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From: Moyers, Bill
Sent: Wednesday, October 25, 2006 3:21 PM
To: Calvin Beisner
Subject:

Dear Calvin Beisner:

As this weekend passed and there was no response from you to my urgent request that you retract the lie that you have been spreading about me, my anger gave way to sorrow. There was only silence from you as your defamation raced across Cyberspace. By Sunday evening I had concluded that you were waiting for the damage to accumulate, knowing that with the Internet, a lie circles the earth instantly while truth stumbles to its feet.

And this saddened me. I had not wanted to believe that you are just as eager as your allies on the Right to practice the polemics of personal destruction. I knew that you were the designated spokesman on environmental matters for the religious wing of the political right, which is why they sent me to you. But I came to Florida in good faith, and I left believing that if you and I had such a cordial conversation, perhaps the sorely-needed dialogue among evangelical Christians in America might actually be possible. For so long the invective of the Falwells, Robertsons, and Dobsons has poisoned relations with other Christians. The transformation of Christianity into a political religion – a weapon of partisan combat – weighs heavily on the soul of democracy. I read Ann Coulter, listen to Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly and Rush Limbaugh and Michael Savage – and I do not recognize the God they are talking about or the people they demonize, myself included. The great heart of Jesus seems missing from their worldview. The Golden Rule is tarnished and twisted. The Bible is turned into a partisan tract. And the Beatitudes are blasphemed. The profound themes of our historic faith – justice, mercy, love, compassion, redemption, and forgiveness – are swept away in the toxic dust of their vituperation. The propagation of the Gospel – the Good News – has been replaced by the polemics of personal destruction. As I listen and read all this, I think to myself: If this is what the world sees and hears of our faith today, no wonder Jesus weeps.

But you seemed different from these people, and I left our interview and conversation with a measure of hope. You and I interpret the Bible differently. We see faith through different lenses. Our views on social issues vary. But we had such a good-natured discussion about some of these issues – it shows in the broadcast – that at some level we seemed to connect despite our differences. You even offered to drive me to the airport after the interview. En route we talked about personal concerns – about your children and my grandchildren, how hard it is to raise kids in such a coarse society, our graduate studies at different Scottish universities, our roots in faith, your daughter Susan's music, my son's successful

struggle with addiction. We scarcely mentioned politics. You said you didn't much follow political events. I said that once I left the Kennedy and Johnson administrations almost 40 years ago for journalism, I had put partisanship behind me. On the plane home I considered how, if Christians of all stripes started listening to each other – not to agree but to try and understand – perhaps a new conversation about faith and democracy, religion and politics, might yet happen.

Over the coming months we stayed in touch. I sent you a copy of my documentary *Amazing Grace*. You sent me a CD of Susan's *Redeeming Love*. You signed your emails "In Christ." I worked all the harder in the editing room to give evangelicals of different stripes the chance to hear what their brothers and sisters in the faith are saying about the environment. The only reason I had undertaken to produce this documentary was because it is an important issue and a good story – a story no one else in broadcast journalism has addressed. But I began to see that it could be a useful and positive means for evangelicals who differ on the environment better to understand what each side is saying.

All of this was in good faith. Or so I thought.

Then, on the eve of the broadcast, came your devastating attack. Blog reports suddenly popped up which said you claimed in a newsletter that "When Moyers interviewed me for the documentary last spring, he very candidly told me that he is a liberal Democrat and intended for the documentary to influence the November elections to bring control of Congress back to the Democrats. Don't expect good science, economics, or ethics – or even journalistic balance."

I was stunned. This was not just a critique, an opinion, or even an attack – it was a lie, clearly timed to discredit the documentary just prior to broadcast. I had said nothing of the sort to you. Not in 35 years of broadcasting has it crossed my mind that journalism should try to elect or defeat any candidate or party. Partisan talk radio and cable channels to the contrary, any journalist who tries to do so would be – and should be – drummed out of the craft. And anyone stupid enough to announce such intentions to a guest – even in jest – should follow the Gadarene swine over the cliff to oblivion.

I immediately emailed you to ask whether you actually said such a thing. I wrote again later that day, asking: "What has come over you?" I said you were not telling the truth and I asked for a retraction and an apology as your lie gained speed across the Internet. You replied the next morning only to say that you were busy and that you "should" be able to send me a reply at the end of that day, in your own good time. I was furious and wrote back immediately asking how you intended to rectify this lie. You were undermining my reputation and credibility, not to mention my livelihood, and were blasé about it. You then replied with no

substantive response but a definition of the word "lie," as if you proposed to avoid responsibility on the basis of a dictionary definition! Given your rebuff of my appeal, I asked my attorney to contact you immediately and put you on notice that if you did not act forthrightly to retract the lie, I had no alternative but to seek recourse by other means. For the fact is that lies allowed to spread like virtual kudzu on the Internet can permanently injure their victims while poisoning the wellsprings of democracy. It is okay for you to criticize my journalism, or for me to take issue with your theology; it is not acceptable that we lie about each other. The 9th Commandment says plainly: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Jesus says simply, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." Presumably that includes bearing false witness against even journalists, although many of your allies have been doing just that for a long time now. The Right relentlessly employs lies, deceit, distortions, exaggerations, and mischaracterizations to intimidate journalists and discredit those with whom they disagree.

You responded late that day with an email to me in which you admitted that the first half of your statement was indeed false, and you apologized for that; but you let stand the most damaging part of your false statement which attacked my integrity. My attorney wrote you once again the following day, Thursday, demanding a full retraction but I have received nothing further from you.

I had not wanted to think that you were willing to join the right wing's ongoing crusade against journalists. But as the weekend wore on with no appearance of a retraction or apology, I realized that I was wrong. You were willing to defame a journalist who had come to you in good faith, had treated you honorably, made sure your interview was edited fairly and, then, in the interest of transparency, posted the full transcript so people could judge for themselves. In the face of the fairness and respect I showed you, you not only lied about me but you allowed the lie to gather speed and force as we have seen happen so often in coordinated attacks by the right wing on the people and institutions they would destroy. Sadly, I concluded, it is time to say, "Enough's enough!" Let's ask a body of our peers to weigh how much tolerance a society can accord lies that defame others.

That was my position as of Monday morning. Day after day you had allowed your poison to spread. Then, on Monday I learned of your lawyer's letter, saying that you stand by your position but that you are "troubled by the fracturing of the relationship" and "desire to attempt to restore that relationship outside of the civil courts as Christians are admonished to do in First Corinthians chapter six."

Well, the relationship is fractured because of your lie and refusal to rectify it. A simple retraction and apology is all I ask. As you ponder my request, I would urge that you do two things: Put on your daughter's music – the music you sent me – as

I did on Sunday while thinking about your behavior. Then read the fifth chapter of Matthew, as I also did on Sunday. Then we'll see what happens.

Bill Moyers