

# REDEEMER

R E P O R T

MARCH 2008

## POLITICS, SOCIETY AND EXCLUSIVE TRUTH

BY TIM KELLER

In early February I was asked to be on a panel at Columbia University with two university professors to discuss the question: *How can Christians (or Muslims, or any other religious people) who claim to have 'the Truth' live in peace and active cooperation with others in a pluralistic, democratic society?* For the event I made a list of ways to answer this important question, but didn't get to say everything I wished I could have. Below is what I would have said if time had allowed.

### **A crucial topic**

The United States pioneered the separation of church and state, the arrangement in which the government favored no one religious institution. But in the 20th century there developed something beyond that. Laws and public policies must never be grounded in religious convictions and reasons, it was asserted. Why? Religious reasons, it was argued, are 'conversation stoppers' because they are not accessible to non-believers. Instead, public discourse must be based on scientific and other forms of human reasoning that are available to all. Believers must not initiate public policy based on their Biblical beliefs.

That would be imposing their beliefs on everyone else. Religious belief and convictions are for the private sphere only. This view of how things should be is still the dominant view of the cultural elite. But there are two reasons why the idea of a secular public square is now in crisis.

### **No neutrality**

First, this approach was crafted when there was widespread consensus that orthodox 'exclusive' religion inevitably dies in modern, scientifically advanced democracies. However, though there are more secular people than ever, there are also more conservative, orthodox believers than ever as well. And all the trends show that orthodox religions, including Christianity, will be on the rise in the world for the next couple of centuries at least.

This has created a crisis for the cultural elite. There are more citizen-voters than ever who believe in absolute religious and moral truth. Right now they are being told to keep their religious views private. But this leads us to the second problem with the idea of a secular public square. There are many philosophers and thinkers today who are arguing

that *all* moral convictions are 'conversation stoppers' because they are rooted in faith assumptions and world-view commitments that no one shares with everyone. In short, there are no 'secular reasons' that are open to everyone.

To illustrate this, let's think of a young agnostic humanist who wants to re-institute the former welfare programs. If we ask him why, he says, "Because I believe that the poor have a *right* to a certain level of subsistence, regardless of their marketable skills or their level of energy and discipline. Welfare is a fundamental right."

Fine, but now let's ask him on what he bases that moral conviction. What reason proves or demonstrates that this is a right all people have? His answer will almost certainly be rooted in a declaration of the dignity of all human persons, the infinite value of every individual. But is that something that can be proved scientifically? No. Is that something that is self-evident to all human beings in all cultures and centuries? No. So what kind of reason is this? It is a belief. It's a

*(Continued on page 2)*



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belief grounded in the sanctity of choice, the dignity and rights of every individual, and many other views of human flourishing that are peculiar to the western Enlightenment worldview.

The question then becomes: why couldn't a *Christian* work to re-institute welfare because she believes it is a fundamental human right that is grounded not in a humanist faith-system but in the Bible? The humanist's worldview is not shared by all in the society, and the neither is the Christian's. Neither can convince everyone in the world that their moral basis for the policy is right. But who can? Why can't they both just work for their policy, seeking to get as many votes for it as possible? Is it fair to tell the Christian that she can't work for public policy based on her Biblical convictions but the secular person can? It doesn't seem fair to tell Christians to stop working for laws that reflect their beliefs, when others with unprovable beliefs are given freedom to do so.

**Two kinds of secularism**

If the secular public square is now unworkable, what is the alternative? The alternative is not a Christian state (or a state domi-

nated by any religion.) Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight..." (John 18:36) This passage later gave Augustine the basis for saying that it was idolatry to ever identify a human government too closely with the City of God. In countries with a state church, or even in places like early New England where only church members could vote, high office and privilege was open mainly to Christian believers. Christian faith was supported by tax dollars and government programs as well as by civil punishments against blasphemy, etc. History seems to show that when the church 'gets into bed with political power' it leads to large-scale alienation of the poor and the masses from Christianity and ends in secularism.

Some are now talking about two kinds of secularism. The first kind, called either 'positive' or 'programmatic' is the older view that insists that the worldview Enlightenment humanism (with its particular beliefs about human nature and human flourishing) are to be privileged over any other set of beliefs. The second kind, called either 'negative' or 'procedural' secularism is the view that says

the state continues to stay neutral by not supporting one religion or religious institution over any other. However, there is no discrimination against the kinds of arguments and reasoning you can use in public discourse. No one needs to hide the bases for their moral commitments. But anyone who expects to be successful in the marketplace of ideas should try to make arguments that appeal to the broadest spectrum possible. And may the best appealers win!

Augustine insisted that we must never identify the City of God with any human government, but that the citizens of God's city should be the very best citizens of their earthly city. Christians should be active in local and national politics, working for the common good as best as they can discern it. They should be open about the Christian roots of their moral convictions, but if they want to be successful they will have to make arguments that don't only appeal to Christians and they will have to form movements that don't make non-Christians feel unwelcome. The gospel should remove the natural self-righteousness of the human heart enough to help us do so.

**MARITAL CONFLICT – WHY CAN'T WE GET ALONG?**

Want to discover tools for cultivating a healthy marriage? This seminar is for married couples only. Saturday, April 5 from 10:00AM to 1:00PM at the Redeemer Offices. Register online at [www.redeemer.com/sogf](http://www.redeemer.com/sogf)

**REDEEMER REPORT**

Kathy Keller  
Heather Klein

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.  
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HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington) services at 10:30AM • 6:00PM	ETHICAL CULTURE West 64TH and CPW service at 9:15AM	FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH Corner of West 79TH and Broadway service at 5:00PM & 7:15PM
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# EASTER WEEK AT REDEEMER

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## **Wednesday, March 19**

*Mark's Gospel*

Performed by Max McLean

Ethical Culture Society, 64th and Central Park West

7:30PM

Free admission

## **Friday, March 21**

Good Friday – 4 services

East Side: 5:30PM and 7:00PM at All Souls Church, 80th and Lexington

West Side: 5:30PM and 7:00PM at First Baptist Church, 79th and Broadway

*We will have limited childcare through age 5 at all services. To inquire, please email [carolyn@redeemer.com](mailto:carolyn@redeemer.com) with your service preference and age of child(ren).*

## **Saturday, March 22**

*God in the Grave: Prayer and Reflection in Community*

Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Floor

10:00AM to 12:00PM

RSVP required, [prayer@redeemer.com](mailto:prayer@redeemer.com)

For more information, visit [www.redeemer.com/prayer](http://www.redeemer.com/prayer)

## **Sunday, March 23 \*note special worship schedule**

Easter Sunday – 6 services

9:00AM at Ethical Culture Society (with brass and choir)

9:45AM and 11:30AM at Hunter College Auditorium

(Orchestra of the Redeemer, choir and soloists)

5:00PM and 7:15PM at First Baptist Church (with band and soloists)

6:00PM at Hunter College Auditorium (with band and soloists)

For more information, visit [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com)

# CFW MARCH 2008 EVENT SCHEDULE

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## **Saturday, March 1**

*PhD Students Dinner*

6:00PM

gradstudents@redeemer.com for details

## **Sunday, March 2**

*The Gotham Fellowship Information Session*

12:30PM

RSVP (required) at

[www.faithandwork.org/gothamfellowship](http://www.faithandwork.org/gothamfellowship)

## **Thursday, March 6**

*Legal Fellowship Dinner*

7:00PM

Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Fl.

## **Sunday, March 9**

Health Care Fellowship Dinner

After the West Side 5:00PM Service

## **Thursday, March 13**

*Grad Student Fellowship*

7:00PM

Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Fl.

## **Friday, March 14**

*InterArts Fellowship*

7:00PM

Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Fl.

## **Sunday, March 16**

*Health Care Lunch*

12:00PM

Meet at Hunter College Auditorium's

69th St. entrance

## **Monday, March 17**

*Entrepreneurs Fellowship*

7:00PM

Details at [www.faithandwork.org/ei](http://www.faithandwork.org/ei)

## **Thursday, March 20**

*Legal Fellowship Breakfast*

8:00AM

Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Fl.

## **Thursday, March 27**

*Health Care Fellowship*

8:00AM

Email [aseon@hotmail.com](mailto:aseon@hotmail.com) for location

## **Friday, March 28**

*Redemptive Advertising*

Guest speaker Quentin Schultze

7:00PM

Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Fl.

## **Monday, March 31**

*Financial Services Ministry*

7:00PM

Redeemer Offices, 1359 Broadway, 4th Fl.

*Please go to [www.faithandwork.org](http://www.faithandwork.org) for information on all CFW events.*

# REDEEMER SUMMER MINI COURSES ARE BACK!

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BY JENNIFER K. CHAN

They began as a way to showcase the wealth of talent in our community and have become some of our most popular events. Last year a dynamic team of volunteer instructors offered hundreds of people 30 different courses—ranging from talks on issues like the plight of child soldiers to crash-courses on hip-hop dancing and gourmet cooking.

During the summers most of our ministries offer fewer programs. Through the Summer Mini Courses, though, instructors such as Marion Melton (Tennis Clinic), Kay Bhothinard (Thai Cooking) and William Wu (Investing 101) gave Redeemerites a chance to get together and explore activities, topics, and neighborhoods they may not usually encounter.

Several Redeemer staff members also volunteered their expertise to lead Mini Courses, including Sonja Chen (New York City Architecture), Tom Jennings (Jazz 101), and Tim and Kathy Keller.

“Tom Jennings was a great teacher,” said a participant in the Jazz 101 course. “In a limited period of time, he covered an

extensive history of jazz and gave us a good sampling of music. I loved the idea of going to a jazz club afterwards...”

The Mini Courses have also provided opportunities for Redeemer members and attendees to engage with colleagues and friends who may not yet be believers or part of the Redeemer community.



“I think they’re...a great chance to bring non-Christians to a ‘church’ event that is ‘non-threatening,’” said one Mini Course attendee who came to the Human Sex Trafficking course with a friend from work. “My co-workers thought it was really unique that my church had courses like this.”

This year we want to offer more courses in a wider range of areas, but we can’t do that without your help. Do you have a skill or hobby that you could share with

the rest of the church? Would you (or someone you know) be willing to host an event in your home for small to medium-sized groups? If you are willing to teach or host a class, we would love to hear from you.

Some suggestions for classes we could develop include:

**Sports** - rock-climbing, golf clinic, The Yankees 101

**Justice** - poverty, global missions, venture philanthropy

**Family/Relationships** - dating, singleness, raising a family in the city

**General Skills** - photography, cake decorating, songwriting

**We Heart New York** - neighborhood tours, New York in films, Christianity in New York

Thank you in advance to everyone who will help teach, volunteer, and participate in this year’s Summer Mini Courses. They’ll be here before you know it!

Course proposal forms can be downloaded from our website: [www.redeemer.com/summer](http://www.redeemer.com/summer). Fill out the form completely and email it to [summer@redeemer.com](mailto:summer@redeemer.com). Please submit course proposals by Friday, April 4, 2008.

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## VOICING YOUR SKEPTICISM

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Everyone lives on a continuum of skepticism and certainty, faith and doubt. Questions haunt us, like:

- *Why should I believe the Bible?*
- *Aren’t all religions created equal?*
- *How can a God of love be a wrathful judge?*

Opportunities to voice our doubts are sometimes hard to come by. In the month of March, Tim Keller will be available each

Sunday after specific worship services for informal “Question and Answer” sessions. If you are wrestling with Christianity, or know someone who is, consider coming to one of these sessions as we explore together the journey of faith.

Schedule of Q & A’s:

**March 2** – Hunter College Auditorium after the 6:00PM Open Forum

**March 9** – Hunter College Auditorium after the 10:30 AM service

**March 16** – West Side YMCA after the 9:15AM service

**March 23** – Hunter College Auditorium after the 6:00PM service

**March 30** – Hunter College Auditorium after the 6:00PM service



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## APRIL IS ARTS MONTH AT REDEEMER

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Why is NYC so crazy over the arts, and why does Redeemer place such an emphasis on them? What's the big deal? During the month of April, Redeemer's Music and Arts Ministries invite you to find out!

Through numerous events, unique classes, exclusive field trips, and more, immerse yourself in the world of the arts for a month, and find out what you've been missing and why the arts and culture matter so much to God.

A complete calendar of events will be available on the Information Tables at worship services by mid-March, or visit [www.faithandwork.org/april](http://www.faithandwork.org/april)