This is the scandal a moral critique must expose: The poor are destroyed, society is destabilized and our shared humanity is terribly diminished.

We can and we must do better. If we focus more on ending poverty than cutting the social safety nets that help the poor, we can do better. If we move beyond the politics of lust for power to the politics of love for people, we can unify around a moral agenda. And we can do better. If we secure pro-labor, anti-poverty policies that insure economic sustainability by fighting for living wages, strong safety nets for the poor, fair policies for immigrants, infrastructure development, and an end to extreme militarism that

puts more resources in bombs, missiles and weaponry than food, jobs and shelter, we can do better.

God is using Pope Francis to prod our consciousness and push us toward action. By daring to preach the gospel of truth and justice, challenging the sins of economic exploitation, poverty and climate destruction, he is showing the way to revival, repentance and redemption.

To our ears, the Pope's message resonates with the ancient Jewish text that says, "Woe to those who legislate evil and rob the poor of their rights." This Pope sounds a lot like Jesus, who said in the Gospel of Matthew that love, mercy, and justice ate the weightier matters of the law.

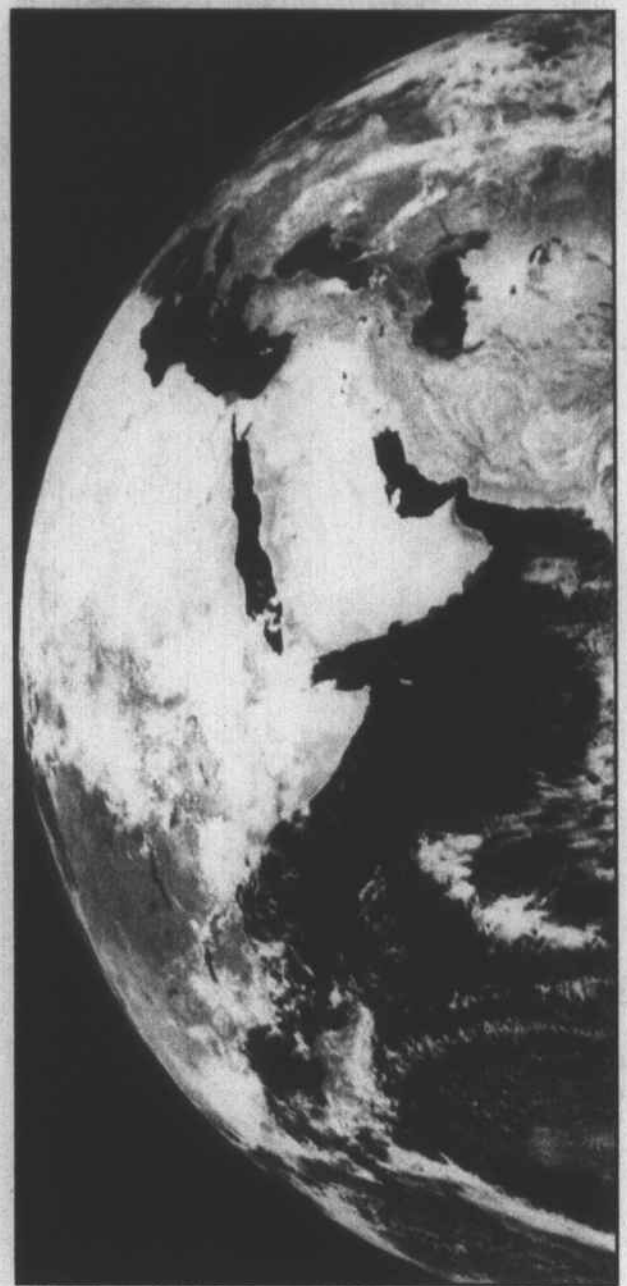
There are some Americans who applaud the Pope for his theological orthodoxy when he calls on us to love one another but decry his message as "political" when he points toward inequality and injustice. These are the same voices that grow hoarse touting "morality" with respect to abortion and homosexuality but cannot hear any suggestion that poverty is a moral issue.

This deafness to the Pontiff's purpose suggests that Jesus himself would not be welcomed by them in America. Their complaints reveal the serious moral crisis we find ourselves in.

Somebody must stand and say, "It doesn't matter what party is in power or who has a political supermajority. There are some things that transcend political majorities, partisan politics, and the narrow categories of liberal versus conservative. There are some things that must be challenged because they are wrong, extreme, and immoral."



Francis



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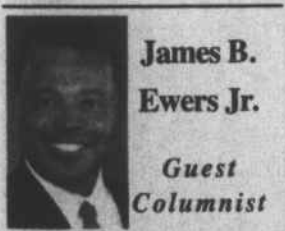
Destroying the Earth is just wrong. Hurting the poor is wrong. Treating corporations like people and people like things is just wrong.

And so, to those who complain that the Pontiff is engaging in politics, we say, prophetic voices must rise up and challenge immorality in every age. It's our time now. So let us join the Holy Father not in the politics of Democrat and Republican but in God's politics of love and justice.

The Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II is president of the North Carolina NAACP, which is based in Durham. He is also the architect of the Forward Together movement, which has Moral Mondays as a segment. Barber won the Award from the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation on Sept. 19.

You can keep up with Barber on Twitter or Facebook.

Kudos to graduate student's bold step in race relations dialogue



James B. Ewers Jr.
Guest Columnist

Growing up in the segregated South, I was accustomed to seeing "black only" and "white only" signs.

As I was maturing in North Carolina, these signs were posted at restaurants and theaters. While not specifically designated by signage, there were black schools for us as children and black churches that we attended.

In addition, we as blacks had our side of town and white people had their side of town. We seldom came in contact with each other. It didn't trouble us as our parents provided us with happy, loving and safe environments.

As I reflect now on this period in my life, conversations about race simply didn't happen. There weren't any dialogues about issues of social justice. Interestingly, I attended a parochial elementary school with all black students and all white teachers who were nuns. I never felt marginalized or discriminated against because of the color of my skin. Some reading the aforementioned statement might think that I and my friends were naive. But kids back in the day and today can tell when a teacher doesn't have your best interests at heart.

If you fast forward to 2015, there have been countless conversations about race and how to improve communication and garner respect for one another. These racial dialogues have occurred in business and on college campuses. Community agencies have sponsored them, and many have been held in our homes, all of which have been designed to bring the races closer together.

Still, with all of these workshops and dialogues, America has a long way to go. We read the newspaper or watch television and the battles among the races continue in a number of areas. I won't mention them because we know them all too well.

Recently, a college student in Buffalo, New York, made what I believe was a sin-



Photo by Inside Higher Ed.com

cere effort to begin some talks about race. Ashley Powell, a black graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo, put up 17 signs around campus that said "black only" and "white only." This was part of an art project that she had constructed.

Posting the signs invoked feelings of ill-will and discord among some in the campus community. She said she wanted to show white privilege.

Talking about race is a sensitive subject, and most everyone cries foul when you bring it up. The term, white privilege, has been around for years and is a part of the racial lexicon.

Some would say that too much is made of the term. Maybe because I matured when I did, I was focused solely on my pursuit of excellence. If you are black and a baby boomer like me, I am sure that you will agree.

Did Ashley Powell realize the

firestorm she would create when she started this project? I can't answer that question. However, I do know that it did take some courage for her to post the signs. Now that the signs have been posted, where do we go from here? My thinking is that she achieved her goal and that was to get students and faculty at the New York school to begin some conversations about race. Some would opine that her strategy was different and unusual but it is the result that counts.

Sometimes it takes "unusual strategies" to get people moving on a particular issue. Ashley Powell used her graduate school experience to become a voice for how to improve relations between the races. We really don't know who was empowered by Ms. Powell's bold move. It could have been her fellow students or it could have been one of her graduate professors.

It is good to see those engaged in grad-

uate study understand the importance of race and gender in this country. Speaking up and taking a stand will always take more heart and more tenacity, so kudos to Ashley Powell who stood ready to tackle a tough issue.

The signs "black only" and "white only" put up by this graduate student will make us look a little deeper and try a little harder to make America be one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

James B. Ewers Jr. Ed.D. is a former tennis champion at Atkins High School and played college tennis at Johnson C Smith University where he was all-conference for four years.

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