

# CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

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# Ten Things to Light Your Fire

By Foy Valentine

“There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not,” said the wise man, “the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid” (Proverbs 30:18-19).

Well, there are five things that are too wonderful for me, yea ten, that light my fire. I share them here in the hope that your own imagination will be stirred to conjure up some goodies of your own.

- *A good meal in good company.* The Bible says that in heaven folks will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and sit at table in the kingdom of God. A foretaste of that goodly prospect is often experienced here and now when good friends gather to put their feet under the same table for good food and good fellowship. An unhurried prayer of gratitude to God, a cup of hot homemade soup, fresh corn bread cooked in an iron skillet and right out of the oven, real butter, savory roast, brown gravy, fresh corn on the cob, sweet potato souffle, fresh shelled black eyed peas, and hot coconut pie. I don't ask for much. Just a plain and ordinary little meal. Keep it simple. Take plenty of time. Drink a couple of glasses of really cold iced tea. And garnish the whole nine yards with good conversation. No wonder smart people want to go to heaven.
- *A walk in the woods.* In the fall, you kick the leaves, revel in the color, savor the smells, walk a couple of fallen logs, sit on every stump you come to, marvel at the mushrooms, feast on a few dead-ripe persimmons sweetened to perfection for having hung for the last week or two in the wonderful warmth of the late fall sunlight, eat a bunch of possum grapes brought to their height of flavor by a couple of frosts, and at a little creek skip two or three flat rocks across the sun-dappled surface of still water. When you come to think of it, such a walk in the woods is worth a thousand dollars, maybe more.
- *A deep drink of cold water.* When David was desperately weary, utterly exhausted, and sorely stressed by guerrilla warfare against the Philistines whose garrison was in Bethlehem where he grew up, he longed for “a drink of water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate.” It's

remembered from a far safer and more tranquil period in his life. He did not crave food. He did not wish for deliverance from his enemies. He did not ask for a nice bed with clean sheets—he longed for a drink of water. When a body is thirsty, nothing can compare with a drink of water.

- *Work.* Does this seem odd to you? Probably not. When we stop to think about it, work is a very special gift from God. Work gives purpose to life. Work enables us to be useful and to feel that usefulness in our bones. When work is well done, it builds self-confidence. Work identifies us with God who is himself a worker. Work is the mother of sound sleep. Like others who write a little, I hate to write, but I like to have written. That is, the goads of discipline are for the moment grievous, painful, but there are special rewards once the work has been endured. So, thank God for work.
- *Butting heads with little grandkids.* Some peculiar people, oddly enough, do not seem to relish this splendid sport. Gently butting heads with a three-year old little girl or a five-year old boy does for me, however, what it apparently does for a cow who nuzzles her calf and thus communicates affection, secures bonding, and shares by this unique sense of touch deeper feelings of love and pleasure and kinship than could ever be done with elemental sounds or mere words, no matter how intricately crafted or elegantly uttered.
- *Watching the sun set.* Beautiful sunsets never, ever get boring. Lasting hardly longer than five or ten minutes, fine sunsets are infinitely varied, gloriously hued, wonderfully new, and breathtakingly original.
- *Seeing the moon rise.* Few things in nature, or in all human experience, can rival a full moon inching up over the horizon on a late fall evening. It is a fascinating slow-motion marvel. As the earth does its inexorable turning, the faintest sliver of a big, golden moon peeps out, and then pushes up ever so deliberately until the whole gorgeous orb looks the world right in the eye. If you could only see this marvel once in a lifetime and could know what sheer delight it would be, you would gladly go half way around the world to experience it. But for us, right where we live, it comes every 28 days. Enjoy.
- *Nestle down in a good bed for a night's sleep.* And just to think. When I was a kid, I hated to go to bed at night lest I miss something exciting that might happen or something wonderful that could develop. Well, things have changed. Now I can hardly wait to get to that blessed bed. This is something that is nothing short of delicious: to get in a

(continued on page 14)

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Editor: Foy Valentine

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# Is It Murder?—The Problem of Ethical Language

By Charles Wellborn

[Dr. Charles Wellborn is Professor of Religion Emeritus, Florida State University, Tallahassee and for 20 years was Dean of the Overseas Campus in London where he now lives.]

One of the most distinctive attributes of the human race, setting men and women well apart from any other species, is the power of verbal communication. While some experiments have seemed to show evidence of rudimentary communication among animals such as chimpanzees by means of signs and grunts, and while some people have fantastic theories about dolphins, the human ability to communicate not only simple facts but complex ideas remains unique. The entire area of human language is still, in many ways, a puzzling mystery to psychologists, neurologists, and linguists.

While human verbal and written communication is a highly developed and distinctive skill, it is not without its problems. Sir Francis Bacon, the 16th century lawyer and philosopher (whom some people believe wrote Shakespeare's plays), recognized those problems when he wrote in his influential treatise, *The Advancement of Learning*, "The first great judgment of God upon the ambition of man was the confusion of tongues; whereby open trade and intercourse of learning was chiefly embarred."

While one might quibble with Sir Francis as to whether, scripturally, this was the *first* judgment of God on a sinful human race, he stands on solid ground in terms of the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel, which tells us that God punished the pride and ambition of His people by "confounding" their language. The story is usually employed as an explanation of the myriad of different human tongues—English, Chinese, Arabic, etc. But it can equally well apply to the manifest ambiguities and difficulties of interpretation within a single language, such as our own English.

Many of the words we use in everyday verbal intercourse are capable of many different understandings. Take the word "love." When someone says to you, "I love you," what does he or she mean? The word may convey simple lust, mindless obsession, passionate regard, deep affection, the desire for manipulative possession or jealous ownership, friendship, altruistic concern—the list of meanings can go on and on. The interpretation of those words by the one to whom they are addressed is conditioned by many factors: our knowledge of the speaker, the context in which the words are spoken, and, perhaps most importantly, by what in a particular set of circumstances *we want the words to mean*.

H. Richard Niebuhr, the American theologian, has pointed out that the process of communication is not complete until

what he called "the gesture"—the initial words or actions—is interpreted and responded to by the recipient of that gesture. The meaning of any individual's "gesture", as well as the response and interpretation to it, is always shaped and bounded by the unique physical, intellectual, emotional, and cultural situation. There is insight in the pronouncement of Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*: "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less."

These observations have a particular relevance to the problem of how Christians are to understand the words of the Scriptures. The Bible is given to us in human language, words set once and for all in a particular format. Those Christians who believe in what is called "verbal inspiration"—that is, the idea that each scriptural word is in the fullest sense directly inspired of God, overriding any personal beliefs, characteristics, or limitations of the human writer—must deal seriously with a basic question. If this understanding is true, then what do these inspired words actually mean? The thorough-going verbal inspirationist can never stop with the mere words. He must devise creeds, dogmas, catechisms, choosing out of a number of possible meanings the "correct" one. What is obvious through twenty centuries of Christian history is that preachers, theologians, and the rank and file of Christian believers have arrived at many differing understandings of the same sets of scriptural words. When Christians begin to try to enforce their particular interpretations on others, or maintain that they and they alone have understood the only correct meaning of the words, they are claiming for their human views the same divine imprimatur as the Scriptures themselves. That seems to me, as one sinful human being among many, an impossible position. I cannot accept that any individual, group, or human organization can lay claim to such divine authority.

In the realm of Christian ethics, a case in point is the interpretation of the meaning of the Decalogue. Christians accept the Ten Commandments as a solid, God-given basis for healthy moral conduct. But what do the Commandments actually mean, when applied in actual life situations?

Take, for example, the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill", more accurately translated as "You shall do no murder." The commandment clearly places an extremely high value on every individual human life. "Murder" can be defined as unjustified killing. Here, the application of the moral law takes on complexity. What actual circumstances "justify" the taking of human life? The answer to that question has been the sub-

ject of debate and disagreement through the centuries. Earnest Christian believers have looked at thorny issues such as the killing of enemies in wartime, capital punishment, abortion, birth control, euthanasia, and self-defense, all of which arguably involve the taking of life, and have reached widely different conclusions.

Across the centuries one can discern an irregular pattern of development in the understanding of “murder.” In ancient times a widely held view was that the prohibition of unjustified killing applied only to family and clan members. Thus, the killing of Abel by Cain was essentially the crime of fratricide. Over the years the meaning of “murder” gradually came to include the killing of those in one’s own tribe and then, in one’s nation. Christian pacifists and conscientious objectors argue today that the killing of any other human being, even in war, is unjustified. The problem in this regard has been heightened by the slaughter of civilians and non-combatants, including women and children, in modern “total war.”

Clearly, the understanding of the meaning of the Sixth Commandment has been materially shaped by the contemporary cultural context. At this point Christians need to be especially careful in their approach to the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Numerous sections of the Old Testament present genuine problems of ethical understanding. We believe that the Old Testament is given to us by God as an instrument of edification and the understanding of spiritual truth. It tells the story of the struggle of Israel to understand and obey God’s laws. That struggle was replete, as the Hebrew prophets repeatedly pointed out, with human misunderstanding and error. We are to learn from and profit by, not only the valid insights gained by Israel, but also their mistakes.

Two examples, out of many, will help to make the difficulty plain. We are told in the Book of Joshua that when Jericho was conquered, the Israelites, in obedience to Joshua’s command, “utterly destroyed all that were in the city, both men and women, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword” (Joshua 6:21). Are we to believe that it was actually the will of a loving God that innocent women, children, and even animals, should be brutally and cruelly put to the sword? Are is it more sensible and consistent to believe that Joshua, a sinful man and, to some extent, a prisoner of his culture, misinterpreted God’s will in a spirit of vengeance? The Old Testament must always be viewed through the eyes of Jesus. Is it possible for us to imagine Jesus sanctioning such a massacre? Were the lives of all the inhabitants of Jericho worthless in the sight of God? Was the killing of Jericho’s women and children “murder”?

**T**he Book of Judges relates one of the more tragic stories in the Old Testament. Jephtha, military leader of Israel, preparing for battle, tries to bargain with God and makes the foolish vow that if God grants him victory, he will sacrifice whatever first greets him when he returns home. Victory is achieved, and when Jephtha arrives home, he is greeted first by his only child, a daughter. In fulfillment of his vow, he sends his daughter to her death.

What are we to make of this? Are we to see it, as preachers sometimes extol it, as a great act of faith and obedience on the part of Jephtha? Or—are we to see it as the disastrous story of a sinful man, misunderstanding the will and character of God, actually committing “murder”?

Perhaps I can press the point with a far-fetched, hypothetical, modern example. If President George Bush, at the beginning of the Gulf War, had publicly vowed that, if God gave America victory over Saddam Hussein, he would sacrifice whatever first met him at the White House door, how would most sensible people, including Christians, have reacted? And if the President had been greeted on his return by George, Jr., his eldest son, and, in fulfillment of his vow, had sent his son to his death, what would have been our judgment on him? The whole example is, of course, ridiculous, but the fact that we cannot conceive such a scenario surely passes some sort of judgment on Jephtha.

**C**oncrete examples of the shaping of the interpretation of Scripture can be multiplied almost endlessly. In the 6th century, Procopius, secret court historian for the Emperor Justinian in Constantinople, wrote of his Christian master (who had built the magnificent Santa Sophia and left his enduring legacy in the Justinian legal code), “He did not accept that the crime of murder extended to those who did not agree with him on theological or, indeed, other matters. He slew them without compunctions of conscience.” In the Middle Ages the leaders of the Holy Inquisition piously believed that it was the will of God for them to torture or even kill in order to preserve the purity of their doctrine. In the years leading up to the American Civil War devout pastors across the South proclaimed that the Scriptures endorsed and approved the institution of human slavery. Today, few if any honest Christians support that interpretation of God’s moral law. We easily recognize that in the past such distortions of Biblical interpretation resulted largely from cultural conditioning. It is more difficult for us to accept that our own contemporary understandings may be similarly misshapen.

To return to Richard Niebuhr’s terminology, the Scriptures can be seen as a “divine gesture.” That gesture consists of a particular set of words. The process of communication is not complete until we interpret and respond to the gesture. Our response, as sinful persons locked up in a time-space box that conditions our every thought and action, is always and everywhere partial and problematical.

I have concentrated here on one particular Biblical injunction: “You shall do no murder.” I have emphasized the difficulties of interpretation when we apply that moral law to specific problem areas. I have deliberately not set out my own views on such issues as war service, capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia. I certainly have views on each of these problems, and I am prepared to argue my views in the appropriate forum. But what I want to make clear here is that my views are personal ones, and I claim no pseudo-papal infallibility for them.

Our responses must take account of the complex dimensions of the problem. Look at the issue of capital punishment,

for instance. Is legalized killing by the state the “justified” taking of human life? The answer to that question is not given by a simple repetition of the basic Scriptural text. True, the Old Testament routinely, in accord with its cultural context, seems to approve forms of capital punishment, often cruel and barbarous forms. And the New Testament nowhere specifically condemns capital punishment as such. (It should be remembered that the New Testament is also silent on many other issues which were now contemporary moral problems, such as the industrial exploitation of children or environmental pollution.)

Today’s Christian approach to the morality of capital punishment must take into account any number of questions, some of them factual and others ethical or philosophical. What is the acceptable purpose of capital punishment? It obviously is not reform or rehabilitation. Is it a deterrent to the commission of other capital crimes? If it is, would it not make sense to follow the example of previous societies and use the most painful and public methods, such as open-air hanging or the public guillotine? It is taken for granted that any legal process should involve justice. Are we certain that the legal bureaucracy we have set up to make decisions on capital punishment is a fair and equitable one? Is it worth the risk for society to execute ten guilty murderers if it also executes one innocent person, caught up in a fallible system? Does legalized execution ultimately humanize or brutalize the total society? If the punishment should fit the crime, which is worse—a quick, “humane” execution, or to be locked away for years in the “hell-holes” which modern society calls prisons? Is the economic factor decisive; that is, the comparison of cost between executing a criminal and imprisoning him or her for long periods of time? Should legal justice strive to be totally objective, or should it be influenced by the understandable emotional demands for revenge on the part of the victim’s family? Does final judgment involving the death of a human being belong to the Lord or to a human court?

I suggest that such questions only begin to reveal the complexity of the issue. My rhetoric may at times betray my personal view, but my views are not the core of the problem. We are seeking the best moral truth we can find.

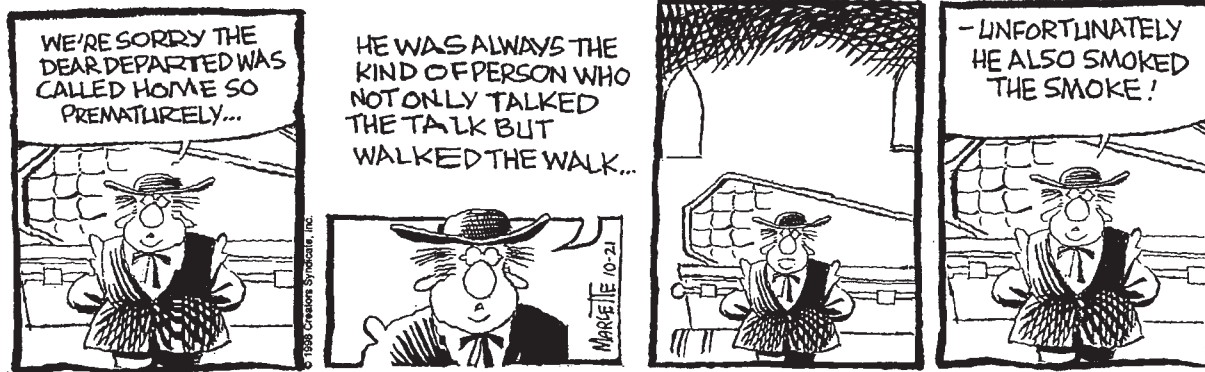
Where does all this leave us? Is there hope for some progress in our understanding of God’s “gestures”? I do not think that such progress will arise out of dogmatic creedal pronounce-

ments, whether those dicta originate in Rome, Nashville, or Salt Lake City. Our hope now, as in the past, rests in a continuing, open dialogue within the Christian community. What is essential is free, untrammelled discussion and debate among those who honestly strive to find moral enlightenment. That dialogue must be firmly set within the real-life parameters of the twentieth century. It must take into account all of the valid dimensions of the problem. There is still new light to burst forth from the Old Book.

In the process we must not be afraid to take hard new looks at old problems. There is no change in the basic words of the Scriptures, but there is continuing change in *human interpretations* of that Scripture. My own Baptist forebears—people like Roger Williams and John Leland—were branded heretics by the established religious authorities of their day. If history has taught us anything, it is that yesterday’s “heresy” is quite often today’s “orthodoxy.” New light does come, but it comes only through the free dialogue of committed Christian believers, armed with honesty and humility. Human declarations involving claims to some sort of divine infallibility are often the last resort of those who find it difficult or impossible to defend their views within the wider Christian family.

There is no escaping our Christian responsibility. God has given us the Scriptures. He has also given us minds and spirits. I believe he expects us to use those gifts in the continuing search for his will in matters of moral conduct. The job is tough, but “toughness” is one appropriate description of the Christian life. Given our manifold human limitations, the answers at which we arrive may rarely be final or definitive, but the quest must continue.

If the Christian family is what it proclaims itself to be—a “community of love”—we must make certain that changing and differing understandings of Biblical language must not be allowed to shatter the bonds of Christian fellowship. While holding strongly to our own honest perceptions, we must not allow our differences to sever us from other Christians who have just as honestly arrived at a different interpretation. And we must always be ready to listen to what others believe and to enter into a meaningful dialogue with them. It is only in this way that we can hope for any real moral progress. We might even come to a clearer understanding of what the Decalogue means when it says, “Thou shalt not kill.” ■



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# It's Okay to Be Extravagant

By Hal Haralson

[Hal Haralson practices law and religion in Austin, Texas and writes a right smart for *Christian Ethics Today*.]

The young woman poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and bathed them with her hair.

One of the disciples tried to stop her saying "Master, we could buy food for the hungry with the money that perfume costs."

"She's giving the best she has. Let her alone."

In relationships, particularly in marriage, it is all right to be extravagant once in a while.

It is an effective way to express your love.

Judy and I decided to take off four days and go to New Orleans. No plan. No reason, except to get away.

It was three months ahead of her sixtieth birthday. We had been married for 41 years.

I've always looked for the unexpected and tried to surprise her.

For her fiftieth birthday, I had a dinner party at Green Pastures Restaurant in Austin.

I had secretly invited the most significant people in her life in the five decades she had lived.

She walked in the room to find people she hadn't seen in years, from all over the United States. It was a whopping success.

Now, with number 60 approaching, I had to find a creative way to express my love.

We were walking down Bourbon Street the second morning. "Let's go in here," she said, pointing to an art gallery.

As we walked in the door, Judy squealed. The painting on the wall hooked her inner child and her glee could not be contained.

It was by an Italian artist. The background was the door to a cathedral with flower vendor carts in front. It was alive with color.

The thing that grabbed Judy's "child" were the 6 choir boys/girls in red and white pinafores on the sidewalk in front of the cathedral.

She cried. She squealed. She had the owner put it in various positions.

This went on for nearly an hour and I thought she was going to buy it.

The \$2,800.00 price tag was too much. She backed out.

The next morning, she suggested we go back by the gallery. Same routine. For nearly an hour she squealed and cried and had the owner hanging the painting in various positions.

She sat down at his desk and got out her checkbook. (Judy is a psychotherapist with 15 years of private practice....She could buy this painting if she wanted to.)

Just as she finished the check, she stopped, changed her mind, and we left.

All the way to the hotel she argued with herself over whether she should have gotten the painting. "It was just too much." She began to list the things we could do with the money.

After we arrived at the hotel, we had something to drink and went up to the room. I made some excuse about having to go back to the lobby.

I called the gallery and spoke to the owner. "If she calls you or we come back by, tell her it's too late...the painting has sold." I arranged to mail a check and have the painting shipped to my office.

As October 11th (Judy's sixtieth birthday) approached, I got more excited. The painting had arrived at my office about a month before and I was having a hard time keeping my secret.

We had dinner at Green Pastures. All of our children were there.

I had hung the painting behind a larger painting in the private dining room.

After dinner, I said a few words and our son, David, went over and removed the larger painting.

When Judy saw the "choir boys" she almost went into hysterics. I thought we might have to call the EMS.

This was the high point of 41 years of marriage.

Extravagance is sometimes okay in expressing love. ■

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# Bill Clinton, Ken Starr, the Gospel, and God's Salvation Army

By Roger Lovette

[Dr. Roger Lovette is pastor of the Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Alabama and is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

Who could be undisturbed by what has been happening on the national scene? I am just heartsick over recent events in Washington. For months this debacle has been building until it has reached a crescendo. The media have had a field day; and, apparently like most other Americans, I resent this and find them despicable players on this sorry stage. We are sitting around pondering a salacious account of tawdry misbehavior which even horny teenagers ought not to indulge themselves in, worrying about what we should say to our children and grandchildren, anxious about what it says about our country, concerned about what the world thinks about us. Never have I felt this way about my country, except perhaps that awful weekend in November of 1963 when a President lay dead in Dallas, felled by a cruel assassin's bullets. Then, not knowing what to do, we gathered in front of our TV sets day after day. And on Sunday we filled the churches across the land. We came hoping for some word from the Lord, hoping somehow that we might make sense out of that violent madness. We came, as Unamuno suggested years before, to grieve together—to weep in common for ourselves, for the Kennedys, for our children, and for our country.

I feel some of those same feelings today. So I come here and open the Book, hoping on such an occasion as this that there will be some word from the Lord.

By way of introduction, however, and before I turn to the scriptures, I want to make several comments.

First, *this is not a time to gloat, even if you are a passionately partisan Republican*. What has happened to the presidency and to the way Americans do politics is a sad thing, a profoundly sad thing. It will take years and years to recover. When we do recover, the way we look at the presidency and many other authority figures will be forever different. Mistrust in public officials is building and seems destined to escalate, just going on and on and on. This whole shabby matter distracts us from the business of working together for the common good where there is much to do. Grief would be a more appropriate response than gloating for the people of God in particular but for all Americans in general, bi-partisan grief, genuine grief that leads to authentic repentance for making the sorry loom that would weave such a sorry pattern.

Next, *remember our history*. Not only our national history, but our biblical history as well. The United States has been beset by scandals, major and minor, since our earliest beginnings. Our leaders have been frequently flawed. Seeing one more now with feet of clay is not the end of the world. By saying this, I do not mean to diminish the sadness or the seriousness of what has been going on. But we also remember that King David, Israel's greatest king, once admitted his great wrong of adultery and murder only after he was confronted and rebuked by Nathan, the prophet of God. We need to remember that whole sordid affair was just one chapter in a long, long story. David, despite his defects, would become the yardstick by which every king of Israel in the future would forever be measured and judged. And today we still name our sons after this king, flawed as he was by adultery, murder, violence, and war. Human leaders are indeed prone to judgment failures and character flaws. Our country and our churches have survived many crises, and both are still standing. So, God bless America and God bless our churches.

Third, *there are rules and standards that ought always to be observed*. We break these at our own peril. All of the Ten Commandments still stand, including those pertaining to our sexuality and our speech. If you were to take a piece of cloth and tear it in two, you might be able to stitch it together. You might be able to mend it. You might even be able to reweave it. But it would never, ever be as it was before. All of us have to live with the consequences of our actions. We can hurt and we can maim and we can even destroy others when we break the rules and ignore the standards. This is serious business. That is why the Ten Commandments talk about these things.

Fourth, *Jesus was much harder on self-righteousness than he ever was on sins of sex or speech*. Isn't that strange? Read the Book. I have had it with the self-righteousness of the media commentators and the Radical Religious Right Republican partisans who have piously taken out full-page ads to recycle renegade preachers but who have jumped into the present political crisis to call for the President's resignation or impeachment. What they obviously would prefer would be to have his head on a platter. Al Mohler, who is the Fundamentalist president of the now Fundamentalist Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville has publicly called on the President's home church in Little Rock to deal with its erring member. Who gave this young Pharisee authority? Authentic Baptists

still believe in the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of all believers. He said: "How can President Clinton claim to be a Southern Baptist and persist in this public display of serial sin? Only because the congregation which holds his membership has failed to exercise any semblance of church discipline. Southern Baptists will be watching the Immanuel Baptist Church of Little Rock to see if it musters the courage to make clear its convictions." The pastor of that church, Rex Horne, needs a standing ovation. This is what he said: "The recent admission...by the President is grievous. His actions are indefensible and inexcusable. They are not, however, unforgivable. I pray the President will find the grace of God which comes upon confession of sin and the peace which comes from a restored relationship with our Lord." (These quotes are taken from the *Religious Herald*, September 3, 1998, "Differing Views," p. 5.) I keep remembering the story of the woman who was flung at Jesus' feet after she had been caught in the very act of adultery. Jesus did not focus on the sinner. He focused instead on those who stood in the circle with the pursed lips and the folded arms, wanting to know what Jesus would do. He said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." It is far, far easier to deal with someone else's sin and to ignore your own.

And in this context what ought to be said of the Republican effort to bring down the Democratic standard-bearer? What should be said about the forty million dollar publicly-funded partisan exercise designed to humiliate Clinton but especially orchestrated to influence future elections, consolidate Republican control of the Congress, secure the White House for a Republican in the next election, and prepare for future spoils of political victory? What ought to be said of illegally leaked grand jury testimony, of lavishly funded entrapment schemes, and of the corrosive "spirit of party" so abhorred by George Washington, which has reached a new low in the history of this republic. Is there a word from the Lord? Consider: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," and "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." America's two-party political system is not perfect, but it is the best political system that humanity has thus far devised. The Republican Party is a conserving party with an anti-government orientation and the Democratic Party is an innovating party with a pro-government orientation. History has proven that both these orientations are needed for their checks and balances work together for our common good.

**F**ifth, *the Bible admonishes us to pray for those in authority.* Do you find it strange that the Apostle Paul admonished

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*"The reason  
that Christ  
came into the  
world was to  
save sinners."  
This is what  
Christ is about.  
This is what  
church is about.  
The church is a  
salvation army.*

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the churches to pray for the Roman emperor, the very one who spent a lot of his energy trying to destroy the church? Christians are to pray for those who are in places of governmental leadership, who are responsible for seeking to maintain public order, keep the peace, and promote the general welfare. This clearly does not mean for us to pray like the Congregationalist Samuel Eaton who disliked the Madisonian foreign policy so much that he prayed, "O Lord, Thou hast commanded us to pray for our enemies. We would therefore pray for the President and Vice President of the United States." And I don't think it means for us to pray like Henry Ward Beecher, a famous preacher of another day who, by the way, had his own sexual problems which made a great scandal later on. He prayed once after President Buchanan was gone, "Thank you, Lord, for removing rulers imbecile in all but corruption." Christians are to pray genuinely and earnestly for those in authority in government.

Perhaps that is enough commentary. It is time to get to the text. I have searched long and hard for something to say today, and I have found it in one of the Pastoral Epistles, which epistles are First and Second

Timothy and the book of Titus. These letters were written to present Paul's teachings to the churches and to safeguard them from wrong teachings and practices.

First Timothy, from which the text comes, was written to offer guidance for the administration of the churches. How are we to make this thing called church work with integrity? What does it mean to be God's people and to follow principles of the gospel? Paul wrote to oppose false teachings which would lead little, fragile churches down side streets and deadend roads. First Timothy, chapter 1 and verse 15 is the heart of what he is saying at this point: "This saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance." Five times in the Pastoral Epistles, the author says: "This saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance." What he is saying is that this is a serious matter. "The reason that Christ came into the world was to save sinners." This is what Christ is about. This is what church is about. The church is a *salvation army*. Our work is to bring redemption to anyone and to everyone. I don't care if we are talking about Monica or Linda or Ken or the President of the United States. The church is not in the judging, punishing, or self-righteousness business. We are in the salvation business.

As I have listened and watched, I have remembered the story that comes from a French novel by Pierre van Passen. The little, aged Roman Catholic pastor at Roudaire yearned for his people to love one another. He kept praying that they might just come to understand something of the mercy of God that had been poured out on them and on all of God's chil-



dren, and consequently that they might turn and give that mercy out to one another. But it was not to be so in that little place called Roudaire. So one day the pastor went down to the river to receive the drowned bodies of two illegitimate children, a brother and a sister, and it was just more than the pastor could bear. The brother was a huge, misshapen gnome, driven to suicide by the cruel taunts of unchristian members of the church parish. The sister, who was so distressed that the only person in all the world who loved her and whom she in turn loved was gone, that she threw herself into the river where she was also drowned. The pastor was destitute. He had worked hard and it had come to this. So he broke the rules of his church. He opened the doors and brought in the bodies of the two children, human beings the community and even the church called illegitimate, bastards. Suicides. Then he called the people together and said, "Come in. We are going to have a service." The congregation was furious. But they came with their anger and packed the house. Finally, when his time came, the pastor said:

In that day, the great day, when the Lord of all shall say to me, "Pasteur de la Roudaire, where are thy sheep?", I shall not answer Him. And If He shall say to me the second time, "Pastor of Roudaire, I gave thee sheep to guard; where are thy sheep?" then, I shall say, "They are not sheep, O Lord—they were a pack of wolves.

When we turn to the text, it is clear that Paul remembered his own background. He remembered that he was a sinner. This is where we start. Not in Washington. Not in the state capital. Not across the aisle. Not with somebody else. We remember ourselves. Paul called himself a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man of violence, the chief of sinners.

Paul never could forget the things that he had done. The word "blaspheme" comes from the Greek word *blas* which means stupid and from *pheme* which means speech—stupid speech. Paul is saying, "My words hurt a lot of people." The next word is *blapto*, having to do with persecution. He is saying, "I persecuted Christians, trying to grind into the dust those who disagreed with me." Then we come to the most serious word of all, *hubris*, a violent word, arrogant, prideful, sadistic. It means to inflict hurt and injury on somebody else. Paul is saying that he felt delight in the cruelty that he inflicted on others. "I have done all these things," he said, "and I am ashamed."

Then it is in verse 15 that he writes that he is the chief of sinners. But despite all the terrible things that he had done, he shares an intriguing word in verse 16. He says that Christ Jesus with perfect patience poured out mercy on this wretchedly wicked Saul and pointed him in a new direction. The New Testament language is especially interesting here. It says that the Lord Jesus Christ took a pencil and a piece of paper and began to sketch a picture of a new man. A new person. A picture not of the old, mean, proud, vindictive, cruel man who

enjoyed twisting the knife in others. Paul said that the Lord was drawing a picture of somebody he himself could hardly recognize. It was a new Paul. It was a changed Paul. It was the Paul who would rise to the occasion and march across his world saying, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am nothing."

Paul tells us why he was changed. It was because of four things:

- *Mercy*. He uses this word twice. It is one of the great words in scripture.
- *Grace*. God's unmerited favor that overflowed until it covered him all over.
- *Faith*. This is the confidence that the believer has ground to stand on so solid that nothing could ever, ever shake it.
- *Love*. This is the love of God in Christ so measureless and strong that Paul could stand in awesome wonder and ponder its cruciform shape and then could share with us the length and breadth and depth and height of it all—mercy and grace and faith and love.

One of our favorite hymns in this country is "Amazing Grace." We sing it on all kinds of occasions. It never fails to move us:

Through many dangers, toils, and snares  
I have already come.  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

The man who wrote that hymn had been guilty of terrible things, John Newton. He finally sank so low that he bought a slave ship and became a slave trader who would sail his ship up and down the African coast, kidnapping human beings and cramming them into the hold of his ship and then hauling them to different countries to sell them like cattle. But then one day he heard of word of grace. He became a preacher of the gospel in time and over his mantel wrote in large letters: "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." John Newton composed his own epitaph, and this is what is on his tombstone today: "John Newton. Clerk, once an Infidel and Libertine, a Servant of Slaves in Africa, was Preserved, Restored, Pardoned, and Appointed to Preach the Faith he had so long laboured to destroy." He never forgot that he was a forgiven sinner.

Unamuno was right. We come to grieve together. We grieve for the President and his family. We grieve for the nation. We do not judge. That is God's business. We remember that marvelous scene from First Timothy where the Lord Jesus, with a pad and pencil, sketches a new likeness for his church, his people. In that picture, if you look closely, you will discover mercy and grace and faith and love. God's salvation army. ■

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# Some Things I Wish I Had Said to My Father

By Roger Lovette

[Dr. Roger Lovette is pastor of the Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Alabama.]

When I first read the play *I Never Sang For My Father*, I remember I cried. What was going on here? I never cry. But something about that sad story of a boy who never got to finish his business with his father brought tears to my eyes. My father has been dead for 20 years and I still carry around a lot of grief because we never got to finish our business. Maybe that's where the tears come from. I still have a lot of things I have to say to him.

I would like to tell my father that the tree he planted on the day I was born brings me joy to this day. My parents had been married 17 years. Doctors told them there would be no children. Then, out of the blue, I came along. And, on the day of my birth, my father knelt in front of the little four-room white clapboard mill house that would be our home, and planted a tree. It was an oak. I don't know what he thought as he dug in the ground, carefully placed the sapling, watered the little tree and stepped back.

When I visit my hometown I still drive by the old house. I stop the car and look up. Towering above the house, stretching toward the sky is my tree. I thank my father for that gift.

I wish I had told him how sorry I was that he could not hear. When he was a little boy, way out in the country his ears ruptured. The family lived on a dirt road miles and miles from doctors. They tried home remedies—things like eggs cooked in vinegar—placed on his throbbing ears. But nothing worked—most of my father's hearing never came back. So he could never hear me easily. Communication was hard for him and for me.

Often I grew frustrated that he could not understand me. I wonder how hard it must have been for him to try to decipher sounds that usually came to him garbled and indistinct. I now know why he hated crowds. He just couldn't hear what was going on in the group. I now understand why he kept to himself and people thought he was a loner. I would like him to know I now understand something of his distance and his solitude.

I wish I had told him how much I appreciated how hard he worked. He moved, like so many others in the deep South, from farm to city where he worked in a textile mill. He worked there from age 21 to age 65. Same mill. Most of his years he lived in the same little four-room house. I wish I had told him I have wondered how hard it was to get up and go to the same job year after year, decade after decade. Little money. Little appreciation for all those years of hard, tedious, sometimes 12-hour shifts. No vacations. Nothing to look forward to but

another week and another year in the mill.

I wish I had told him how amazing I think it is that he never complained about his lot in life. He never grumbled about what he did not have. He stayed. He brought home his paycheck. He kept the family together. Our little nuclear family would not have made it if he had not done what he faithfully did.

I wish I could tell him how much I appreciated the legacy of lack of prejudice he left to me and to my brother. He was foreman in the mill in Georgia from the 1930s through the early 1960s. Every black person who worked for him admired Mr. John. They knew he would be fair. They knew he would be honest. They knew he was a man who always treated them with respect.

I would like to tell him what a rare gift he gave me—the great gift of looking beneath a person's skin color. He didn't learn that in school—he only finished the seventh grade. He followed this way because it was right.

I never told him how much those long walks in the woods on Sunday afternoons meant to me. We had no car. We had little money. The only day he was off work he would take my brother and me up to the hills along the river. We didn't say much. We just walked and explored the neighborhood. We found strange-colored rocks and arrowheads and caught frogs and watched snakes slither. After he died I remember how special those Sunday afternoons were. I don't think I ever told him.

It was after his death that I learned that he had witnessed his own father's death when he was 9 years old. They were in a wagon. A relative stopped the wagon and shot my grandfather. He died as my father stood helplessly watching. He never mentioned the horror of that occasion. I wish I had heard him tell the story of his own loss and grief. I think I would have understood him better.

I don't think I ever told him that I remembered the day his thumb got cut off in the mill. Later, when the insurance money came, he bought my brother and me whatever we wanted. I remember I chose my first wooden box of oil paints. I would like to tell him that I still have that box high up in my closet. It is one of my most favorite treasures.

I know now why I cried when I read the story about the boy who never got the chance to sing for his father. Life slips away from us all. I never got to say some of the things I wanted to say.

But on Father's Day I remember a man named John who was my daddy. He is gone but I remember the gifts he left behind. There was little of material worth—but a treasure of memories and a legacy of richness that I will take all the way to the finish line. ■

# Fundamentalism's Noble Forebear: Curtis Lee Laws

By Curtis W. Freeman

[Dr. Curtis Freeman is Associate Professor of Christianity and Philosophy at Houston Baptist University.]

Fundamentalism today is committed to ecclesiastical establishmentarianism in the American educational system through such things as state-sponsored prayer, tuition tax credits, and vouchers. We think our readers will be surprised and encouraged to discover that the forebear of fundamentalism was a true Baptist guided by historic convictions. This piece by Laws (and forty-nine others) is included in *Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People* by Curtis W. Freeman, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., and Rosalee Velosso. It is due to be published by Judson Press in April 1999. We encourage readers of *Christian Ethics Today* to get a copy and be like the wise kingdom scribe who brings out of the kingdom's storehouse things new and old (Mt. 13:52).

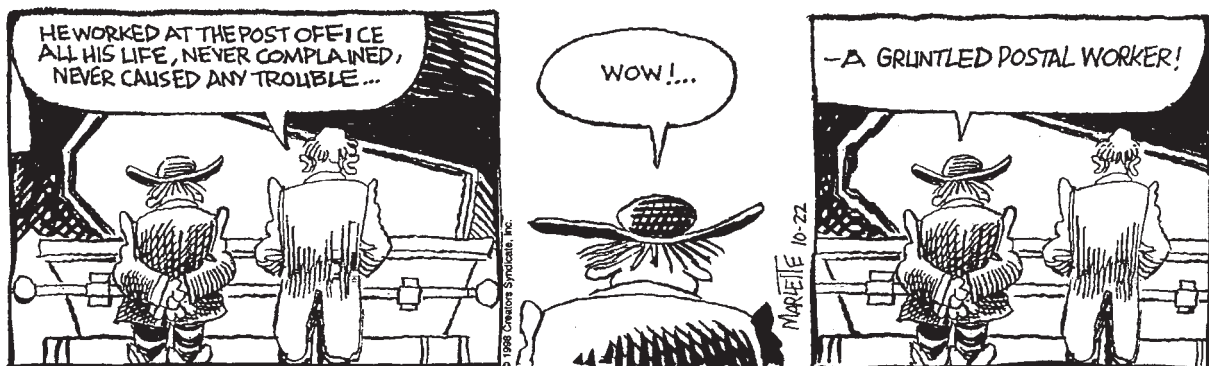
## Curtis Lee Laws

Born in Loudoun County, Virginia and educated at Crozer Theological Seminary, Curtis Lee Laws (1868-1946) was a pastor, editor, and denominational leader. He served two prominent pastorates: the First Baptist Church of Baltimore, Maryland (1893-1908) where he became famous for his widely distributed sermon "The Fiery Furnace and Soul Liberty" and the Greene Avenue Baptist Church of Brooklyn, New York (1908-13). In that sermon preached in 1904, Laws commended the civil disobedience of English Baptists (conservatives and liberals) who suffered together for their resistance against the use of tax revenues to promote sectarian teaching. When Laws became the editor

of the *Watchman Examiner* in 1913 (a position he held until 1938), it enjoyed the largest circulation of any Baptist periodical in the North and established him as a trusted voice of historic Baptist principles. Concerned about the advance of liberalism in seminaries and churches, Laws and others issued a call for a conference on the fundamentals of New Testament faith just prior to the 1920 meeting of the Northern Baptist Convention in Buffalo, New York. In his reporting of the "side lights" of that convention, Laws coined the term fundamentalist for those "who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal" for the faith. Yet he was far from the spirit of fundamentalism that E.J. Carnell later described as orthodox grown cultic. Laws' definition of fundamentalism was deliberately broad, not divisively narrow. It required neither inerrancy nor dispensationalism—the growing shibboleths of anti-modernists. Fundamentalism, for Laws, was essentially an attempt to reaffirm theological orthodoxy and promote biblical Christianity. These aims were not unlike those of Pope Pius X in his condemnation of modernism. But in contrast to the more factious voices in the fundamentalist movement of W.B. Riley, T.T. Shields, and J. Frank Norris, Laws was ever a denominational loyalist who believed that "Baptists ought to be big enough and wise enough and Christ-like enough to discuss all their differences in the fear of God and in the spirit of Christ."

## The Fiery Furnace and Soul Liberty

To celebrate the destruction of Jerusalem and his victory over the nation of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, King of



Babylon, set up a golden image in the plain outside the city. Its immensity and grandeur were designed to display the power and dominion of Babylon and its god. When all the Babylonian officials had assembled for the dedication of this colossus, a herald proclaimed that, by edict of the king, all the people should bow down and worship this image at the sound of the music. But the three friends and associates of Daniel could not be cajoled or coerced into obedience to this command of the king. As in the days of the apostles, these Jewish heroes hesitated not an instant between obedience to the law of God and to the command of the king. They courteously but courageously said to the tyrannical king: "O king, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. If you fulfill your threat, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thy hands, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy god, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:16-18). This is a bold and heroic declaration of soul liberty. They were dealing with an unenlightened heathen king. In his wrath he threw them into the fiery furnace. They were willing to suffer for their convictions, but they were not willing to live contrary to their convictions. Their God delivered them from their peril, and so our God, who is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8), will, in His own good time and by methods of His own choosing, deliver His people who are willing to suffer rather than to abandon the truth. . . . [Laws then traces the heritage of religious liberty from the days of the Anabaptists forward.]

### Religious Liberty Imperiled

A fortnight ago, in a sermon preached from this pulpit, I accidentally referred to the combined efforts of the English Parliament and the Church of England to crush out the free churches of England and Wales, and I called upon the Archbishop of Canterbury, now visiting in this country, to enlighten our people upon this return to medieval barbarism upon the part of the great religious body of which he is the head. My exact words were these:

The Archbishop of Canterbury, as the primate of all England and the head of the establishment, is largely responsible for the sectarian education law, and being in this country he has a good opportunity to teach us his authority for the adoption of a system which is contrary to all laws of justice and contrary to the will of God—a system which seeks to control the individual conscience. Thank God for the non-conformists, and that there are thousands in England today who would die at the stake rather than be forced to submit to the dictation of the established Church, of the king and of the Parliament when their deliverances are contrary to the plain teaching of God's word. It is generally thought that religious liberty has been attained in all countries of high civilization, and the Archbishop of Canterbury will find little sympathy among the American ministers and laymen of

the Protestant Episcopal Church for a law which is a disgrace to the great Christian body of which he is the head.

I meant no personal discourtesy to the Archbishop, who once was a low churchman, and who, before his elevation to his present high office, extended many courtesies to non-conformists. But he represents an institution, he is the head of the established Church. The established Church is responsible for the law. The Archbishop must be willing to bear this responsibility, and I am sure that he is.

To my great surprise, distinguished Protestant Episcopal ministers here in Baltimore have taken exception to my words. I had not supposed that there was a well-informed and patriotic man in America who would endorse the cunning effort of the English establishment to enforce the teachings of Episcopacy upon the children of other denominations in the schools supported by the state. I am confident that the ministers who are apologizing for their distinguished visitor would not have the public schools of Baltimore run in the interests of Episcopacy. The friendly discussion which has followed the publication of this brief and incidental reference to the present religious and educational controversy in Great Britain proves, first, that many people among us desire more information upon this important question, and second, that there may be some people among us (very few, let us hope) who are not enthusiastic supporters of the doctrine of soul liberty, not withstanding the deliverances of the Constitution of the United States, under the protection of which they live and prosper. . . . [Laws continues explaining the sectarian school act passed by Parliament in 1902-3 and giving a brief history of education law in England.]

### Passive Resistance and How It Has Worked

The free churches determined not to receive state aid for the support of their own schools, and they were equally determined not to pay the school rate for the support of other sectarian schools. They were quite prepared to suffer any inconvenience or indignity or outrage for the sake of their conscientious convictions. They might have refused to resist the law and fled before their persecutors, as did the Pilgrim Fathers of the long ago. But these men love their country, which they have helped to make, and they do not propose to be driven out of it. They might have stultified their consciences and paid the rate, becoming peace-at-any-price men. They might have followed in the footsteps of their fathers, who in 1688 united in a revolution against ecclesiastical tyranny. We may rejoice that, instead, our brethren have simply refused to pay the rate, courteously but courageously declaring that in good conscience they cannot pay to have false and pernicious doctrines taught in the schools. Since the days of John Bunyan passive resistance has been the weapon by which non-conformists have won most of their victories. The immortal tinker expressed himself in these quaint words: "I told him the law has provided two ways of obeying—the one to do that which I let my

conscience believe I am bound to actively, and when I cannot obey actively, then I am willing to lie down and suffer what they shall do to me. . . .”

When the non-conformists declared that they were willing to suffer for their consciences, they knew what was facing them. They were ridiculed by the Church papers for saying that the education act might end in the imprisonment of free church ministers and laymen throughout the country. The prophecy has come true. In the *Daily News* of London Dr. John Clifford, the leader of the movement, has recently given the history of the first year of “passive resistance.” The bright side of the picture is that many noble-hearted Church of England people have joined the movement and are standing with the non-conformists, and that Roman Catholics have also expressed their purpose to share the fortunes of the persecuted. Dr. Clifford declares that it is more than a religious revolt of the free churches; that it is “essentially a citizens revolt against the intrusion of Parliament, led by the Bishops, into the realm of conscience, and the distinctive fact is that these citizens are undeniably amongst the best assets of the nation.” The weak-kneed are becoming more courageous, the people are enlisting, the Church is awakening to the fact that the movement is growing with alarming rapidity. But there is a dark side to the picture. During the year there have been 21,871 summons issued to coerce men and women into paying the school tax. Nine hundred and seventy-one sales of property, representing many thousands of individual owners, have taken place. Twenty-two of the freemen of one of the most highly civilized nations of the world have been thrust into prison, to sleep on prison beds and to eat prison fare, that the Church of England may use the schools supported by the state for proselytizing to her own communion the children of non-conformist parents. At this time nearly 2000 arrests are being made each week. Several Baptists have been imprisoned, and I glory in their heroism.

Another Baptist preacher was imprisoned long ago by the same authority, but we had all felt that the established Church had become civilized since the days of John Bunyan. Thank God for the passive resisters who refuse to be coerced by a priest-ridden government, who refuse to sit calmly down and have their liberties stolen from them. These are the men whom the Archbishop of Canterbury has had the effrontery to call “anarchists.” They include in their ranks such men as John Clifford, Alexander Maclaren, Principal Fairbairn, Reginald J. Campbell, Thomas Spurgeon, G. Campbell Morgan, Frederick B. Meyer, W.J. Dawson, J. Monroe Gibson, Bendel Harris, Silvester Horne, Henry S. Lunn, W. Robertson Nicoll, J.H.

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*In this land of  
the brave no  
man among us  
will be a  
coward when  
the liberties of  
our brethren are  
threatened.*

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Shakespeare, Mark Guy Pearce and many more of equal note, and thousands more of equal nobility of character—clergymen, ministers, journalists, teachers, manufacturers, merchants, jurists and statesmen.

### **The Duty and Privilege of Americans**

Without popular government in the truest sense, our co-religionists in England and Wales are at the mercy of a Parliament dominated by the Bishops of the Church of England. The establishment is boldly striking at the life of non-conformity. The policy of both government and Church savors of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages. The non-conformists are too strong and too determined to flee the persecution as did the Pilgrims and Puritans. They will stand their ground and die if necessary for religious freedom. This is a battle in which the whole civilized world should be interested. The like of it has never been known before. For England to swing out of line in the onward march of civilization and return to the ideals of the sixteenth century is pitiable, but that her noblest sons and daughters should be humiliated and persecuted for conscience's sake in this age is diabolical. As American citizens it is our duty to protest when one of the most cherished principles of our own

civilization is being tramped under the feet of a nation which rejoices in our friendship. If the American press would agitate this matter, speaking its mind upon this reversal of the twentieth-century ideals, from purely political motives the English government would give instant attention.

As members of the same churches and denominational bodies, many of us have a special privilege. Our brethren over the sea profoundly appreciate the interest which we are taking in their struggle, and they rejoice in every expression of sympathy and affection which reaches them from our country. They are not posing as martyrs, nor pleading for sympathy, but they would be either more or less than human if they were not strengthened by the knowledge that the English-speaking world is wishing them God-speed.

The Protestant Episcopal Church of America is facing a splendid opportunity and at the same time an awful responsibility. In their hearts the broad-minded and Christlike ministers and laymen of American Episcopacy can have no sympathy with the motives and methods of the Church of England as expressed in this educational act. It is mere subterfuge to lay the guilt of this matter at the door of Parliament. Now, if our Episcopal brethren will be true to their own convictions and speak as they feel, their protest in this matter will shake the English establishment from center to circumference. . . .

At such a time as this we shall all feel inclined to smile and

to forgive our Episcopal brethren the presumption of calling themselves the American National Church, and we shall rejoice if conditions here are improved by the Archbishop's visit. But we do devoutly pray that *The Churchman* may be right as to the Archbishop's own enlightenment. He needs it, or, at least, his Church needs it, and the need is pressing and imperative. Again I say, I rejoice in the opportunity which God has placed before our Episcopal brethren. The two Churches have no organic connection, and yet their relations are such that the mother Church will be glad to listen to her more enlightened daughter, and let us hope that the daughter will do her full duty.

Before the Archbishop of Canterbury leaves this country he ought to know how Americans feel about religious liberty. He would hardly dare call us "anarchists," as he calls the passive resisters among our co-religionists in England. The Archbishop, a good and great man, deserves to be treated with every courtesy, but if our religious leaders do their duty, he will hear many a ringing protest against the tyranny of the Church of which he is the head. His policy ought to receive no sympathy. In this land of the free no guest can be treated with discourtesy. In this land of the brave no man among us will be a coward when the liberties of our brethren are threatened. May our God sustain and strengthen His children in their time of trial. May they be patient and gentle and forgiving like the Master. May they be saved from using the weapons of this world in their battle for soul liberty. The victory will surely come, and with it other and grander victories for the truth.

New occasions teach new duties;  
Time makes ancient good uncouth.  
We must upward still and onward  
Who would keep abreast of Truth.  
Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires;  
We ourselves must pilgrims be,  
Launch our Mayflower and steer boldly  
Through the desperate winter sea,  
Nor attempt the future's portal  
With the past's blood-rusted key. ■

## Ten Things to Light Your Fire

(continued from page 2)

pleasantly warm bed on a cold, dark night, pull the covers up under my chins and then around my oversized ears, nestle down in the bed after a small spell of twisting and squirming so as to get fixed just right and then to listen to the little mountain stream making exactly the same gurgling, audacious music it did when I built that little cabin forty years ago—the same sound it was likely making 10,000 years before that...Do please excuse me. I can't stay awake any longer. Let's talk about it in the morning.

- *Stare at the fire.* This has to be one of the oldest, simplest, and finest of all human pleasures. We're talking *neutral*. All gears are disengaged. All muscles are hanging loose. All electrical systems are unplugged. Tranquillity reigns. The flickering firelight makes its infinitely varied display but the real show is the coals. Some are red. Some are yellow. Some are white. Sooner or later they all get gray around their temples (don't we all?) as the ashes start to form. Gravity pulls the larger pieces down into a natural little heap, not totally unlike what is slowly transpiring on the surface of the sun where a somewhat different kind of fuel is being spent on its way to some far-off black hole. The visual wonders related to staring at a fire are enhanced, of course, by the welcome warmth that radiates a body's reveries. Anyone who cannot frequently sit in a rocker and stare at the fire is infinitely poorer for this deprivation. And all who share the blessing of this ritual are together in a select company of God's truly fortunate people.
- *Talk.* Jean Paul Sartre allowed that the Frenchmen of his day were interested in only two things: to fornicate and to read the newspaper. Our baby boomers do not seem to be very interested in reading the newspaper. The Generation X people seem caught up in their version of going there and doing that. (Having already been there and done that, I could ask them some helpful questions if they were only interested.) And it strikes me that Generation Y (Youth) people have an absolute compulsion to move around and spend money, as long as they don't have to make it. Me. I'm from another generation, another era, maybe another planet. I like to talk. I relish talk. I crave talk. I revel in talk. I go out of my way to get involved in talk. Like the Australian aborigines who learn three or four utterly disparate languages in order to talk more and tell more stories, I admire those gifted persons who talk much and who talk well. A talk fest with a very small company of good friends with nobody trying to pull rank, nobody seeking to dominate, and nobody compelled to preen, is about as close to a "lovely" evening as I can conjure up.

So, here are ten things that are "too wonderful for me." If they didn't light my fire, I would just have to tell you *my* wood would be wet. ■

# Adultery: How to Affair-Proof Your Marriage

## Proverbs 5-7

By Paul Basden

[Dr. Paul Basden is the pastor of the Brookwood Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.]

*Adultery* has been much in the news recently.

Frank Gifford, of Monday Night Football fame, was accused of having a hotel-room fling with some woman other than his wife, Kathie Lee.

Marv Albert, another sports commentator, was accused of sexually assaulting a woman (again not his wife) in a hotel room. It looked like "Love Takes a Bite, Part Two."

Funny man Eddie Murphy was caught with a transsexual prostitute, which "inquiring minds" have yet to understand.

Air Force pilot Lieutenant Kelly Flinn had an affair with a civilian and found herself evicted for life from military service.

Army Sergeant Major Gene McKinney was tried on multiple charges of sexually assaulting female military personnel and having numerous affairs with these women soldiers.

Michael Kennedy was accused of having an affair with the underage babysitter of his children, further tarnishing whatever remained of the Kennedy image.

Truly we are living in an "adulterous generation."

I hate to start a Sunday morning this way, but the Seventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," has not had as much press in this century as it has in the last few months.

What are we to make of it? Do these high-profile cases of extra-marital affairs represent a small minority of marriages? Or are they the norm? I guess that all depends on whom you ask. On the one hand, Dr. Joyce Brothers claims that adultery is on the rise.

Figures on adultery have risen: Two out of three married men today reportedly commit adultery at some time during their married lives, while only 50 percent did so in the 1940s....The number of women finding sex outside marriage (today) is about 50 percent. ("Why Wives Have Affairs," *Parade Magazine*, Feb 18, 1990, p. 4)

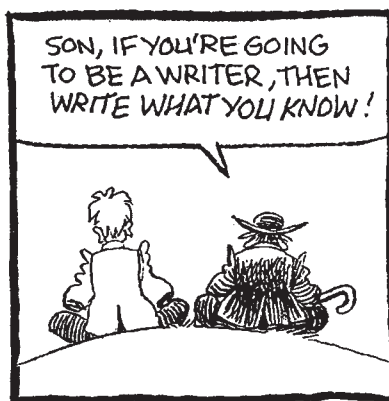
Sociologist-priest Andrew Greeley begs to differ. Basing his conclusions on a Gallup survey of 657 married couples in 1989-90 sponsored by *Psychology Today*, he claims that "ninety percent of American couples have had only one sexual partner since they were married." ("The Bad News Is Not So Bad," *Christianity Today*, March 9, 1992, pp. 42-43)

Whom do you believe? In a sense, it doesn't really matter. Regardless of the statistics concerning adultery, as Christians we know that it is a grievous sin. It is a sin which God calls us to avoid. Best of all, it is a sin which God shows us *how* to avoid.

The Old Testament book of Proverbs contains numerous divine insights into marriage and family matters. Chapters 5-7 contain three extended passages on the evils of adultery. One of these forms the biblical basis of this message. This particular passage, 7:6-23, describes in sordid detail the *Anatomy of an Affair*.

### Anatomy of an Affair

The first five verses help set the stage. The chapter begins with the father teaching his son about the ways of godliness



and wisdom: "My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you." (v. 1). Then he moves to a stern warning against adultery. Actually he warns his son about "the adulteress" (v. 5), literally "the loose woman" or "foreign woman." In today's parlance, we call her "the other woman." She stands for any woman who takes her marital vows lightly and laughs at sexual morals. She may be a co-worker, a neighbor, a mistress, or a downright prostitute. Men, she represents any woman who is not your wife.

#### Scene One: *The Prey*

At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice.

I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment.

He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. (vv. 6-9)

Here we see a father telling his son how he once observed a young man, just outside his window, being seduced by a loose woman. (By the way, don't be offended by this caricature of a loose woman. And don't jump to the erroneous conclusion that Christianity views females as more sinful than males. Because Proverbs is generally written by fathers to sons, the examples tend to be about women seducing men. But we all know that neither gender has a monopoly on this sin. Now back to the story.

The prey is a "simple" young man, "who lacked judgment." In other words, he received high marks in the "foolishness and naivete" department. But do not consider him morally innocent. He went to this woman's house at night. As Warren Wiersbe writes, "He's tempting himself and heading for trouble." (*Be Skillful*, Victor Press, 1995, p. 56) There are no innocent adulterers.

As the wise marriage counselor knows, it always takes two to tangle. So...enter the hunter.

#### Scene Two: *The Hunter*

Then out came a woman to meet him,  
dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.

(She is loud and defiant, her feet never stay at home;  
now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks.)

This woman sends a loud message without ever saying a word! Notice her dress: seductive! Notice her "loud and defiant" style! Notice her body language: "crafty" and "lurking!" This babe is definitely on the make.

What a picture of seduction. It reminds me of the riveting scene in John Grisham's *The Firm* where a prostitute on the

Grand Cayman islands was paid by the law firm of Lambert and Berghini to seduce the main character, Mitch. The plan was to trick him into having an affair behind the back of his wife, Abbie, so that the firm could have something with which to blackmail him if he ever tried to leave and reveal their illegal ties to the Mafia. The prostitute was indeed a hunter, stalking Mitch until he was most vulnerable. Then when the time was right, he was an easy target.

The pattern almost always looks like this, doesn't it? One person is on the prowl, and one person is waiting to be caught. Adultery always involves one hunter and one prey. How does the hunter do it?

#### Scene Three: *The Tactics*

The first tactic was physical contact: "She took hold of him and kissed him." (v. 13). Talk about a sudden kiss! Humans are not much more innovative today when it comes to seduction. Physical contact still ranks as the most common first tactic of the hunter. It may be an inappropriate touch on the knee, or a lingering handshake, or a prolonged hug. But whatever form it takes, the intent is seldom hidden for long.

The second tactic involved old-fashioned pick-up lines:

With a brazen face she said: "I have fellowship offerings at home;

today I fulfilled my vows.

So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you!" (vv. 14-15)

To render those verses in modern English, simply paraphrase them as, "Have I got a great meal at home for you" and "I've been waiting for you all day long." Not very creative, granted, but neither are today's favorite pick-up lines:

"My husband and I are really having problems. How is your marriage doing?"

"My wife doesn't take care of herself any more. She's gone to pot. Boy, you look great!

Where do you work out?"

"My husband takes me for granted; but you make me feel so special."

"I know we shouldn't be talking like this, but, say, are you having a mid-life crisis, too?"

The third tactic was enticing promises:

"I have covered my bed with colorful linens from Egypt.

I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

Come, let's drink deep of love till morning;

let's enjoy ourselves with love!" (vv. 16-18)

Here the "pleasures of sin" find expression in erotic language, designed to soften the prey for the kill. Lust has its own language.



The fourth tactic was a guarantee of secrecy:

“My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey.  
He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon.” (vv. 19-20)

Nothing much has changed over the past few millennia. Adulterers still promise that “my husband is out of town” or “my wife will never suspect a thing—you know how trusting women are!”

Will the young simpleton in the story give in to this loose woman’s wily ways? Or will he have the courage and willpower to resist her come-ons and flee the temptation?

#### Scene Four: *The Kill*

With persuasive words she led him astray;  
she seduced him with her smooth talk.  
All at once he followed her like an ox going  
to the slaughter,  
like a deer stepping into a noose till  
an arrow pierces his liver,  
like a bird darting in to a snare,  
little knowing it will cost him his  
life. (vv. 21-23)

Sadly, the prey is no match for the hunter. The simpleton gives in, without much of a fight. She wins easily. Like Martin Short’s character said in *Father of the Bride, Part 2*: “Piece of cake, piece of crumb cake!”

But few who give in to adultery think about its real cost. An extra-marital affair costs not just a car or a mink coat or new golf clubs—it costs your life!

For the lips of an adulteress drip honey,  
and her speech is smoother than oil,  
but in the end she is bitter as gall,  
sharp as a double-edged sword.  
Her feet go down to death;  
her steps lead straight to the grave. (5:3-5)

When the hunter catches the prey, the end result is always death. Sometimes it is physical death. Sometimes it is marital death. But always it is spiritual death!

If this is the anatomy of an affair, how can we avoid such a thing happening to us?

#### **Avoiding an Affair**

Another passage, Proverbs 7:24-27, provides several warnings about how to resist the temptation to extra-marital affairs. First, you must *guard your heart*.

Do not let your heart turn to her ways. (v. 25a)

In other words, catch wandering thoughts early on. Martin Luther reportedly quipped: “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head, but you *can* keep them from building a nest in your hair!” If you are overtly tempted by someone other than your spouse, talk to a trusted confidant immediately. This might be a friend, your pastor, or even your spouse. But guard your heart. Don’t let it run away from you. Keep it on a short emotional leash.

Second *watch your step*.

[Do not] stray into her paths. (v. 25b)

Watching your step begins with being careful and wise about where and when you are alone without your husband or wife. The world is full of times and places that won’t help you keep your marriage vows: bars during Happy Hours, hotels during business trips, a deserted office after hours. So...watch where your feet go! Do whatever you need to keep them on the right path. Make adjustments in your personal life, whether it means changing the magazines you read, changing the television shows and movies you watch, changing the traffic routes you take, changing the friends you spend time with, or even changing the job you go to daily.

Third, *consider the cost*

Many are the victims she has brought down;  
her slain are a mighty throng.  
Her house is a highway to the grave,  
leading down to the chambers of death. (vv. 26-27)

Few decisions you make can ruin more aspects of your life more quickly than an affair. In every conceivable way, it ends up feeling like death: spiritual death, moral death, marital death, sometimes even physical death (consider the number of people who die every year from sexually transmitted diseases). While it is true that not all sins make you pay quickly, adultery presents the bill almost immediately.

Listen to a similar warning:

Can a man scoop fire into his lap  
without his clothes being burned?  
Can a man walk on hot coals  
without his feet being scorched?  
So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife;  
no one who touches her will go unpunished.  
(6:27-29)

The message is loud and clear: adultery is playing with fire! You will always get burned! As the Apostle Paul declared in Galatians 6:7, “A man reaps what he sows.” (The same is true for a woman.)

Fourth, *keep the home fires burning*.

Drink water from your own cistern,  
    running water from your own well.  
May your fountain be blessed,  
    and may you rejoice in the wife of your  
youth. (5:15, 18)

To paraphrase the old Country-Western song, “Don’t look for love in all the wrong places!” Look for romance in your own home. Look for joy in the person who is your lawfully wedded husband or wife. Reserve sexual intimacy for your own spouse and for no one else.

I conclude with a hard-hitting dialogue between Dr. Laura (Schlesinger) and a man who called in to her radio talk show one day.

Bill...declared that he was bored in his marriage and was thinking of having an affair. The doctor was ready for him. “Do you think you’re the only one bored in the relationship?”

“I didn’t think about that.”

“Is it likely that in spite of the boredom of living with you not being romantic, seductive, playful, etc., that [your wife] has broken her vows and dishonored your trust?”

“No.”

“Then, although she’s stuck with you, she still has her honor?”

“Yes.”

“And if you messed around on her, would she still have her honor?”

“Yes.”

“And what would *you* have?” (*Christian Century*, May 14, 1997)

Since before the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai over three thousand years ago, adultery has been a grievous sin before God. Won’t you follow God’s teachings that will help you to avoid it?

We’re *all* prone to wander, Lord. So save us, Lord, save us. And deliver us from temptation for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. ■

## Pastor Search Committee

By Kathryn Nutt Shamburger

[Kathryn Shamburger has contributed previously to *Christian Ethics Today*. She lives in Tyler, Texas.]

We are looking for a preacher  
But we first must meet his wife.  
Is she overweight or skinny?  
Does she eat peas with her knife?  
Does she cook and scrub and nurture  
All the children in her care?  
Is she thrifty—self denying?  
Does she spend much on her hair?  
Is her clothing always modest?  
Get to every place on time?  
Does she sing and play piano?  
Do chalk-talk and pantomime?  
Is she gentle, is she caring?  
Kind to everyone she sees?  
Does she visit all the shut-ins?  
Spend much time upon her knees?  
Is she very civic minded?  
Volunteer for this and that?  
Is she absolutely neutral  
In a congregation spat?  
We are looking for a preacher  
But we first must meet his wife.  
'Cause the way these preachers stay on  
We could have them both for life! ■

# Do the People in the Pew Want to Be Told the Truth?

By Kenneth Chafin

[Dr. Kenneth Chafin has been pastor of the Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville and of the South Main Baptist Church in Houston and has held distinguished teaching posts at Southwestern and Southern Theological Seminaries. He and his wife Barbara divide their residence between Louisville and a farm near Brenham, Texas.]

Last Sunday I was the substitute teacher for one of the Sunday School classes in our department. They are all in their late sixties or older with only a member or two who have not yet retired. They have been professors, surgeons, public servants, homemakers, business people, and farmers. Members of the group had held almost every office or responsibility in the church and almost all of them had been Christians for years.

The lesson in the quarterly was from Jeremiah, at the time when Jerusalem was under siege and about to fall. The Prophet had been placed under arrest by the king because he had announced that God had already given Jerusalem into the hands of the Babylonians. The members of the class had probably heard this text preached on or had studied it dozens of times. My first thought was that there was no aspect to the lesson that they had not already beaten to death and I wondered how to involve them in any relevant discussion.

Then it occurred to me that Jeremiah was in jail because he preached to a crowd that didn't want to hear the truth. After we had read the scripture I wrote a one question test on the chalk board to be answered either true or false. "The people in the pew want to hear the truth as the pastor understands it." The members of the class are both honest and articulate but they had a hard time with that question. They wanted to answer "Yes" because the other option was to suggest that God's children don't really want to hear the truth; but to

admit that made them uncomfortable.

Witnessing their struggle reminded me of an experience thirty years before when I was teaching preaching at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. I had just completed twelve years preaching in one of the denominations finest pulpits, South Main Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. I'd gone back to the seminary out of a sense of calling to teach preaching to the young men and women whom God was calling. It was a fulfilling experience both from the caliber of students I had and the fellowship with my colleagues. But from time to time I would hear students say, "That may be what the Bible teaches but it would get you in trouble if you preach it in the churches." I was aware that the truth has always created some tension as it challenges conventional wisdom but to hear it stated so bluntly bothered me. I didn't want to believe that the people did not want to hear the minister's best understanding of the truth.

One day, just to see how wide-spread that feeling was among my students, I included in the regular Friday morning true/false test the question, "The preacher can assume that the people in the pew want to hear the truth, even if it makes them uncomfortable." I thought that they would struggle with it a bit, then answer it, "true." I was wrong. Twenty-two of the thirty students said it was false. The question, and the class's response to it, created vigorous discussion without any consensus. As we moved to other matters the memory of their discussion lingered in my mind, disturbing me. I wondered if they were underestimating both the laity and the power of the truth to convict and change minds. Like Mary of old, I kept all those thoughts in my mind and pondered them.

When several years later I left the classroom to become the pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, that same issue became very personal. It was a historic pulpit in



a church whose membership reflected the diversity of the city. While my predecessor had led the church to deal with race and gender issues the church had done very little thinking about the battle that was raging for the soul of Southern Baptists. At that time several Fundamentalists had been elected to the presidency of the convention and, in spite of the obvious effort to stack the trustees of the schools and the mission boards, many naive people still thought that all they really wanted was equity.

But there were those who realized that their goal was really absolute and complete control of the denomination and wondered if something might be done to reverse the direction that things were going. Someone in Nashville issued a general invitation to a meeting for those who were interested. The *Courier-Journal* in Louisville did a story on it and a reporter called me for a comment. I told the reporter that I felt that the meeting was needed and that if my schedule allowed it, I planned to attend. They ran the story on the front page the following day.

I hadn't been in my office an hour before I got a phone call, from Bob Sanders, a respected and influential member of the church. Bob was a retired school principal with a keen mind and a willingness to question things that he didn't agree with. Those two characteristics had created for him a large following in the church. I respected him as a man to be listened to.

He began our conversation with the statement, "I read that article in the paper this morning." I told him that I was glad but gave no other response. Then he asked, "Did they quote you right, that you plan to go to that meeting?" I told him the quote was accurate but that I hadn't yet been able to clear my schedule but that I hoped to go.

His response was, "Your going to that meeting is going to

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*...The preacher  
who can be  
intimidated by  
a phone call will  
also back away  
from telling you  
the truth from  
the pulpit.*

---

upset a lot of church members." I tried to make light of his warning by suggesting that some of the members went places that upset me but that I didn't let it undermine our friendship. Bob didn't think it was funny. He added, "Pastor, I don't think you are hearing me. *They don't want you to go!*"

Instead of responding directly to his instruction, I replied, "Bob, you know that I'm preaching a series on the Ten Commandments. If, in preparation for next Sunday's sermon, I were to discover things in the application that I knew would upset some members, would you like for me to back away from it so everyone would feel good, or should I go ahead and risk upsetting some people?" I think that at first he thought that I was trying to change the subject.

But before he could respond to my question, I added, "The question is directly related to what we have been talking about. You see, Bob, the preacher who can be intimidated by a phone call will also back away from telling you the truth from the pulpit. What do you want *your* pastor to do?"

There was a long pause. I could almost hear the wheels in his sharp mind turning. After what seemed like ages he said, "Pastor, no matter how it might upset me, I want you to tell me the truth when you stand in the pulpit." Then, he chuckled and said, "I hope that you have a safe trip to Nashville." That's the day Bob Sanders and I became the closest of friends. We fished together, ate meals and had fellowship together. Our discussions were vigorous and covered the whole range of our interests. Each of our lives was richer for the understanding we had reached. But I keep wondering if his answer represented only his own feeling or if he were speaking for most of the people in the pew. Do they really want to hear the truth? ■

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# An Ethical Approach to Enmity

By John M. Swomley

[Dr. John Swomley is professor emeritus of social ethics at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. He is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

One of the great stories in the Bible is about war, enemy intelligence, and the peaceful resolution of conflict. In Second Kings, chapter 6, Syria and Israel were at war:

Once when the King of Syria was warring against Israel, he took counsel with his servants, saying, "At such and such a place shall be my camp." But the man of God sent word to the King of Israel, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are going down there." And the king of Israel sent to the place of which the man of God told him. Thus he used to warn him, so that he saved himself there more than once or twice.

And the mind of the king of Syria was greatly troubled because of this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me who of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bed-chamber." And he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and seize him." It was told him, "Behold, he is in Dothan." So he sent there horses and chariots and a great army, and they came by night, and surrounded the city.

When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was round about the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" He said, "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed, and said, "O Lord, I pray these, open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, I pray thee, with blindness." So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha. And Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria.

[It is essential to remember that Samaria was the stronghold of Israel, where the King's armies were massed.]

As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "O Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and lo, they were in the midst of Samaria. When the King of Israel saw them he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I slay them?" He answered, "You shall not slay them. Would you slay those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." So he prepared for them a great feast, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians came no more on raids into the land of Israel.

This idea, that enmity can be resolved by feeding your enemy, appears also in Proverbs 25:21-22: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire upon his head." This is supposed by some to be an Egyptian proverb. When Jews repented they put on sackcloth and ashes or dead coals. When the Egyptians repented they put live coals on an earthen tray on their head and walked toward the person or those they had wronged.

So the Apostle Paul's reference to this in Romans 12, is obviously influenced by Kings and Proverbs: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."

The ethical question raised by these passages is one of practicality. Would this advice, if followed today, be effective in resolving disputes between nations? Is it the right thing to do?

The United States government claims that it has at least four or five small nations as enemies, or "rogue states": North Korea, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, and Libya. North Korea has been a cold war enemy since the Korean War, which ended in 1953, or 45 years ago; Cuba, an enemy since 1961, or 37 years ago. During those years the United States has tried punishment, through embargoes and other sanctions, to force acceptance of our will by these nations. Those hostile actions have not worked, but have only intensified opposition to American policies.

An article in the June, 1998 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* called sanctions "the most brutal form of war...because they punish an entire population, targeting children, the future, most of all."

Cuba, which has the best medical system of any country in Latin America and Africa, with over 400 clinics and hospitals

in rural Cuban provinces, cannot get medicines and hospital equipment. The Cuban Democracy Act, passed by Congress in 1992, severely limited the amount of medical supplies reaching Cuba, and the Helms-Burton Act was even more restrictive. These Acts and other hostility toward Cuba are primarily the result of large groups of Cubans in Florida and New Jersey who wield electoral influence in the United States and are dedicated to restoring capitalism and its form of democracy, to Cuba.

Cuba's children, especially, have suffered. Milk is available only to very young children; there is a shortage of baby food. Food itself is rationed. There is a shortage of such items as toilet paper and women's sanitary napkins, as well as medicines and anesthesia. Deaths have occurred because appropriate medicines have not been available.

The United States is the only country that has treated Cuba in this fashion. There are no diplomatic relations with Cuba. And at one time over 90% of trade relations between Cuba and U.S. subsidiaries has been in medical equipment, medicines, and food.

It is doubtful that our relations with Cuba could be worse. But suppose the United States were to reverse course and provide ample stocks of food, medical supplies, seeds, and agricultural equipment and other machinery, as well as computers and modern technology in various fields? Suppose also that the U.S. would provide scholarships for up to 5,000 high school graduates to study in American colleges and universities with only one string attached: upon graduation they must return to Cuba to teach Cubans at least five years. These and other programs would be offered to Cuba without asking anything in return.

Would it work? Is it comparable to the Biblical approach: "If your enemy hungers, feed him"? Obviously there are no guarantees. But my best guess is that it would at least end the hostility, lead other nations in the world to have greater respect for America's "global free trade" policy, and begin to build friendship with the Cuban people. And maybe it would have an impact there on human rights, freedom to dissent, and other attributes of democracy.

A similar but not necessarily identical policy could be pur-

sued with North Korea. The 150-mile wall which the U.S. and South Korea built across the island to prevent any contact between North and South Korea would have to be breached. The U.S. maintains the fiction that it is in control of all United Nations forces in South Korea since 1950, though the only forces other than 37,000 U.S. troops, are the South Korean army, navy, air force, and reserves. The U.S., which regularly has conducted "war games" over or around North Korea would obviously have to end this "cold war" treatment, as well as begin to trade with and permit other assistance to North Korea.

The only change in North Korean policy during the American cold war hostilities came as the result of a U.S. overture to that country involving the provision of oil and other support in return for North Korea's freezing its nuclear power development.

South Korea's new President, Kim Dee Jung, actually came to the United States in June, 1998 to tell the Clinton administration that its cold war policy was wrong. The *New York Times* of June 2 said he came "to win a more flexible stance in our two countries dealing with North Korea."

In effect, said the *New York Times*, "Mr. Kim made the same argument about North Korea that the Clinton administration has made about China, that "the best way" to change North Korea "is not to isolate it and punish it with sanctions but rather to build economic and diplomatic ties that draw it out into the international playing field."

A friendly U.S. policy would almost certainly bring its reward. The book of Proverbs, after proposing feeding the enemy, concludes that "the Lord will reward you." In 1993 I organized the American Committee on Korea to try to prevent war between the U.S. and North Korea, and have visited that country twice, talking with key government officials. They genuinely seek a new relationship with the United States.

From an ethical standpoint the real question is not "Will it work?" but, "Is it the right way a large wealthy country should deal with small, poor countries to end decades of punishment that has not worked?" ■



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# Seeking Peace by Johann Christoph Arnold

*A Book Review by Darold H. Morgan*

[Dr. Darold Morgan is a former pastor of the Cliff Temple Baptist Church in Dallas and before retirement was the President of the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.]

Any responsibly written book on peace should be welcomed by this tired and frustrated age especially when something really significant is said. You will not be disappointed when you open and begin reading this fresh, vital, stimulating volume. In fact you will be genuinely surprised by several practical, yet obvious, conclusions. The author draws from a surprising variety of spiritual traditions. There is a major input from the experiences of ordinary people. There are exceptional and relevant quotations from an array of familiar and famous writers. Anecdotes and personal experiences abound which are appropriately related to the main theme. The book is eminently readable. The author's writing style, characterized by rather short essays, is never tedious. Written beautifully in measured and balanced cadences, the author's reasoning is authentically Christian.

Coming from a tradition of German Pietists who were driven from their homeland by the Nazis, this well-known author and his family obviously suffered deeply from these persecutions. His Bruderhof Fellowship has identified with numerous peace-related causes, and out of this widely misunderstood commitment to pacifism there has emerged an unusual sensitivity and understanding of the issues related to peace. Especially heartening to Christians is his internal, spiritual perspective on peace stemming from a solidly biblical base. Yet the Jewish, Buddhist, and even the Islamic cultures will also find much common ground in these pages. There is a unique appeal even to the unbeliever in the author's compelling emphasis on peace and justice. This universal appeal is a welcome focus of this book.

Much is made of the quest for peace as it relates to a simplification of our modern lifestyles. With the pressures of technology, the sheer number of people, the latest communication gimmicks, plus the array of personal problems people are facing, one could easily conclude that life is hopelessly complex. Such frustration leads to special difficulties related to seeking and finding peace. These powerful external influences simply cannot speak to the deeper issues of life, issues touching on such things as the meaning of suffering, personal depression, and loneliness. Answers or directions in these arenas are essential in the quest for peace.

The strongest section of the book is entitled, "Stepping Stones" in which he takes the current dilemmas of humankind and probes searchingly the needs of people everywhere for serenity, simplicity, and peace of mind. Essays in this section deal with Silence, Surrender, Trust, Forgiveness, Humility, etc. There are fifteen such practical "Stepping Stones."

Arnold quotes at length from the writings of his father and grandfather. Some may tire of this, but usually these references tie in with powerful memories from the past, revealing the depth of the Bruderhof commitment to peace. This is a family which has known the fundamental issues which have challenged peace at its deepest levels of life and experience. It is clear that the search for peace is not just the pursuit of scholarship. It is a combination of a biblical overview and personal commitment to spiritual priorities related to peace.

Anecdotes and quotations abound from remarkably varied sources like Dostoevsky, Mother Teresa, Bonhoeffer, Thomas Merton, Simone Weil, Kahlil Gibran, C.S. Lewis, Desmond Tutu, Victor Frankl, and many others.

The author subtly presses for his pacifist position, but his conclusions are not offensive to those who hold differing positions because his authentic Christian attitude and Christian commitment are beyond question. The quest for peace is a never-ending search in that our basic call from God is to be fruitful, not successful. He quotes approvingly Henri Nouwen that "fruitfulness comes from vulnerability and the admission of our own weakness." (P. 54) Seeking peace, he infers, may never bring it to us, but actively loving in our world as Jesus did in his time on earth may lead us to discover peace as a gracious by-product of Christian love. The paradox of withdrawal from the world in order to serve prophetically and even sacrificially in the world may be too idealistic for some. But somewhere in between these extremes there is the potential for personal peace.

Arnold is influenced by the definition of peace, using the beloved Hebrew word, Shalom, for direction. "It means the end of war and conflict, but it also means friendship, contentment, security, and health, prosperity, abundance, tranquillity, harmony with nature, and even salvation. It is ultimately tied to justice because it is the enjoyment or celebration of human relationships which have been made right." (P. 13)

This book deserves a wide reading. Any writing that helps anyone on a personal pilgrimage to personal peace is profoundly important. This good book does precisely that. ■

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# Is Suicide Changing?

By Bill Blackburn

[Dr. Bill Blackburn is pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Kerrville, Texas.]

In April of 1998, the U.S. Surgeon-General commissioned a report on suicide in America. Dr. David Satcher declared to a meeting of the American Society of Suicidology, "I'm convinced that we can shape a different future for this country as it relates to mental health and as it relates to suicide."

In the summer of 1980 I began studying suicide intensively. My close friend from college days, Paul Malone, had taken his life at age thirty-three. After I spoke at Paul's funeral, our Sunday School teacher from our senior year at Baylor, Jarrell McCracken, asked if I could write a book on Paul that would help others understand why someone would come to the place of taking his or her life. I could not do that book. It was both too personal and too painful.

I suggested instead that I write a book in memory of Paul on the prevention of suicide. That book, *What You Should Know About Suicide*, was published by Word Books in 1982 and republished in a revised form in 1990.

But now, almost two decades after Paul's death, I find myself asking: "How has suicide changed in these ensuing years?"

## What Has Remained the Same?

The overall rate for suicide in America has varied little. There are still about 12.8 deaths by suicide per 100,000 population. The same western states and Florida have the highest rates of suicide. The same means are used: guns, pills, ropes, knives, cars, jumping, and a whole array of inventive methods.

The same reasons why persons take their lives are given or inferred:

1. To escape an intolerable situation
2. To punish the survivors
3. To gain attention
4. To manipulate others
5. To join a deceased loved one
6. To avoid punishment
7. To be punished
8. To avoid becoming a "burden"
9. To avoid the effects of a dreaded disease
10. To pursue an irrational, impulsive whim
11. To seek martyrdom
12. To express love

And the devastation left behind has not changed. There are families and friends whose lives are changed forever. There are economic consequences to families, businesses, and communities. There is an increased chance that other family members may choose suicide. And there is the heartbreak of knowing that in most cases time would have brought a different perspective, new hope, and continued life.

## What Has Changed?

The biggest change in these years since 1980 has been some growing social acceptance of suicide as an acceptable way to deal with problems. Some of this comes from popular psychological interpretations of motivation, so that we use the prime virtue of our culture, tolerance, and seek to understand suicide rather than face the devastation of suicide on our society.

This change of the acceptance of suicide as an alternative includes the whole debate of physician-assisted suicide. It is interesting to note, however, in a AMA poll, in spite of the fact that a slim majority of Americans favor legalizing physician-assisted suicide, most would choose other end-of-life options such as hospice care if they clearly understood their choices (*American Medical News*, January 13, 1997).

Among the other changes related to suicide are these:

- *The rise in suicide rates among Black youth.* The suicide rate of African-Americans between the ages of 10 and 19 has increased by 114 percent since 1980, according to a report of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (*Washington Post* article, reported in the *San Antonio Express-News*, March 20, 1998).
- *The rise in suicide rates among the elderly.* The suicide rate among persons 65 and older has shown a steady increase since 1980 after a half century decline (*Harvard Mental Health Letter*, May, 1994).
- *The rise in suicide rates of children 5-19.* Suicides continue to rise in this age group according to a report of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, February 21, 1996).

## A Christian Response

The response of Christians to the phenomenon of suicide should be first a turning to God as the life-giver. A consistent Christian ethic on the issue of life includes a stance against suicide, capital punishment, and abortion.

A heightened sense of the power of Satan is needed in the



face of suicide. Suicide is a spiritual battle between the forces of evil and death on the one hand and the forces of good and life on the other. Satan is the great deceiver. In a depressed or overwhelmed state, the Father of Lies can convince a person that there is no hope and no way out.

Christians should stand against the violence of our society. Suicide is a violent act, but in many avenues of popular culture, we are told that violence is the answer. The easy availability of handguns is an especially troubling issue as we see the rise of handguns in suicide deaths of the young, of women, and of the elderly.

While Christians stand against violence, we should also stand with professionals like the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher who are committed to mental health research that leads both to understanding and to prevention.

In our churches, we need to address a Christian life ethic from the pulpit, in Bible study, and study groups.

Christians should commit themselves seriously to pray for persons in depression, pain, or debilitating stress. Healing and restoration can follow a concert of prayer by brothers and sisters in Christ.

And Christian's need to understand the pain suffered by someone who would take his or her life. Although for some, suicide may seem so far remote from their own experience and for others, too painful given their own history, the compassion of our Lord is the model. What does compassion mean? To suffer with. When we can identify with the suffering of others, there is an empathy that can help lead a friend from the dark danger of suicide to the light and hope believers have in Christ.

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## Conclusion

In these last twenty years, I have talked to uncounted people who have lost a loved one to suicide. I have counseled many suicidal people. I have talked with numerous persons who have attempted suicide.

Suicide is a profound tragedy that leaves a lingering legacy of questions. Why? Could I have done something? Was I a part of the problem? How could she/he have done this? Didn't they know how bad this would hurt?

Several years ago, I was talking to an eighty-four year old man who has since gone to be with the Lord. As we talked, we discovered that I had worked for the same publishing company his father had been president of earlier this century. He took me into his bedroom to show me a picture of his father. Holding the picture, he started crying.

Then he told me that when he was thirteen years old, his father committed suicide because of a downturn in the business. The old man said, "He didn't talk to me. Maybe if he'd talked to me, I could have helped

him." He set the picture down and cried some more.

His father had shot himself to death seventy-one years before and now his son, a retired successful businessman, was crying helplessly and wondering why.

Christians are called to stand for life and against death. And this stand comes down to a day to day faithfulness to the Lord in a multitude of varied relationships.

When by our discernment, our compassion, our prayers, and the hope and joy we have in the Lord, someone decides to live rather die, God is glorified. ■



# Watching the World Go By

By Ralph Lynn

[Dr. Ralph Lynn is Professor Emeritus of History at Baylor University and a regular contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

Two late books—one on American social-economic problems and one on the impact promised by science in the near future—have set me to wondering if responsible religious leaders should not organize to study and propagandize in these areas as some are doing now in church/state relationships.

The authors of these two admirable books have done impressive research and have consulted all sorts of modern oracles except for their regrettable neglect of the voices of the religious.

It seems to me that the views presented in both books are quite adequately supported by their documentation.

David M. Gordon's 1996 book, *Fat and Mean: The Corporate Squeeze of Working Americans and the Myth of Managerial "Downsizing,"* is a picture of the last fifteen years of our economic history. The following statements give the flavor of his book:

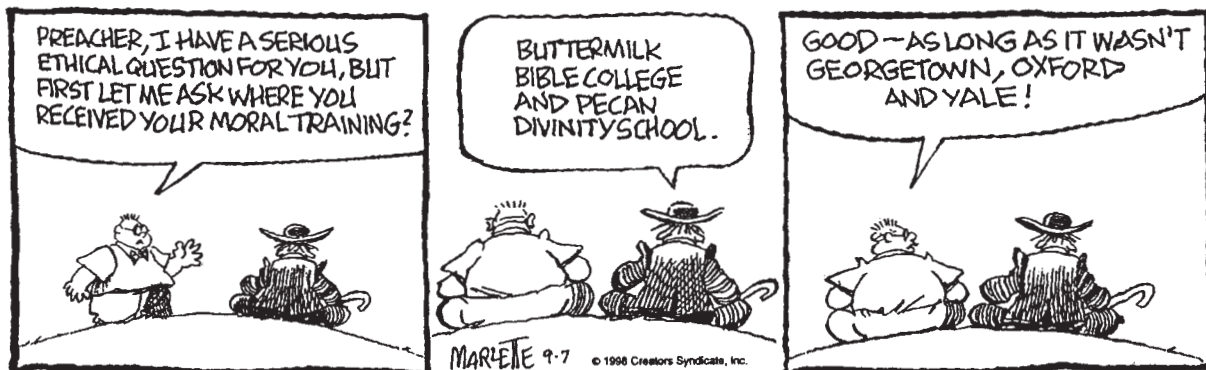
1. Although the American economy has been growing for fifteen years, "Over the past twenty years, real hourly take-home pay has declined by more than 10 percent."
2. "The proportion of managers and supervisors in private non-farm employment has grown during the 1990s."

The hourly workers have borne the brunt of the downsizing.

3. Donald V. Fites in 1990 made Caterpillar "the symbol of a hard-nosed, union-busting, conflictual management. In 1995 he won a poll of 3,300 CEOs as CEO of the year."
4. A significant cause of the "decay of our moral fabric: the kinds of limited and corroding job opportunities that millions of Americans face."
5. "Our corporations are unlikely to change their ways without serious pressure."
6. In contrast with U. S. corporations, those of Japan and Germany take the "high road of fueling their growth with cooperation and trust" between management and workers. (Note: our religion could teach us something about management and trust, but Gordon neglects religion.)

Michio Kaku's 1997 book, *Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century,* is a fascinating, frightening, informed, responsible attempt to tell us about our near future.

Unhappily, he, like Gordon, neglects religion. The following statements indicate some of the startling glimpses of the future for millions of people now living:



1. Whereas Newton saw himself as a boyish “observer on the seashore of knowledge,” we, in the near future, will “make the transition from unraveling the secrets of Nature to becoming masters of Nature.”
2. Around 2030 or 2040, we may be having “relatively interesting conversations” with robots acting as secretaries and butlers, anticipating “when their masters are acting irrationally” and making “value judgments as to what is best for them.”
3. Scientists are aware that robots could “pose a threat to our existence” and have devoted a “fair amount of thinking to the problem.”
4. The Internet will radically change many kinds of business and may create mass unemployment. “Security First Network Bank of Pineville, Kentucky, is doing business entirely on the Internet today. No tellers. No line, No waiting. And no branches either. It means we don’t need all these bodies.”
5. Scientists foresee an economy “so productive that only a small percentage of the population can produce all the food and goods necessary to keep society going.”
6. In the not distant future, we may be able to have “designer children” and (my addition) designer soldiers cloned to

produce armies. The Greek myth of Cadmus may be actualized by some future Hitler or Saddam Hussein.

Cadmus, needing soldiers, slew the dragon, planted the dragon’s teeth one day, and the next harvested a field full of giant, fully armed, fully trained combat soldiers. Since experience seems to show that what is scientifically-technologically possible is also inevitable, perhaps one should not dismiss this as fantasy. (Note: Kaku also neglects religion. Of literally dozens of big name consultants on his book, *not one* is a spokesman for religion.)

Ideally, we should have some alert, courageous, eloquent Old Testament prophet-types among our clergy and religion professors to alert us to our dangers and responsibilities.

Our world, however, is much more complicated than the Old Testament world, and our seminaries are not geared to educate the whole range of scholars.

It is encouraging to recall that the Old Testament prophets we honor most were not of the priestly order. Happily, we could easily form a committee of our qualified lay people to do for our responsibilities in the sciences what we have done so well for so long in church-state relationships.

Unless, as David M. Gordon warns, we can apply massive, organized pressure, our economic system will remain stacked against the majority of our people, we will continue to be bystanders as science expands its empire, and the world will continue to neglect religion because religion is negligible. ■

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# You Can't Go Home Again

By Foy Valentine

Breathes there an editor  
With soul so dead  
Who never to himself  
Hath said,  
How on earth can I fill this enormous void  
of three appallingly empty pages so as  
to meet this dastardly deadline that  
doth so easily beset me?

Well, I have to tell you that on occasion I have dropped into this worthy journal some of my own palpably questionable, if not glaringly unworthy, writing. Filler. Stuff. Copy to accommodate a deadline. The piece that follows is submitted, as graduate students are wont to write, "in partial fulfillment of the requirements" laid on my sore back by the current deadline.

Please permit me, however, one other small agenda.

Ethicists often ponder and frequently debate the issue of change in the world of ethics. It has occurred to me that it might not be a totally unprofitable exercise to look critically at a sermon I preached 35 years ago to the Southern Baptist Convention messengers in Kansas City. Times were different. I myself was a piddling forty years old. What has changed in the ethics arena during the last 35 years? Have the basic ethical issues changed at all? What do you think? What shall we then do?]

In one of the most poignantly insightful titles in American literature, Thomas Wolfe makes the point that you can't go home again. The point is at once practical and profound, mundane and philosophical, somber and joyous, bitter and sweet, devastating and exhilarating. Most of us have tried it a thousand ways and know with Thomas Wolfe's George Webber... "that you can't go home again.

"... You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood, back home to romantic love, back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame, back home to exile... back home to lyricism...back home to aestheticism, back home to the ivory tower, back home to places in the country, back home to the father you have lost and have been looking for, back home to someone who can help you, save you, ease the burden for you, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time, back home to the escapes of Time and Memory." [Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), p. 706.]

The Hebrew children spent forty fruitless and futile years trying to go home again, to what was in reality an alien land.

Their experience is recorded with brilliant clarity in Numbers: "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (Num. 14:1-4).

T. S. Eliot spoke with poetic precision when he had J. Alfred Prufrock to say, "I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, and I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, and in short, I was afraid." I do not wish to be positioned at this Convention as a Kansas City Kierkegaard nor do I propose that we make Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar our heroes because they sang our song. I should like, nevertheless, to suggest that there are signs that we, like Prufrock, have seen the moment of our greatness flicker, we have seen the eternal Footman hold our coat and snicker, and in short, we are afraid. This is a critical time in American church life, but we will forfeit the future if we continually bathe ourselves in nostalgia and expend our energies in trying vainly to go home again.

## I. Home for Southern Baptists

It is in order for us to focus briefly on the home from which Southern Baptists have come.

We were a country people, but, like the rest of America, we have moved to town.

We were an uneducated, even ignorant, people, but we are now learning a few things.

We were a provincial people in confident control of our province, but to our anguish and dismay our cogs no longer seem to engage the gears of any real power in our culture, We find ourselves an isolated and waning force in the court house, the state house, the White House, and the Glass House on the East River.

We were, at least in ecclesiology, a radical sect, but we are tending to become another Church.

We were racially, historically, economically, politically, and culturally homogeneous, but we are fast becoming irreversibly heterogencous.

We were revival-oriented, but revivalism as known and practiced by Baptists when I was a boy is dead. It is dead in

spite of our frantic mouth-to-mouth breathing over it and even though we still respectfully hold one-week and even two-week memorial services in loving tribute to its memory.

We were poor, but now, by any reasonable standard on earth, we are affluent.

We were ill-housed in our sorry, one-room, crowded, frame meeting houses, but now we meet in splendid, uncrowded sanctuaries for which we are gloriously in debt.

We were fervently convinced of the rightness of our cause, but now we harbor all the questions and doubts that normally accompany a measure of sophistication.

We were stoutly and vociferously opposed to the institutionalism of the old-line churches, but in only a hundred years we have established institutionalism of every shape, form, and fashion; and all the web is not yet woven.

We were rooted in the soil, but now from the cradle to the grave we roll around on the pavement.

We were a brash and lusty adolescent denomination bulging with unguided muscles, but the aging process has worked its unwelcome work on us and we are now politic, cautious, meticulous, respectable, proper, aging.

We lived in a settled, unchanging world where we knew even as we also were known, but now we live in a world where the winds of change blow with devastating fury across the face of all the earth.

We lived in an isolated, marvelously moated land where men never dreamed of mastering the black arts of nuclear war, but the time has come when men in a fantastically shrunken world have both dreamed that dreadful dream and actualized it.

This has been home for Southern Baptists. For us to go home again would be to go back to the country, back to ignorance, back to provincialism, back to radical sectarianism, back to homogeneity, back to revivalism, back to poverty, back to isolationism, back to our cabins in the clearings, back to the frontier, back to all this and much, much more.

## II. A Look at Our Effort to Go Home Again.

Why are Southern Baptists trying to go home again? Because it is the natural thing to do. Because it is inevitable when growth has come. Because we can not help it when we have aged a bit. Because we are caught in a world in travail and

we are badly disoriented. Because we have not yet found ways of adjusting to industrialism, unionism, urbanism, statism, socialism, or for the most part even capitalism. Because we have discovered that our old formulae for success are no longer producing results and we are in shock about it. Because we have not learned to speak today's tongue. Because we are really not at home in this brave, new world.

How are we trying to go home again? By reproducing country churches in the city suburbs. By resorting to the use of artificial stimuli to produce results like we used to have. By hiding the fact that while we are fierce of visage we are actually faint of heart. By maintaining the pretense that we are as brave as bulls when we have actually become as timid as mice. By cultivating a mood that says, "Hang the facts. Give me a cliché." By our compulsive activism.

What is going to come of the effort to go home again? The effort will win some battles but it will lose the war. It is not a mean and ignoble thing to try to go home again. In fact, it has certain truly sublime elements. It is simply not started to succeed. We cannot turn back the clock or even stop it no matter how dramatic our histrionics. We cannot recapture our past. We cannot recall yesterday. We can't go home again.

If we can't go home again, then where can we go?

## III. Toward Our True Home, the City of God.

Like Abraham, we must seek that city whose builder and maker is God. We remember, however, that while the City is in eternity, the seeking must be done in time. Christ was teaching us something very near to the heart of his gospel, not just a bit of pretty ritual, when he taught us to pray. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Believers are not free to flag or fail until "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11: 15).

It is the two-fold thesis of this message that we can't go home again and that we can move measurably toward that true home which God is preparing for them that love him. Here and now, with God's help and by his grace, we are to be moving consciously, conscientiously, and consistently toward this ideal home. Its final consummation we necessarily await, but its distinct outlines and chief characteristics we need already to



be getting familiar with.

In order that we may neither waste precious time in looking back at the home whence we have come or in looking bewilderedly for the wrong city, let us give attention to some of the distinctive features of our true home, the city of God. Any home which is satisfying and adequate for God's people here must approximate in outline and foreshadow in form the qualities of the home hereafter.

How can the eternal home be identified? What is heaven like? It is a family. It is a brotherhood. It is a moral fortress. It is a workshop. It is a kingdom. Let us consider these characteristics.

#### 1. This Home is a Family

The ultimate home which Christians seek is a family. In it God is Father, Jesus Christ is elder Brother, and the Holy Spirit is eternal Comforter. In it, the family of God's redeemed children shall ever dwell together in unity. The home we seek is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

In view of that home which is our ultimate destination, let us, as an earnest of our intent, begin here and now to make of our human homes little colonies of heaven where we dwell together in Christian love, Christian joy, Christian peace, Christian patience, Christian kindness, Christian goodness, Christian faithfulness, Christian gentleness, and Christian self-control. If my profession of interest in the home to come is genuine, then there must be a reflection of that interest in my home housed on the street where I now live.

The concept of family in our Christian faith eschews too-early dating, immature marriages, feminine fathers, masculine mothers, undisciplined children, absentee parents, juvenile delinquency, sexual promiscuity, divorce, materialism, and all the other forces that fragment today's families. It is a concept that embraces careful preparation for marriage, spiritually solid foundations for marriage, and marriage that is both initiated and lived out "in the Lord," where believers are not yoked unequally together with unbelievers and where husband and wife and parents and children are so caught up in a dream bigger than themselves that they strive through the years to make the dream of a truly Christian home come true.

#### 2. This Home is a Brotherhood

Christians seek a home characterized by brotherhood. It is a city without walls. Outside walls are not necessary in the home where we are headed because there are no enemies there. And inner walls are not required because the redeemed who dwell together in brotherly love have no selfish interests to protect, no evil to hide, no exclusiveness to relish, no psychological neuroses to nurture by shutting out somebody else.

In view of the city without walls sought by the saved, it behooves us to begin here and now to build such cities of brotherhood. The middle wall of partition which still divides believers is a wall Jesus Christ died to tear down. To the extent that we worship that divisive wall, we re-crucify Christ. To the extent that we tolerate it, we deny Him who came to break it

down. To the extent that we cherish it, we dishonor Him who hated it and who hates the pride and prejudice it still stands for.

To pretend that our prejudice in maintaining the walls of racial segregation, class consciousness, economic exclusiveness, and social snobbery does no violence to the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord and the altar of God, Savior, is to close our eyes to the real purpose of the life and the death of Christ.

We need to abolish racial discrimination in our country and in our churches, not because of a clause in the Constitution, nor because of ideological challenge, nor yet because we need the votes of the watching world. We need to conquer race prejudice because it is a sin against almighty God and a rejection of the precious blood of Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son.

Let us then cease shouting at each other across Kipling's seas of misunderstanding. Let us rather learn, in preparation for the brotherhood beyond, to call God, "Father" and all his people, "Brother" so that God's city without walls begins to look attractive to us here and now.

#### 3. This Home is a Moral Fortress

Christians seek a home which is a moral fortress. It is that bastion of ultimate integrity, that impregnable mother lode of rectitude, that veritable quintessence of righteousness which John described in Revelation as the city where "there shall in no wise enter...anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" (Rev. 21:27).

As we seek the city "wherein dwelleth righteousness" let us "follow righteousness" on our way there. As we seek the city where no immorality in any form shall ever be, let us make our profession of religion a morally relevant and ethically meaningful thing here and now. Christian morality demonstrates its genuineness only when it authenticates itself outside the church house in the rough-and-tumble, everyday world in which we daily live.

In this world's moral gloom let us not idly tolerate the erosion of all moral standards until our churches become like Robinson Crusoe's goat pasture, so big that the goats inside are as wild as the goats outside. Let us rather in the moral realm become "Christ's men from head to foot and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling" (Rom. 12:14, Phillips).

#### 4. This Home Is a Workshop

Christians seek a home which is a workshop. The old rocking chair won't get us there. The notion that in heaven we will be stretched out on flowery beds of ease to do nothing forever has an unquestioned appeal when we are tired, but the fact is that the notion is extra-biblical and grossly inaccurate. Our true home will be a place of creative and satisfying work for God where "his servants shall serve him" (Rev. 22:3).

As we seek the home which is the Christian's ultimate workshop, let us perform our daily work, here and now, "As unto the Lord." In the beginning God assigned Adam the work of tilling and keeping the Garden of Eden. In the decalogue He commanded his people, "Six days shalt thou labor."

Even so he wills for us to work. Paul proclaimed this principle when we admonished, "If any one will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thess. 3: 10 RSV). The Christian's approach to work involves seeking to find God's will concerning what work to do, experiencing something in the work itself which is significant before God and meaningful to man, cultivating a spirit of responsibility which takes honest pride in the work done, and in finding through daily work the highest self-development of which we are capable. Daily work, rightly understood, is no onerous chore but a holy task.

##### 5. This Home is a Kingdom

Christians seek as their permanent home the city of the Great King where our final citizenship is.

As we await the final papers for our future citizenship, let us honor that future with a significant Christian citizenship where we now live.

In the last presidential election when interest in citizenship reached a new high, only 64.3% of the qualified voters in the United States bothered to go to polls. If we find corruption in government we cannot honestly put all the blame on the so-called professional politicians. The blame must be shared by those who refuse to work in the normal processes of citizenship. In recent years many a good man has sought elective office only to be defeated by the apathy and inertia of his friends—equally good men who did not bother to get involved. Plato rightly said that the punishment suffered by the wise who refuse to take part in the government is to live under the government of bad men.

The Christian citizen recognizes that civil government is of divine appointment. He prays for those in positions of authority. He pays his taxes. He obeys the laws. He conscientiously casts his ballot. When the situation requires it, he presents himself as a candidate for public office. He remembers to use moral discernment in his support of governmental programs, bearing in mind that his ultimate loyalty is to the King of Kings. The responsible Christian citizen will not even try to wash his hands of politics. He will rather try to get redemptively involved in the whole realm of citizenship.

## CONCLUSION

If Christians bear clearly enough in mind the open portals of the eternal Home and hold well enough in focus the beckoning arms of the heavenly Father, then we will avoid both crippling commitments to the home of yesterday and debilitating compromises with the home of today. We must ride light in the saddle if we are to avoid injury when the horse stumbles. We must, if we are to manifest spiritual vigor and moral thrust, maintain a structured tentativeness with regard

to this present age. Indeed, "It is people for whom the navel cord of this world has been cut who can give themselves most joyously to its redemption." [Karl A. Olsson, *Passion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 91.]

This does not mean, however, that we are to retreat into stained glass sanctuaries, cutting off all concern for and commerce with the world. Quite the contrary. If we fail to leaven the lump, we fail Christ.

This emphasis on the Christian's responsibility in this world is based on the understanding that God himself cares about what happens on this earth. Jehovah God was portrayed by the prophets as being concerned about such things as military alliances, the selling of debtors into slavery, the plundering of the poor by the rich, the cheating of the buyer by the seller, and the oppression of the weak by the strong. The God of the Bible, the God Christians know through personal faith in Jesus Christ, is no abstract First Cause or Prime Mover or Great Unknown out in the Great Somewhere who can be placated by a bit of discreet crying in the chapel. He is a personal God who is very deeply and very definitely concerned about military alliances, racial segregation, the unconscionable profits of the drug industry, the indefensible price fixing that honeycombs big business, and the criminal corruption that persists in organized labor. He is concerned about tax evasion, padded expense accounts, the exploitation of violence as entertainment, the toleration of senseless killings in the boxing ring, family fragmentation, and the unsolved problems of the aging. He is concerned about unemployment at home and child labor abroad and the one hundred billion dollars a year (or about eight per cent of its gross annual product) which the world now spends on weapons. He is concerned about the hideous inanities preached as a sorry substitute for the Christian gospel, the infuriatingly bland and crashingly dull church programs calculated to produce an attitude of profane indifference, the immensely absurd spectacle of loving the souls of the poor and needy in Africa and Asia and hating the immigrants themselves when they move to our shores from those countries, and all the other moral flotsam and spiritual jetsam that could be orchestrated into this melancholy tune.

God cares. God is concerned. And since God is concerned, his people have an obligation to be concerned, too.

The demand of Christ our Lord is not that we should take a sentimental journey back home. It is rather a demand for us to take a bold and visionary giant step toward our Christian destination. What God wants of us today is not an eviscerated, all-things-to-all-men, formal confession of creedal correctness. What he wants is a quality of life that demonstrates to this world and to the great cloud of witnesses above that we have been with Jesus. ■

# THE CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS AT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

The Center for Christian Ethics exists to bear witness to the relevance of the Christian gospel in the world. It maintains an emphasis on applied Christianity with program activity based on Christian experience, Biblical truth, theological insight, historical perspective, current research, human needs, and the divine imperative to love God with our whole hearts and our neighbors as ourselves.

## CHRONOLOGY

- In 1988 plans were made and the foundations laid for the Center for Christian Ethics.
- In 1989 the Center for Christian Ethics name was carefully chosen.
- In 1990, on June 14, the Center was chartered as a non-profit corporation.
- In 1991, on June 17, the Center was granted 501(c)(3) standing by the Internal Revenue Service.
- In 1997, a mutually beneficial relationship between the Center and Baylor University was established, with the Center's primary offices situated in the Baylor Administration Building, at 416 Pat Neff Hall, Waco, Texas.

## TRUSTEES

Sarah Frances Anders  
Pat Anderson  
Patricia Ayres  
John Leland Berg  
Jim Denison  
Randy Fields  
Leonard Holloway  
W. David Sapp  
Donald E. Schmeltekopf  
Foy Valentine

## SUPPORT

Financial support for the Center for Christian Ethics has come from churches, through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, from Foundations, and from interested individuals.

## CONTRIBUTIONS ARE

- Greatly needed
- Urgently solicited
- Genuinely appreciated

## OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen and support the cause of Christian ethics.
- Champion the moral values without which civilization itself could not survive.
- Publish a Christian ethics journal as a needed voice for the Christian ethics cause.
- Conduct forums to discuss critical ethical issues with a view to recommending practical responses.
- Address the ethical dimensions of public policy issues.
- Prepare and distribute Christian ethics support materials not being produced by others.
- Work with like-minded individuals and entities to advance the cause of Christian ethics.
- Perform needed Christian ethics projects and services for those welcoming such help.
- Recognize and honor those who have made unique contributions to the cause of Christian ethics.
- Utilize the contributions of responsible stewards who designate resources to be used in furthering the cause of Christian ethics.

The **VOICE** of the Center for Christian Ethics is *Christian Ethics Today*. Within the constraints of energy and finances, this journal is published about every other month. It is now sent without charge to those who request it.

**COLLOQUIUMS** are Center-sponsored conversations held several times a year with knowledgeable participants coming together to discuss relevant ethical issues with a view to recommending appropriate actions.

**INITIATIVES** in Christian Ethics (related to such things as race, class, gender, publishing, mass media, translation, teaching, and curricula) are Center agenda concerns.

The Center for Christian Ethics  
CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY  
Post Office Box 670784  
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