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QUOTE OF THE WEEK

We can fly to the moon and back how many times? And we cannot stop up a damn well.

- **Eric Authement**, owner of a shrimp processing plant in Dulac, Louisiana, that his family has run for generations. (Source: *New York Times*)

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HEARTS & MINDS
by Jim Wallis



A Time for Moral Reckoning



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I am watching unbelievable pictures tonight of endless swaths of brown oil mixed with the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico, of dying wetlands and marshes, of miles of contaminated coastlines, of dead birds and animals, of helpless and hopeless Gulf Coast residents sadly witnessing their livelihoods and their lives slipping away. With the explosion and sinking of the [BP oil rig six weeks ago](#), the immediate talk was about environmental threats and technical fixes, economic losses and political blaming, and debates about responsibility for the costs. But with the failure of the latest attempt to stop the spill, and with both BP and the federal government admitting they still really don't know how much oil has already spilled or will spill, a national discussion is beginning about the fundamental moral issues at stake, and perhaps even a national reflection on our whole way of life based on oil dependence and addiction.

After the failure of "top kills" and "cut and cap" strategies, it now appears the gushing of oil into the sea could continue until at least August, or maybe even longer. This could be one of those moments when the nation's attention all turns to the same thing, as in 9/11 and the days after Katrina. To use an over-used phrase, this could be a "teachable moment," but as 9/11 and Katrina demonstrated, we don't necessarily learn the right lessons from teachable moments. This time we had better do so.

First, we have to change our language. This isn't a little "spill," it is an environmental catastrophe -- the potential contamination of a whole gulf (already a third is now off limits for fishing) and hundreds of miles of coastline, and it threatens to expand to an ocean and more coastlines. It will bring the destruction of critical wetlands, endanger countless species, end human ways of life dependent upon the sea, and now, it will increase the danger of a hurricane season that could dump

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not just water, but waves of oil just miles inland from the coasts.

Theologically, we are witnessing a massive despoiling of God's creation. We were meant to be stewards of the Gulf of Mexico, the wetlands that protect and spawn life, the islands and beaches, and all of God's creatures who inhabit the marine world. But instead, we are watching the destruction of all that. Why? Because of the greed for profits; because of deception and lies; because of both private and public irresponsibility. And at the root, because of an ethic of endless economic growth, fueled by carbon-based fossil fuels, that is ultimately unsustainable and unstable.

It's not just that BP has lied, even though they have -- over and over -- to cover up their behavior and avoid their obligations. It is that BP *is* a lie; what it stands for is a lie. It is a lie that we can continue to live this way, a lie that our style of life is stable and sustainable, a lie that these huge oil companies are really committed to a safe and renewable energy future. BP should indeed be made to pay for this crime against the creation -- likely with its very existence.

But I am also reminded of what G.K. Chesterton once said when asked what was most wrong with the world. He reportedly replied, "I am." Already, we are hearing some [deeper reflection](#) on the [meaning of this daily disaster](#). Almost everyone now apparently agrees with the new direction of a "clean energy economy." And we know that will require a re-wiring of the energy grid (which many hope BP will have no part in). But it will also require a [re-wiring of ourselves](#) -- our demands, requirements, and insatiable desires. [Our oil addiction has led us to environmental destruction](#), endless wars, and the sacrifice of young lives, and it has put our very souls in jeopardy. *New York Times* columnist Tom Freidman recently wondered about the deeper meaning of the Great Recession when he asked, "What if it's telling us that the whole growth model we created over the last fifty years is simply unsustainable economically and ecologically and that 2008 was when we hit the wall -- when Mother Nature and the market both said, 'No More.'" The Great Spill makes the point even more.

There is not one answer to this calamity; there are many: corporate responsibility, for a change; serious government regulation, for a change; public accountability, for a change; and real civic mobilization to protect the endangered waters, coasts, species, and people's livelihoods. But at a deeper level, we literally need a conversion of our habits of the heart, our energy sources, and our lifestyle choices. And somebody will need to lead the way. Who will dare to say that an economy of endless growth must be confronted and converted to an economy of sustainability, to what the Bible calls stewardship. What about the community of faith?

I am told this morning that the smell of oil is already apparent in the parks and playgrounds near the Mississippi coast. Unless this crisis in the Gulf finally becomes the wake-up call that signals a new national commitment to end our dependence on oil, our children may now be smelling their future.

The first step forward is building awareness. Would you forward this SojoMail to 20 of your friends?


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In this month's *Sojourners* magazine, we tell the story of a cross-generational faith and feminism blog that discusses the journeys of women and men of all ages who continue the work of gender equality today. [Read the story of this lively blog conversation](#), and find more [resources on faith and feminism](#) at the *Sojourners* magazine Web site.

ON THE GOD'S POLITICS BLOG

+ [See what's new on the blog of Jim Wallis and friends](#)

An Early BP Christmas Present? Please, God, No...
by Justin Fung

"Spill" sounds so innocuous, doesn't it? "Whoops, I spilled some milk." It doesn't seem like the appropriate word to append to "oil." "Whoops, I spilled several MILLION gallons of oil." I don't like feeling helpless. But that's what I'm feeling right now. And with the latest news that a worst case scenario might see the leak not closed until Christmas, all I can think to do is keep praying.

+ [Click to continue](#)

Labor is Part of the Immigration Equation
by Marque Jensen

If migration policy was "freed" or emancipated, people could respond to real work opportunities, economies would be able to grow globally, the federal and state focus could be put on fighting crime and not families trying to provide. Emancipation of migration would allow people to come and go as the economies expand and shrink. We speak of global economy -- it is time we allow labor to be part of the equation.

+ [Click to continue](#)

Another Cost of the Flotilla Raid
by Jim Rice

Along with shooting nine peace activists during their [attack on the peace flotilla this week](#), Israeli commandos may have shot themselves in the foot: One of the consequences of Israel's heavy-handed attempt to enforce its illegal blockade of Gaza might be an increased "blockade" of Israel itself, according to a prominent Israeli journalist. Gideon Levy, a columnist for Israel's leading daily newspaper, *Haaretz*, and a member of the paper's editorial board, decried the raid as a "fiasco" in support of a mistaken and failed policy -- the blockade of Gaza -- and said it accomplished nothing positive. + [Click to continue](#)

Nonviolence and the Gaza Freedom Movement
by Nathan Schneider

Three days have passed since the Israeli navy attacked an [international Gaza Freedom Movement "Freedom Flotilla,"](#) intent on breaking Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, in international waters. The explosion of media coverage surrounding this makes it likely the highest-profile act of (supposedly) nonviolent resistance to occur in years. But the dust has yet to settle. The boats and the activists who were aboard them are still under Israeli control, and so also, therefore, is their story of what happened. As information comes in, here are some questions to keep in mind for thinking about this horrific event through the lens of nonviolence.

+ [Click to continue](#)

The Kingdom of God is not an Empire with Language Laws

by Nadia Bolz-Weber

In [Barabara Kingsolver's](#) novel titled *The Poisonwood Bible*, one of the main characters, [Reverend Nathan Price](#), is an American missionary to the people of the Congo. Failing to understand the nuances of their language and insisting on the primacy of the King James Translation of the Bible, he proclaims to them that Jesus is Bangala! Thinking he was saying that Jesus is supreme. Of course the villagers simply looked confused since what he really said was "Jesus is Poisonwood" -- meaning Jesus is a noxious plant. But since the King James was the only *true* translation of the Bible, he refused to substitute another

Who Killed Donte Manning?

NEW by Rose Marie Berger

A modern-day story of a child's unsolved murder, told through a biblical lens that challenges empire, greed, and injustice.

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word.

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Time to Declare a Mission Trip Moratorium by Troy Jackson

Like many Christ-followers in the United States, I have participated in my fair share of mission trips to the Caribbean and Central and South America over the past few decades. I have greatly benefited from these international opportunities. These voyages typically include U.S. Christians serving in schools and churches while also contributing to construction projects. Ideally, all involved grow in their relationships with God while the local community experiences some degree of community development. There is another side to mission trips, however.

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I'm Part of the Reason For That Oil Spill by Tracey Bianchi

That we are now going on six weeks of money, life, and habitat lost as now five states clamor to preserve whatever shreds of marine integrity they can. And this is the point where frustrated folks (green or not) will get angry with [BP, the Federal Government, oil companies, and execs](#) and with whomever it seems politically savvy to lambast. But rarely do I hear anyone getting angry with themselves. Really though, I am part of the reason for that oil spill. As I sat on the highway with thousands of motorists, all fresh off a weekend that chugged down gallons of gas to fuel boats and other recreational toys, I was reminded once again of the total dichotomy that is my life.

[+ Click to continue](#)

The "Freedom Flotilla" Tragedy by Rabbi Arthur Waskow

On May 31, I awoke to news reports that the Israeli Navy had boarded and fired on 10 small ships in international waters approaching the coast of Gaza and bearing humanitarian supplies for Palestinians suffering an Israeli blockade of many (not all) civilian goods. The Flotilla refused demands they dock at an Israeli port, because their journey is in part humanitarian in the narrow sense, and in part it represents a demand that the blockade be ended and the Palestinians treated as a People worthy of respect and direct relationship, not mere mendicants hungry for a handout. That respect is what the Israeli government refused -- and has refused for years.

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Wanted: A Pro-Family Immigration System by Matthew Soerens

There's a wonderful family at my church who are from Rwanda. They have been granted asylum in the United States, having successfully gone through the stressful process of proving that they had a reasonable fear of persecution in their country of origin. Gratefully, they are now safe in the United States and are rebuilding their lives. Unfortunately, the whole family is not here. Celeste, the matriarch of the family and the member of the family whose safety was most at risk, came with her 17-year-old daughter, 12-year-old son, and 4-year-old daughter, but her eldest son, Pierre, was unable to accompany them, because he had already turned 21 years old.

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Quitting Church: An Interview with Julia Duin by Becky Garrison

In *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing and What to Do about It*, Julia Duin, former religion editor for *The Washington Times*, explores why people are leaving the church but yet finding God outside of the traditional structures of church. In her research she noted that people want to change the world and not simply start another ministry program.

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Synthetic Life: The Final Frontier? by Ernesto Tinajero

There are long stories and short stories. Stories that people in a hundred years will be talking about, and stories that will fade in a few months. Most of the time, the op-ed pieces and the late-night news chatter focus on short stories. Last week -- while news of who won what election and the implications for the fall election dominated most of the week -- one of the most

important long stories of the year hit the news cycle: Dr. Craig Venter announced that he and his team had created synthetic life.

[+ Click to continue](#)

Obama Sends 1,200 Troops to the Border to Guard Against Republican Criticism **by César Baldelomar**

This past Tuesday, President Obama announced that he intends to send 1,200 National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border. He also plans on asking Congress for \$500 million dollars to target the smuggling of people, drugs, money, and weapons into the U.S. With midterm elections scheduled for November 2010, and with incumbent Democrats in trouble of losing their seats, Obama and the Democrats seem to have succumbed to mounting pressure from Republicans who are concerned with the influx of so-called "illegal" immigrants. Many commentators, including Ruben Navarrette Jr., argue that Obama has deserted the Latino/a community in this time of great peril.

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Memorial Day: Giving Our Full Measure of Devotion to Peace **by Valerie Elverton Dixon**

Utopia. It is the place that is no place. It is the reality that does not yet exist. It is the political economy that has no politics or economics. Yet. A utopian vision is important. It is important to see the possibilities, the potentialities of the future in the now. Scripture teaches: "write the vision; make it plain on tablets so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie." The just peace vision is one of a world where violent conflict is obsolete. No one dies in wars large or small. Memorial Day is a day to remember the bad old days when human imagination could not conceive of the end of warfare. The just peace vision is a world where we understand that economic justice is necessary for peace.

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Sanitation and Self-Deception **by Andrew Wilkes**

Our sins are hidden in our sanitation. Last week on the New York subway, I read an article about the connection between sanitation and self-deception. Brayden Simms, a columnist for *Metro*, is writing a series on waste management to raise consciousness about how environmental issues affect our daily lives. The truth about our garbage, according to scientists at the University of Arizona, is that we lie to ourselves about what we consume.

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'Chay La Lou': The Things Haitian Women Carry **by Martha St. Jean**

She is my mother. She is my aunt. She is my next door neighbor. I recognize her familiar gait; the quick-paced step. Most importantly, I recognize the invisible burden she carries. I *know* a Haitian woman before I *know* a Haitian woman. I recognize the unfair share of hardships and sorrows. Her face may be unlined, you may not be able to tell if she is 40 or 60, but her eyes will tell the story. I saw this woman, her head down, fierce determination written on her face, so as to not miss the bus. She is everybody yet nobody. I instinctively knew she was Haitian. The thought came to me, "Chay la lou," meaning the burden is heavy.

[+ Click to continue](#)

Evangelical History and 'Nonperson' Women **by Julie Clawson**

I recently stumbled across the book *The Young Evangelicals* by Richard Quebedeaux. Published in 1974, it gives a sociological overview of evangelicalism in America and the emergence of a (then) new generation of Evangelicals. The author seemed to have hoped that this new generation (who were more globally minded and service oriented than their fundamentalist counterparts) would define the future of the movement. Of course in hindsight, there was a backlash against these more progressive voices (i.e. Jim Wallis?) and the Religious Right ended up gaining the dominant voice in the evangelical world. What I found fascinating though was seeing a picture of Evangelicalism from this time period that mirrored exactly what

I grew up with in the '80s and '90s and that still exists today.
[+ Click to continue](#)

Something There Is That Doesn't Love a Wall by David Vásquez

In this simple statement from his poem "Mending Wall," modern American poet Robert Frost voices the deep concern with how human fear leads to building walls that separate us from others. "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know," goes on Frost, "What I was walling in or walling out, And to whom I was like to give offence." While the Great Wall of China has been reduced to a tourist attraction and the Berlin Wall stands as symbol of the progress of freedom, reality is that nations around the world are building walls at an unprecedented pace - from the U.S.-Mexico border, to Israel/Palestine, and in an article in a recent *New York Times*, to a small village in Eastern Europe ("Walls, Real and Imagined, Surround the Roma").
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How Christian is the Tea Party Movement?

STLToday.com

First, an anticipatory note to the commenters – Yes, I'm blogging about an article written by notable progressive and left-leaning Christian Jim Wallis. Yes, it's from the Huffington Post. And yes, it's critical of the Tea Party movement. If all of that disgusts you, please quit reading now – I'm interested in thoughtful discussion, not ad hominem arguments and knee-jerk reactions. [+Click to continue](#)

Odds and Ends

Christianity Today blog

Sojourners president Jim Wallis was a guest on MSNBC's Hardball with Chris Matthews, discussing the BP oil spill as a moral and religious issue. "This oil spill is really apocalyptic. It mirrors our oil addiction. We have to do something about it right now. And that's what churches are saying. And that's just our responsibility to say, 'This is, for us, protecting God's creation,'" said Wallis. [+Click to continue](#)

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