

# columnists

## high desert sketches



This monkey's gone to heaven  
(VALERIE HOWARD illustration)

## Where has all the morality and truth gone?

By GEORGE COVINGTON

In the 1840s, economist and political philosopher, Karl Marx (the lesser known ancestor of Groucho and Harpo), wrote, "Religion is the opiate of the masses". If he were alive today he might write, "Religion and politics combined is the modern opiod of the masses." Many early immigrants to this country came because they were fleeing countries in which the church and the state had become entangled. The Framers of the Constitution knew of the dangers of close relationship between the church and state and worked to avoid it. They wrote, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Today it appears that every fundamentalist preacher in the country feels he must assert his righteous politics into every aspect of our culture. Evangelist Franklin Graham stated a few weeks ago, "'Progressive' is a code word for someone who doesn't believe in God."

Instead of preaching the Ten Commandments, condemning sin and promoting truth and high morals among their congregation, they have thrown morality and truth aside in favor of political expediency. They have forsaken John 8:32, "and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," and substituted, "ye shall believe fake news and what your preacher tells you." They blindly follow a president whose moral compass spins like a top with less stability. A President who seems to feel that the Ten Commandments were just whimsical suggestions for other people.

Rex Tillerson, President Tweets former Secretary of State, stated in his commencement address at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), "As I reflect upon the state of American democracy, I observe a growing crisis of ethics and integrity," he said. He did cite John 8:32 twice. Free to speak his truth, Tillerson added: "When we as people, a free people, go wobbly on the truth, even on what may seem the most trivial of matters, we go wobbly on America. If we do not as Americans confront the crisis of ethics and integrity in our society, and among our leaders in both the public and private sector, and regrettably at times even the nonprofit sector, then American democracy as we know it is entering its twilight years."

Tillerson could have pointed out that in early May, several national fact checking organizations, announced that President Tweet had just reached his 3,000th lie since his inauguration. By now he has probably soared past 4,000.

Despite the fact that President Tweet has demonstrated time and again that he has no ability to grasp the concept of truth or morality, many preachers seem to care only that he meets their social agenda.

In their landmark 2010 book, "American Grace," the scholars Robert Putnam and David Campbell wrote about the decreasing membership of America's churches, and the increase in those who claimed no religious affiliation. They called this latter group the "nones". Putnam and Campbell found that millennials with tolerant and open views on homosexuality were more than twice as likely to be religious nones as their statistically similar peers with conservative or traditionalist views on homosexuality. Many young people came to regard religion, in Putnam and Campbell's words, as "judgmental, homophobic, hypocritical and too political."

Simply put, the fundamentalists are driving a wedge between their aging membership and the ever-increasing millennials. These young people have the education and technological background to quickly determine what is real and what is fake news.

Although the internet did not exist, Mark Twain must've envisioned it when he said, "In religion and politics people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue but have taken them at second-hand from other non-examiners, whose opinions about them were not worth a brass farthing."

Not all fundamentalist have abandoned their sense of morality and truth to follow a leader lacking in the ability to understand either the concept of morality or truth, but too many have. To the latter group I would point out that when you remove morality and truth from your religion, you are left with a cult.

Rather than continuing my sermon toward the choir or the obtuse, Dr. Samuel Johnson once said, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel" (1775). If he were alive today, I am certain he would say, "Religion runs a close second." Old Mark Twain summed it up best when he wrote, "I am quite sure now that often, very often, in matters concerning religion and politics a man's reasoning powers are not above the monkey's."

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## the rambling boy

## Martha Bumpas, the world-traveling PE teacher

By LONN TAYLOR

Martha Bumpas of Alpine is a solidly built woman with a dazzling smile who looks a good deal like what she started out to be in life, a small-town grade school physical education teacher. It is easy to picture her coaching a girl's volleyball team to victory in the state finals.

Bumpas grew up in Mexia, Texas, a Blackland Prairie town east of Waco that is about the size of Alpine. She graduated from high school there in 1981 and went to Tarleton State University, and when she finished college she returned to Mexia and got a job teaching physical education in the elementary school there. But unlike most small-town P.E. teachers, Bumpas had a taste for adventure, and she spent 25 years traveling and teaching in Jordan, South Korea, and China.

"I just got a bug to see the world," she told me over coffee at Bread and Breakfast in Alpine the other day. "I met a Korean teacher and a Japanese pastor and I got interested in what was outside of Mexia." In 1988, through a government program that placed American teachers overseas, Bumpas took a job teaching physical education in an elementary school in Aljoun, Jordan, a town not much larger than Mexia. It was a rough year for her. None of her students spoke English. "Did you learn Arabic?" I asked her. "I studied it," she replied. "I learned survival Arabic."

The next year she moved to Amman, the capital, where she taught English and coached basketball in a private international school. The students were mostly affluent and cosmopolitan children of members of Amman's international business community and teaching went a little easier.

In 1990, just before the Gulf War broke out, Bumpas came back to Texas to get her master's degree in secondary education at Stephen F. Austin State University. Her next foreign teaching position was at Taejon Christian International School in Daejeon, South Korea, a city of a million and a half people, and that is where she truly hit her stride. "Korea became my home," she told me. She studied Korean at Yonsei University, Korea's oldest university, and became fluent in the language, teaching physical education to about 500 students and coaching athletics in Korean. Bumpas became active in the Methodist church in Daejeon - she describes herself as "a person of faith." The services were in Korean, and she memorized a prayer in Korean in case she was called upon to offer a prayer during a service. One unexpected advantage of becoming steeped in Korean culture was that on visits home she was able to talk to her father about his Korean War service, which he had never discussed with his family. They discovered that they had been to the same places and seen many of the same things.

After six years in Daejeon Bumpas "just got another itch," as she put it, and she decided to move to China. She spent two years in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, a part of China just across the border from North Korea where the population is largely Korean, so the local culture was not totally foreign to her. "It was a transitional period," she said. She taught English at Yanbian University, where she became a friend of the university's female president. "Her son wanted to go to school in the States," Bumpas said, "and so I helped him apply for a visa. He got one and was



Martha Bumpas and friends in Beijing.  
(photo courtesy of Martha Bumpas)

admitted to Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas. He wanted to be an architect and so he went on to the University of Cincinnati School of Architecture and is now practicing architecture in the States." He is a friend of Bumpas's for life.

"He always addressed me as 'Teacher'," Bumpas told me. "One thing I learned in China," she went on to say, "is that teachers are the most honored and respected members of society there. How could I ever go back and teach in America, where teachers are so poorly regarded?"

After two years in Yanbian, in 2002 Bumpas moved to Beijing, a city of 20 million people, where she lived for the next 12 years, teaching English. I asked her what the most difficult adjustment that she had to make to such intense Chinese urban life was, and she said, "I think that

it was their sense of community and sharing." She went on to explain that most of her Beijing neighbors were immigrants from rural areas in China who had grown up in a peasant culture, and that they believed that "what they had was mine and what I had was theirs." By way of illustration, she told me about a woman she had befriended who owned a Tex-Mex restaurant in Beijing. She always gave Bumpas a 10% discount when Bumpas ate there, and Bumpas occasionally helped her tend her infant son. "She would drop her little boy at my apartment when she had errands to run," she told me, "but she would always bring her father, who would plump himself down in front of the television set as if he owned it and happily watch Chinese TV until she came back."

Bumpas became fluent in Mandarin and in the 12 years that she was in Beijing traveled all over China, visiting many remote areas, but she never lost her sense of who she was or where she was from. "I took my West Texas pioneer experience to the rest of the world," she told me. Once, she said, when she first arrived in Jordan, she was driving a truck along a desert highway when she saw a vehicle approaching her. She waved at the driver, just as she would in West Texas, and she saw the look of astonishment on his face at being waved at by a strange white woman change to a broad smile as he realized that it was a gesture of friendship. Bumpas is working on a book about her life abroad, which she has tentatively titled "Waiting for the World."

In Beijing Bumpas taught English for Global Resource Services, an international humanitarian organization, and in that capacity made 12 trips to North Korea, providing universities there with resources for teaching foreign languages. She returned to the States in 2014 to care for her aging parents and since that time, she told me, no one from any government intelligence agency has ever talked with her about North Korea. They should. They might learn something from this intrepid West Texas woman.

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## U.S. Rep. Hurd issues statement of support for National Defense Authorization Act

WASHINGTON, DC - This week, U.S. Representative Will Hurd supported the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which authorizes funding for our military and national defense. The NDAA passed the House this morning with overwhelmingly bipartisan support and ensures we are prepared to face modern threats by: giving our men and women in uniform their biggest pay raise in nine years; increasing the size of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Naval and Air Reserve, and Air Guard; investing in critical missile defense and nuclear deterrents; supporting the development of new military technologies; providing increased funding for training for all branches and includes necessary upgrades to military aircraft to address the troubling rise in accidents; updating and replacing outdated equipment and crumbling military buildings; and, streamlining the Pentagon bureaucracy and buying practices that limit our military's flexibility and impose a needless burden on taxpayers.

The NDAA also provides funding for key projects at bases in and nearby the 23rd Congressional District of Texas, including:

\$92.3 million for the construction of a military training dormitory at Lackland AFB in San Antonio; authorization for the Air Force to conduct a core sampling study along the proposed route of a wastewater treatment line at Joint Base San Antonio to determine if any hazardous substances are present in the soil; \$24 million for supply support at Fort Bliss in El Paso; and, \$10.2 million for an energy aerospace operations facility at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

"Our men and women in uniform sacrifice so much to keep Americans safe. We owe it to them to provide the best possible equipment, training and support to do their jobs safely and efficiently," said Hurd, who served alongside many of these patriots during his deployments as an undercover officer in the CIA. "Not only does the NDAA take care of those who are in the fight day after day, it also sends a message to our friends and our foes that the United States has the most effective and powerful armed forces in the world and we are ready to defend ourselves against terrorists and nuclear threats."

