

Repent America, Marvin Olasky, and Michael Peroutka

In this special edition of Ekklesia Then & Now, I want to share with you an exchange I have had with Michael Peroutka and a member of his staff (whose name I will not mention since our e-mails were private). If you are a regular subscriber to *Ekklesia Then & Now*, you will notice that this issue deviates from my usual practice of including a "Then" (the early church), "Now" (today), and "Discussion" (comments on previous issues) format.

Mr. Peroutka was a 2004 Presidential candidate under the Constitution Party and garnered a total of 132,054 votes nationwide. His campaign themes of "Honor God," "Defend the Family," and "Restore the Republic" undoubtedly struck a chord with Christians who are dismayed at the state of our nation. When a friend recently forwarded an e-mail from Peroutka (*What's Wrong With This Picture? Homosexuals Attack Christians; Marvin Olasky Attacks Christians*) to his supporters and subscribers, I was intrigued enough to open it.

Since I am a subscriber to World Magazine and generally enjoy Marvin Olasky's essays and opinions, I read Peroutka's commentary with interest. I have no knowledge of Peroutka's character beyond his public statements, but I believe his comments about Olasky's essay are wrong, so I decided to write him.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read Marvin Olasky's original op-ed piece. This will open a new window. After you've read the piece, just close the window.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read Michael Peroutka's commentary on Olasky's essay. Again, this will open a new window.

[CLICK HERE](#) to view a video of the incident in Philadelphia provided by "Repent America."

Here is my letter to Michael Peroutka:

From: Dick Soule [mailto:dick@peculiarpress.com]
Sent: Wednesday, April 27, 2005 4:19 PM
To: info@peroutka2004.com
Subject: "What's Wrong with this Picture?" article

Dear Mr. Peroutka,

I am a World subscriber, have read Mr. Olasky's comments and, I must respectfully disagree with your observations about the incident in Philadelphia. While you may consider some of Olasky's points to have been cheap shots, Michael Marcavage and "Repent America" are dead wrong in their approach and it in no way reflects the Christianity of the New Testament. Marcavage and his group may consider themselves modern-day prophets with a call to attack "sinners" like Isaiah or Jeremiah, but if so, they miss an important point--one that is reinforced by the early church: the Old Testament Prophets were calling on God's Chosen People (Israel) to repent, not the rest of the world.

In fact, there is not a single New Testament example of the kind of provocative, offensive behavior Repent America exhibited in Philadelphia, and the consistent teaching of the church was not external reformation but internal transformation. Paul's comments to the church in Corinth are particularly revealing:

"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people [obviously, in an earlier letter]; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges." (1 Cor 5:9-13a)

I wrote at greater length about this specific subject in my own newsletter, "Ekklesia Then & Now," and I invite you to read that at http://www.peculiarpress.com/index_ekkleisia.htm. Just click on the HTML or PDF link to the right of the issue name (#24, Immorality).

None of this, of course, is to justify the even more offensive actions of the group that assaulted Marcavage, nor to excuse their deviant lifestyles. On the other hand, these are precisely the kinds of people Jesus accepted (i.e., prostitutes) during His ministry. The only people He challenged for their actions were the religious elite of His day, who considered themselves morally superior to the "sinners." In fact, the Marcavage's actions are more than slightly reminiscent of the Scribes and Pharisees in John 8. Jesus didn't condone the woman's adulterous behavior, but He treated her with kindness, respect, and love while humiliating her accusers into backing off.

You suggest that "there's a time and a place when either (a megaphone or preaching quietly) is required," but I'd like you to show me and your readers a single instance of Jesus' or Paul's use of a first-century corollary of a megaphone to spread the Gospel. Olasky is absolutely correct when he suggests that actions like that of "Repent America" distort the message of Christianity.

My friend Edward Fudge (<http://www.edwardfudge.com>) also recently wrote about this distinctly modern American brand of Christianity in an issue of "GracEmail: "

"Whom does Jesus warn about it? What evils elicit his mention of it? Does Jesus, like many preachers and professing Christians today, thunder hell-fire warnings to unchurched sinners: to prostitutes, drunkards and homosexuals? Does he use hell to spur conversions and to bring people to faith? The answers to these questions might surprise us -- and teach us something important as well. Jesus specifically mentions hell (gehenna) just 11 times in the Gospels. You will find his statements at Matthew 5:22; 5:29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47 and Luke 12:5."

Note: [Click here](#) to read those passages.

You claim that Marcavage and "Repent America" were "trying to win homosexuals to Christ." I doubt they did that day or ever would with such tactics. Instead, they presented an image of Christianity as a threatening message delivered by sanctimonious judges and, in all likelihood, made it more difficult for them to hear the true message of the Gospel--grace and love--presented in the patient, loving way Jesus did.

I respectfully suggest that you re-think your support for these kinds of actions by Christians. They are counter-productive and unbiblical. People who love Jesus and want to see more people turn to Him could stand to spend more time examining how He acted in similar situations.

I have yet to hear from Mr. Peroutka directly, but his "info" line will receive a copy of this, so I invite him to respond directly. I would print it verbatim.

Subsequently, I received a series of e-mails from one of Mr. Peroutka's staff members.

From Peroutka staff

Is it seriously your position that Christians are not evangelize the lost, that there is no Christian in the New Testament who does this? God bless you.

My response

No, that is not what I said at all, and if you'll reread my note, you'll see that. What I said was that the actions of "Repent America" supported by Mr. Peroutka are not the kind of evangelism practiced by Jesus and the Apostles. They did not shout at people or brandish signs telling them they were going to hell. It is sad that you and Mr. Peroutka do not seem to understand what the word "evangelism" means...it comes from the Greek word, **euaggelizo**, which means "to bring good news." The good news (Gospel) that Jesus brought was grace and mercy...he drew others to him not by threatening them, but by loving them. It is only by patient, loving sharing of the good news that people steeped in sin can be saved and then taught to be Christlike themselves. Threatening people with hell is not good news!! Hell is real, but Jesus NEVER brought people to Him by threatening hell. If Jesus were alive today, I believe He would embrace individual homosexuals and lovingly teach them, just as He did those who were attacked by the religious elite of Israel.

So...to be sure it's very clear, Christians are to evangelize (spread the good news) to the lost, and Jesus and the Apostle did precisely that, but they never did it by threatening tactics. Are you suggesting that the proper motivation for following Jesus should be fear?

Since I assume Mr. Peroutka himself wrote the article in question, I'd also appreciate a thoughtful answer directly from him, responding to the points I made in my note, the referenced "Ekklesia Then & Now," and the comments of Edward Fudge I quoted. I believe Mr. Peroutka owes his readers and Marvin Olasky an apology, and I'd like to see him repent of attitudes that are so strikingly similar to those of the Pharisees and Scribes Jesus criticized in His day. Mr. Peroutka has a lot of people who are listening to what he says, and if he is going to represent Christianity, I think he should spend some serious time studying how Jesus and the Apostles approached "sinners." If he did, he would clearly see that the tactics of "Repent America" are antithetical to those of the early Christians.

From Peroutka staff

Why do you limit your remarks to the preaching of only Jesus and the Apostles? Tell me about the style of Paul and John the Baptist.

My response

I'm afraid there's just no nice way to say this, but you are displaying a disturbing ignorance of the Bible. Paul was an apostle, and I am including him--I even quoted him (see 1 Cor 5:9-13). John the Baptist lived and prophesied in the pre-Christian era, essentially the last of the Old Testament prophets. Furthermore, and specific to one point I made in my initial note to Mr. Peroutka, John the Baptist's message was specifically and exclusively targeted at Israel, not others. The clear teaching of the New Testament is that we are to (1) lovingly and patiently share the good news (Gospel) with the lost, and (2) confront the sins of fellow-believers...that precisely what 1 Cor 5:9-13 says. Too much of the church has it exactly backwards!

From Peroutka staff

And Marcavage & Co. WERE "lovingly and patiently" sharing the good news (Gospel) with the lost. Have you seen the video of the sodomites confronting them? If not, you should not be commenting on this subject.

My response

Yes, I watched the video, as well as reading Marvin Olasky's commentary prior to my initial comment. Repent America's motives may be admirable, but their tactics are misguided and counter-productive. It is difficult to carry on any meaningful exchange with you when you continue to ignore the points I make. The use of a megaphone and threatening signs are not the methods of the New Testament--such things were NEVER practiced by Jesus or ANY of His

followers in sharing the good news with unbelievers. Perhaps Mr. Peroutka would stick to the issues rather than resorting to non sequiturs. The actions of their targets, while reprehensible, cannot serve as a justification for Repent America's in-your-face tactics with a group of people I doubt any of them had any relationship with.

From Peroutka staff

How can you be so sure (the use of a megaphone and threatening signs) are "counter-productive?" God's Word, when preached, never returns to Him void. But, yes, "megaphones" were not used in NT times; they did not exist. And while "threatening signs" may not have been used, threats certainly were. Indeed, by these dictionary definitions of "threat" --- "An expression of an intention to inflict pain, injury, evil, or punishment. An indication of impending danger or harm. One that is regarded as a possible danger; a menace" --- one could say that Jesus and His Apostles were living, breathing, threats to all those who were unGodly! To command someone to repent or perish is a threat. To tell someone that what they do deserves death is a threat. To tell some folks whores, tax collectors will be in the Kingdom before them is a threat.

My response

Yes, but you keep ignoring who Jesus said such things to. He told the Scribes and Pharisees, the sanctimonious religious leaders of His day, that "whores, taxcollectors will be in the Kingdom before them."

At that point, I decided to relate this exchange with you. The Peroutka staff member suggests that "God's Word, when preached, never returns to Him void," and perhaps that is true, but that doesn't mean that the return may not sometimes be distasteful to Him. Just who was edified by the actions of Repent America? While I can appreciate Repent America's motives, I fail to see how God was glorified in their actions. Were Jesus alive today, I can easily imagine Him showing up at a major homosexual event, but I cannot imagine Him shouting at them or brandishing signs threatening them with hell. I **can** imagine Him chastising Repent America for the behavior.

Maybe I'm wrong about all of this. If you think so—or if you agree—drop me a note. I'll print all reactions in another "special edition" of ET&N.

Discussion

This special edition sparked quite a few responses, a couple of which were submitted as *ET&N* posts, which I passed along. I usually like to present competing views, but in this case, I can't because there weren't any. Here is a sampling of the responses:

Coming from a family, none of which are believers, I can tell you first hand how damaging the actions of this group can be. When seen or heard on TV or whatever medium, my family lumps those "Christians" together, thus blinding them to any good a Christian following the teachings of Jesus could possibly do and I know they have met several.

Thanks for taking on Mr. Peroutka (and his staff). My prayers are with you and I hope you can get through to them. (Janice)

Thank you for your sharing your letters with Mr. Peroutka, or should I say a staff member. You are exactly correct. If we all could but love as Jesus did! It seems that for many, Law is easier to learn and practice than grace, mercy and love. I appreciate your insightful essays. (Jim)

You are bang on with your comments and I'm sure many will be agreeing with me. But I'd like to thank you for your very important points about OT and NT differences. I had not consciously realized the points you make about preaching to Israel (OT) and exclaiming the Good News (NT). I have always disagreed with banging people over the head with Christianity and you have made it

clear to me why I don't feel comfortable with it.

As pertaining to homosexuality ... (p)eople automatically jump to the conclusion that you want to brainwash a homosexual so they won't be a sinner rather than explaining the love and abundant life that God has planned for them. We have over the past decades been trained to except this "lifestyle" and as Christians we have never been equipped with the true Gospel message to explain the alternative of God's plan for them. Instead we have joined "clubs" (church denominations) and have remained comfortable with our buildings and Sunday morning pew entertainment of choir singing and make me feel comfortable preaching.

Today's church is a far cry from the early church, **if the "church" we have today were the church of the early Christians they would not have made any progress at all, it could have never turned the world on its head** [a great point-DS].

Of course I realize there are many exceptions to this example and I pray they will be lifted high as to edify the entire church. I suppose this has gone off subject a bit, but I believe we have deviated greatly from the works of the true Christian believer and there in lies the problem with Mr Peroutka's staff and their ignorance or denial of what Gospel really means. Thank you for the time you take and may God continue to bless you, your family and your ministry. (Dania)

If I were Oprah and you were Cameron Diaz, I'd say, "You go, girl!"

I have to tell you that while I am thankful that you addressed the issue with this group, because I do think we need to "chastise" fellow Christians who bring so much shame on the body of Christ, I am pessimistic that it will do any good. I had a similar exchange several years ago with the people at Apologetics Press and The Firm Foundation. Like you, I couldn't believe how their self-justification kept leading them to provide the strangest nonsequiturs. Looking back, though, their responses were to be expected. I wish I had copies of the letters that were exchanged. They were, on reflection, a hoot. [Rob]

DS: Rob was right. It didn't seem to do any good, at least with the staff member, and I have yet to hear anything directly from Mr. Peroutka (and don't expect to). One tactic of many politicians is to simply ignore their critics, even if (more perhaps especially if) they're right! Here are the last two exchanges I had with the Peroutka staff member who served as his mouthpiece:

Peroutka staff member:

Exactly! --- Jesus said these threatening things to UNBELIEVERS!, such as those being "threatened" by Marcavage & Co. And you didn't respond to my Q abt your certainty as to the unproductiveness of wht M & Co. did.

My response:

It is curious that you complain about my not answering a question when you have not answered ANY of mine, nor have you addressed the basic issue.

As far as unproductiveness is concerned, that goes back to the original remark...these in-your-face tactics are not those employed by Jesus.

Finally, I find it nothing short of incredible that you would equate Jesus' comments to the leaders of HIS OWN faith with bull-horning a bunch of homosexuals. The corollary goes like this:

Scribes and Pharisees = Judgmental Christians

Prostitutes and tax=collectors = Homosexuals

So, the appropriate application of Jesus' comments would be to say to such judgmental, sanctimonious Christians, "some of these will be in heaven (indicating the homosexuals) before you will."

But I have said what I wanted to say here and in my newsletter. As I said in it, I will be happy to print Mr Peroutka's response there.

I truly hope that you and Mr. Peroutka will come to a fuller understanding of the Gospel, repent of unChristlike attitudes and behaviors, and issue an apology. I will be praying for that.

Peroutka guy:

Forget your "corollary" gobbledegook; the scribes/Pharisees Jesus spoke to were NOT members of His own faith. What is incredible is your reading this into the text. It is NOT there. Wake up, please.

(Note: the large text was his (the textual equivalent of shouting), not mine! I decided to ignore the fact that he chose to be snide about my typo on "corollary." Incidentally, as the sharp-eyed reader may not, he misspelled "gobbledygook.")

My response

It is apparent that you have learned political lessons far better than any biblical ones. Resorting to obfuscation, disinformation, misdirection, and prevarication may make you the perfect political communications director, but shame on you for applying these lessons to Christianity! That you do not even know that Paul was an apostle and that Jesus was a Jew displays a glaring lack understanding Scripture, deliberate distortion, or both, but more importantly, you cannot see your own Pharisaicalism. I pray that God will open your eyes before you arrive at the judgment seat. Do not bother to respond to this—I have nothing further to say to you.



Unsure about or don't agree with something in Ekklesia Then & Now? First, be a Berean (Acts 17:10-11). If you still disagree, [post a message](#) so we can all share in the discussion!

NEXT ISSUE: The Tree of Life

Note: Because of this special edition, I am delaying the next issue by one week. "The Tree of Life," which will be on the topic of the "Sanctity of Life" vs. the "Quality of Life" debate and its consequences, will now be delivered on May 10.

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