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# Rocks

*By Foy Valentine*

A few shriveled souls I know are not crazy about rocks.  
They are to be pitied.  
The depths of their deprivation boggles the mind.  
If good manners allow, they should be discreetly shunned.  
As for me, I just love rocks.  
Always have.

At least I can't remember a time when I was not smitten by rocks, charmed by rocks, enthralled by rocks, fascinated by rocks.

Where I grew up as a boy in East Texas, there were no rocks. Oh, there may have been some deep down in the earth; but where I lived, God covered them all up with fine sandy loam and immense deposits of splendid red clay.

I was, well, rock challenged.

When I went away to college at Baylor, I was drawn, like a moth to a flame, to a geology class. It was love at first sight. I was so pleased with all those glorious rocks that I knocked the top out of the curve in that class, much to the consternation of the several geology majors in the class. I meant them no harm. It was just that I couldn't help myself. I liked geology so much that I pretty nearly ate it with a spoon. I loved it with an agape kind of love, as everybody in church now says...especially those who don't know Greek. No matter that I had a triple major in Bible and English and Speech. I would gladly have added a geology major too if my meager resources had allowed.

Since college, my work has taken me on travels far and wide and I have hardly ever gone anywhere in the world without bringing back some wonderful rock as a memento. There are hundreds of these fantastic treasures. Altogether they could not possibly be worth thirty cents. But by each, there hangs some marvelous tale.

Let me illustrate.

Here on my desk is an ammonite, a limestone fossil some 200 million years old which our Number One grandson, John, and I chiseled out of a deposit of fossiliferous limestone from a dry creek bed behind our house. What a wonder.

On the corner of my desk is a rock I gouged out of the stony bank completely encircling the town of Nordlingen in southern Germany. When that area was a very shallow sea covered with primordial muck, a huge meteor came swooshing in, at some two or three thousand miles per hour, made a great

splash and a great crater which subsequently filled in so that the marvelous little Bavarian city in due season could be neatly built in it, and the surrounding wall was thrown up in an instant, in a perfect circle. My fist-sized rock is composed of thousands and thousands of tiny sea shells which come into fascinating focus under a strong magnifying glass. It is enough to elicit a hallelujah chorus, with trumpet flourishes no less.

Then there is this piece of jasper which I picked up at the very top of Wheeler Peak, the highest mountain in New Mexico. As one of the highest mountains of the Sangre de Christo (Blood of Christ) range, it yielded from its very summit this glorious bloodred piece of jasper. The rock was a thing of beauty before my brother Jim, a devoted rock hound, polished it to perfection. It is now exquisite.

I particularly like this aa, a broken and jagged chunk of black lava from a recent eruption of Kilauea on Mauna Loa's leeward side on the big island of Hawaii. It has a yellowish tinge and still smells of sulphur, which the ancients, with good cause, called brimstone. And just think: it comes from the side of the biggest mountain on earth which from the bottom of the Pacific to its snow-covered peak is some 32,000 feet. Now that is a pile of rocks.

Good memories are attached to this smooth stone which I picked up at the very end of the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska at the uttermost tip of the North American land mass, hard by some calving glaciers. It still feels a little cold.

Then there is this small piece of basalt which some straw-hatted laborer long, long ago worked into the Great Wall of China. I honored him, I recall, as I walked in awe along the top of his handiwork, the only human construct which the early astronauts could make out from their orbits in outer space.

The red coral piece comes from the beach at Bali in Indonesia. I picked it up at sunset. What a memorable walk; what a view; and what a rock.

The ten-pound stone, black but chock full of small white fossils, I found in the Rocky Mountains where one shifting tectonic plate pushed another plate up from sea-level to 12,000 feet, a little while ago. To get my specimen to its present round, smooth, and beautiful shape required quite a vast amount of time and tumbling which it would take a Jules Verne on peyote to conjure up.

Time would fail me to tell

• of the small rectangular stone which the Roman Emperor Hadrian had his workmen incorporate into a 73 ½ mile sentry beat, Hadrian's Wall, across northern England to keep the savage Norse invaders out of the then only slightly less savage

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# A Man's Word Is His Bond

By Hal Haralson

[Hal Haralson practices law in Austin, Texas and is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

My father “graduated” from Centerpoint school near Haskell, Texas in 1915. The highest grade was the eighth grade. That was the end of his formal education.

He appears on the 1920 census as a farm hand near Haskell. (Thanks to the Internet sleuthing of his attorney-grandson, Brad Haralson of San Angelo.)

Delma Watkins Haralson surfaces again as the owner of a Texaco “filling” station at 2nd and Hickory in Abilene, Texas. “Old Man Roach” or “Uncle John,” as he was known to most people, took a liking to the young man at the Texaco station.

“Delma, I know where we can buy 100 head of sheep near Roby for \$200.00. They’re worth twice that much. We’ll bring them to Abilene and double our money.”

“But,” said Delma, “I don’t have \$100.00.”

“My boy, we’re gonna be partners. I’ll loan you the \$100.00. You sign a note and pay it off when we sell the sheep.” (I still have that note).

Pappa told me how exciting it was to buy and sell the sheep. “It was the easiest money I ever made.”

Thus began the lessons of Uncle John Roach. “Delma, I’m going to teach you to be a horse trader.” That meant buying and selling horses, cows, pigs, tractors, and/or automobiles.

He married at age 35 and bought a small dry-land farm eight miles north of Loraine, Texas.

There, he and his wife raised three sons. Ken, who died of leukemia at age 35, Dale, an attorney in Tucson, and me.

He was only 5’4” and weighed 135 pounds. But he was strong and wiry. There was a running contest between him and his favorite nephew. Sit ups, push ups, chin ups. Pappa always won, much to the frustration of the six-foot, 175-pound nephew, whose name was Browning Ware.

He laughed in later years, “I never expected to make any money off the farm. I wanted it so I could keep you boys busy.”

And that he did; driving a Ford tractor, chopping cotton, and milking the cows.

School took up much of our time. We lived at the end of the bus route. First on the bus in the morning and last off in the evening. 120 miles a day. Two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon.

Much of our education was on that bus. The Texas Education Agency doesn’t know this: the first sex education classes in Texas were on rural school buses.

Many times my father said to Dale and me, “A man’s word

is his bond. Tell the truth....Never go back on your word.”

This became the bedrock of his teaching. I took it as my own. It almost cost me my job.

During my second year in law school at the University of Texas, I got a job as a law clerk.

Since I was 34 years old and married with three small children, this income was very important.

There were eight law clerks. We were all referred to as “Boy” by the lawyers. This “Boy” was older than some of the lawyers.

My job was taking statements from parties in the law suit and witnesses to the accident.

The lawyer told me the facts of the case and what we needed the person to say. A favorable statement early in the suit could bring about a good settlement for our client.

One of the senior partners called me in and told me our client had fallen while stepping off the stairs in a building. She broke her hip.

If the janitor had recently mopped the floor and had not put up a sign warning about the wet floor, we had the case in the bag.

My assignment was to get a statement from the janitor.

From the information in the file, I knew the janitor was an old (over sixty) Negro man. He lived in Dale, Texas.

Dale, Texas was south of Austin and east of Lockhart. It is a town made up of the descendants of freed slaves who went there from Austin following the civil war.

There weren’t any street signs in Dale. Most of the buildings were boarded up.

“Do you know where Elroy Jones (not his real name) lives,” I inquired at the garage/filling station.

The directions were easy to follow.

I pulled up in the front of an old shack that was about the same color as the rickety fence that surrounded the yard. The last time it had been painted was right after the civil war.

The old man had on faded overalls, brogan shoes, with no socks. He was leaning against a tree in the front yard. The chair was solid metal, so old the legs had given way. The bottom was held up by two cinder blocks.

“Mr. Jones, my name is Hal Haralson. I work for the law firm in Austin that represents the lady who fell and broke her hip.”

He invited me in and offered me a beer. Our conversation was relaxed and non-threatening. We talked about picking cotton, pulling bolls, chopping cotton, and the knee pads I have in my office.

Mr. Jones decided I was not out to trick him and answered

my questions about his job and when he mopped the floor near the stairs.

His answers were exactly what I had hoped to hear.

"Mr. Jones, I want to write down what you have told me so I can be sure it is right. When I get through, you can look at it and I'll make any changes that are needed. Then you can sign it."

He balked.

"I ain't signing nothin'. I probably shouldn't have told you any of this. I'm gonna retire next year and this could cost me my job."

"I'll talk to my boss Monday and ask him if its okay to sign. I want you to promise me you won't do nothin till I talk to my boss."

"Okay, Mr. Jones. You have my word. I won't do anything else until you talk to your boss on Monday."

It was late Friday afternoon when I got back to the office. The partner was waiting for me. I told him I had talked to Mr. Jones.

"Well, what did he say?"

"He had mopped the floor about fifteen minutes before our client fell and didn't put up a warning sign."

"Let me have his statement."

"He wouldn't sign a statement and I told him I wouldn't do anything until he talks to his boss Monday morning."

"Damn, if he talks to his boss, he won't sign anything. He'll probably change his story."

"Here's what I want you to do. Call the old man and get him to give you the details of his statement over the phone. Record the conversation and we'll have him."

I looked at the senior partner. My heart was pounding....I was hearing my father's, "A man's word is his bond."

"I can't do that. I gave him my word."

"I'm ordering you to call that man and tape his conversation. If you don't, it may cost us the law suit."

"I'm sorry, I gave him my word."

I was ordered out of the office. I later learned that another law clerk had been told to make the call, but the old man wouldn't talk.

By the time I got to work Monday, the rumor was going around that I was to be fired for refusing to do what the partner told me to do. There was a firm meeting that evening.

Tuesday came and nothing was said. Nothing was ever said. I worked there until I finished law school.

I had been practicing law about two years when I saw the lady who was office manager for the firm at the time of the incident.

"Hal, did anyone ever tell you what happened in that firm meeting?"

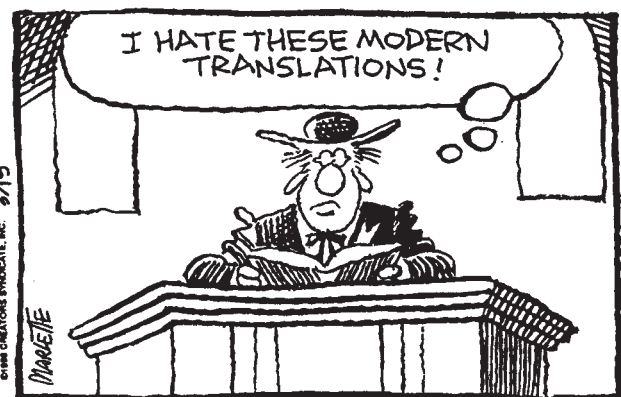
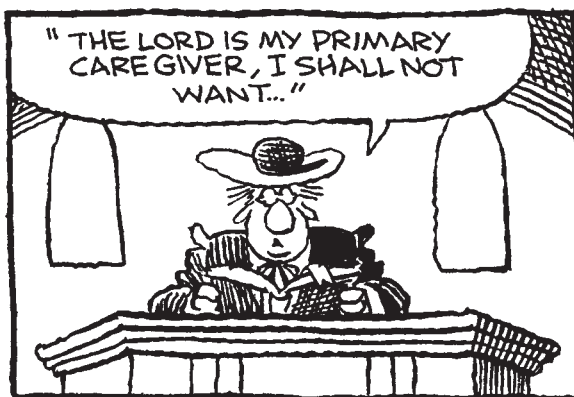
"No, not a word."

"Well, no harm can come from your knowing now."

She told me that the partner I had disobeyed was furious and demanded that I be fired. The founding partner had asked what happened and was told the full story.

Then he said, "I grew up in the country where we had a saying about this kind of thing. 'A man's word is his bond.' Hal gave the man his word. He was right to keep his word. We need more employees like that. He keeps his job."

My father would have been pleased. ■



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# The Addiction Affliction

By William Cope Moyers

[William Cope Moyers is vice president of public affairs for the Hazelden Foundation, based in Minnesota.]

Let me tell you a few things about me. I pay property taxes because I own a home. I pay income taxes and contribute to Social Security because I have a job.

I serve on the boards of several nonprofit organizations in Minnesota, volunteering my time to improve my community.

As the father of three children, I do my best, along with my wife, Allison, to raise them in a loving and healthy environment.

Perhaps that seems unremarkable to you. After all, society expects each of us to do some or all of those things regularly. But let me share something else with you, too, to put all of this in context.

I am an alcoholic and drug addict who is in recovery today. And none of this would be possible if I hadn't overcome substance abuse.

Science tells me I have an illness. I didn't ask for it, I am not quite sure how I got it. But I have learned that if I don't take responsibility for learning to live with it, I will die from it.

For years, I struggled on my own to master a baffling inability to "just say no." It started not long after I innocently experimented with marijuana in 1975, when I was a teenager. Soon, I was binge drinking on weekends in college. Alcohol turned to hard drug use. By the time I was 30, I couldn't even take care of myself.

What is remarkable about my slow but steady spiral downward is that nobody saw it happening, not even when I was a reporter for the *Dallas Times Herald* in Texas, where I spent many good years—and some bad ones in the 1980s.

Dallas County District Attorney Henry Wade and Dallas Police Chief Billy Prince didn't see it. As a newspaper reporter whose beat was their offices, I gained their respect and their trust, even as my substance abuse problem blossomed into full-blown addiction.

My editors at the *Dallas Times Herald* were unaware of my private battle with alcohol and drugs. They saw in me an aggressive, accurate, and enthusiastic journalist who never missed a deadline.

The pastor at Tyler Street Methodist Church in Oak Cliff didn't know I was an addict. I sang in the choir and helped teach Sunday School.

My parents, the two people who knew me best, had no idea of what was happening to me. Why should they be concerned? They had raised me to be a healthy, loving, and caring person. I had good roots.

I was born in Fort Worth while my father, Bill Moyers, was

studying at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and my mother, Judith Davidson Moyers, was working as a home economist for the Texas Electric Service Company.

My summers were filled with fun on the family farm in southern Dallas county, where I played hide-and-seek among the towering rows of corn or hung out at the Wilmer City Hall with my grandfather, Mayor H.J. Davidson. And when I wasn't there, I was in East Texas, with my dad's parents. Yes, ma'am and no, sir, became part of my vocabulary. Roger Staubach and Bob Hayes were my heroes.

I was raised with everything good. I lacked nothing emotionally, morally, or spiritually. As a child, I came to know God; in the seventh grade, my father helped to baptize me at a small Baptist church in Wilmer.

I share these things with you in hopes that you will realize that nobody—no family—is immune to substance abuse problems. No amount of love, parenting, money or religion is necessarily enough to shield somebody like me from the ravages of alcohol or other drugs. People like me need help, and we need to be treated with compassion, not punished, by our community.

We are good people—with a bad illness.

Teenage binge drinking in the Park Cities, heroin overdoses in Plano, drunken driving accidents on the interstate; more often than not, what is happening here involves good people up against a bad problem—substance abuse. Pointing fingers or assigning blame does no good. It is time for the community to extend a helping hand.

I got the help I needed to get well. Professional treatment was the answer—not once, or twice, but three times I received treatment for my substance abuse problem. Today, I am healthy and happy and recovering from an illness that has no cure but does have a solution.

Sadly, many families discover their private health insurance won't cover substance abuse treatment as it does cancer, diabetes, or hypertension. There are severe limitations on what kind of treatment is available and for how long.

How bad is it these days? The Hazelden Foundation, where I went for treatment in 1989 and now work, has extended about \$10 million in financial aid in the past three years alone to people and their families who otherwise couldn't afford treatment. Ironically, most of those families had health care insurance.

That is unfair and doesn't make sense. The so-called war on drugs across the nation is a struggle we can't win unless we offer comprehensive treatment to substance abusers. There is no better place to start than with the young people in this community. Let's give them a chance. One day, they might grow up to be adults like me. ■

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# The Clinton-Lewinsky Morality Play

By William E. Hull

[Dr. William E. Hull preached this sermon, in two parts, on January 31 and February 14 this year in the Mountain Brook Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama. He is University Professor at Samford University.]

During the Middle Ages, the drama of the Mass gradually moved out of the sanctuary to a platform in front of the cathedral doors where guilds would present Mystery or Miracle Plays for the benefit of illiterate peasants. Eventually someone thought of putting wheels under the platform and rolling it from the church yard to the street corner or marketplace (which led to the plays being called *pageants*, the French word for “rolling platform”). Here, liturgical theatre based on Scripture evolved into what were called Morality Plays, didactic allegories in which virtues and vices were personified in dramatic form.

Our nation, and indeed our world, has spent the past twelve months preoccupied with a morality play being acted out in Washington, D.C., featuring the President of the United States. The combination of a zealous prosecutor, a partisan Congress, and an obsessive media have conspired to make this sex scandal the most intimately known and widely reported immorality in the history of the world. No time or expense has been spared to ferret out the tidbits in mind-numbing detail. After more than five years and fifty million dollars, we now have a 445-page Starr Report with a 3,183-page Appendix supported by an 18-box truckload of “documents”, plus an well-nigh endless videotape of grand jury testimony. With the further benefit of widely viewed House Judiciary Committee hearings, resulting in more than 6,000 pages of sworn testimony, little doubt remains as to exactly what happened in this sordid episode.

Since the Clinton-Lewinsky Morality Play is likely to be the most widely discussed “pageant” of our lifetimes on that vice which the Middle Ages called “concupiscence,” the libidinous cravings of sexual appetite, I propose that we utilize it both to illustrate the way in which sin actually works and thereby to clarify some of our confusion over the deeper meaning of this public tragedy. My purpose in making this painful probe is neither to condemn nor to exonerate Mr. Clinton, but rather to fortify ourselves lest, we, too, be overtaken in a fault (Galatians 6: 1).

## I. Sin Thrives In a Culture of Permissiveness

The initial reaction of most people to the scandal was one of shock and chagrin. The first question which I heard most

frequently was the outraged cry, “Could you believe that something so disgraceful, so shameless, so repulsive would ever happen in the White House?” Most people seemed to be blind-sided by the scandal as if it had suddenly come out of nowhere and taken them completely by surprise. So often was I greeted with expressions of incredulity that I finally was forced to respond, “No, I am not in the least surprised. In light of the dominant drift of American society for an entire generation, my only surprise is that something like this did not happen sooner and more often.” We have been sowing the seeds of this bitter harvest since the 1960s, and it is folly to expect a crop failure!

Shrugging off the sterner duties of the Civil Rights struggle at home and of the Cold War hostilities abroad, the current generation combined a narcissistic individualism with a consumeristic hedonism to launch a sexual revolution determined to sweep away the carefully constructed sanctions of the centuries. The “Playboy Philosophy” solemnly argued that we were somehow abridging an inalienable right to personal enjoyment if we did not permit—yea, encourage!—“consenting adults” to do whatever they pleased if it provided them with immediate pleasure. Soon our movies, television screens, novels, magazines, music, and computer monitors were filled, not just with titillating sexual innuendo, but with pornographically explicit depictions of sex on demand, at a moment’s notice, the kinkier the better, all in the name of liberating a repressed selfhood buried under layers of puritanical legalism. What happened in the White House is exactly what happened in movies from “Last Tango” to “Basic Instinct,” in television series from “Dallas” to “Dawson’s Creek,” in books from Madonna on *Sex* to the best-selling *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Love Making*, and in magazines from “Penthouse” to “Hustler.”

“But that is all fiction and fantasy,” some would respond, “whereas the Clinton thing *really happened!*” Which is exactly the point: sin uses the symbolic to shape a sense of what is permissible human behavior. It is naive to suppose that we can spend decades saturating the subconscious with the assumption that “anything goes” and then not expect someone to act out the lurid images etched in their imagination. I have long been intrigued that Jesus characterized his contemporaries as an “adulterous and sinful generation” (Mark 8:38). The question naturally arises how a “generation” could ever commit adultery, since that is an inherently intimate act limited to only two individuals. But a generation can become imbued with the spirit of adultery, the essence of which is gratification without obligation, and, once the generation becomes adulterous, it is

only a matter of time until individuals behave accordingly.

The Apostle Paul diagnosed this dynamic using different imagery when he described those who “were dead through the trespasses and sins in which they once walked...living in the passions of their flesh, following the desires of body and mind” (Ephesians 2:1-3). Why did they become “by nature children of wrath”? Because they “followed the course of this world” which he likened to “following the prince of the *power of the air*, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (v. 2). What this first century language suggests is that there is a sort of hostile atmospheric layer hovering over us, a spiritual “radiation belt” filled with evil influences that contaminate the very air that we breathe. In other words, we can allow demonic forces to gain dominion over that invisible canopy of meaning under which we live. If you prefer more modern terminology, Paul is saying that our morality is powerfully influenced by the prevailing mood, the social mores, the established customs, and the latest fashions that define what is permissible to the reigning power structure.

Let me give you a recent local illustration of how context shapes conduct. This month our community celebrated Martin Luther King Day with an outpouring of support that far exceeded the attention that will be devoted to Washington and Lincoln on their holiday next month. But only a generation ago, our community greeted Dr. King with a firestorm of hatred, clapped him into jail, and tolerated not a hint of support for his cause from the white citizenry. Obviously the morality of the civil rights movement has not changed over the past forty years. What has changed is that a generation ago it was socially permissible to oppose civil rights whereas now it is socially permissible to support civil rights, and that contextual shift has totally changed the personal conduct of many individuals in our community.

The Enlightenment promulgated a myth of the individual as an autonomous moral agent acting on the basis of pure reason. A few scholars still cling to that lofty ideal but, as we saw when German intellectuals caved in to Hitler, most people most of the time follow the consensus of the crowd as it is shaped by what Paul called the “principalities and powers.” Sad to say, we have allowed our culture to become not only careless but reckless, not only greedy but gratuitous, not only promiscuous but prurient, not only vulgar but voyeuristic. Having

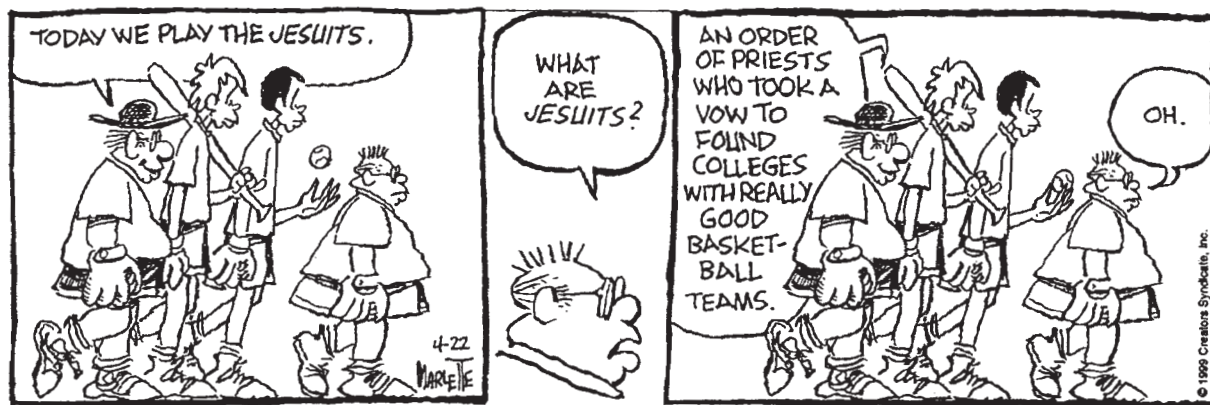
sown the wind, let us not be shocked when we reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7).

## II. Sin Works Its Subtle Seductions from the Top Down

I can already hear some protest: “But this tawdry liaison took place in the Oval Office and involved the highest elected official in the land,” as if we should expect better of those at the top than at the bottom of the pecking order. I know the stereotype, reinforced by many an earnest revival testimony, that sin flourishes among reprobates in the gutter whereas decent folk use education and culture and religion to put all of this unseemly stuff behind them. But the Bible will not have it so; if anything, its stands our cherished illusion on its head by insisting that no one is more vulnerable to temptation than those at the pinnacle of public leadership.

You knew, of course, that I could trot out King David and his wretched affair with Bathsheba to make this point, but remember that his son, Solomon, did no better with his huge harem of pagan wives (I Kings 11: 1- 13). Regarding their successors, listen to this roll call: Jeroboam in the North did evil above all that were before him, provoking God to anger and causing him to “utterly consume the house of Jeroboam as a man burns dung until it is all gone” (I Kings 14:9-11). Rehoboam in the South led Judah to commit more sins than all their fathers had done, introducing male cultic prostitutes into the land (I Kings 14:22-24). Ahab and his infamous queen Jezebel were so evil that in death the dogs devoured their flesh and licked their blood (I Kings 22:37-38; II Kings 9:34-37). As the Biblical text characterizes the reign of each ruler, a steady refrain is heard again and again: “he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his fathers had done” (e.g. II Kings 13:2; 14:24; 15:9; 15:28; 17:2; 21:2; 23:32; 24:9). Even in the theocracy of ancient Israel, where the king was supposed to act like God’s son, exemplary rulers were the exception rather than the rule.

Nor has the situation improved a great deal over the centuries. There is credible evidence that George Washington carried on a long affair with the wife of a friend, while DNA tests have further implicated Thomas Jefferson in the paternity of children born to his slave, Sally Hemings. In our day, of the eleven presidents from Roosevelt to Clinton, six or seven appear to have committed adultery either before or during



their term of office. Nor are leading clergy exempt from this pitfall. Even now, the president of the National Baptist Convention USA is on trial with his acknowledged mistress for racketeering and grand theft. One of the most brilliant preachers in Southern Baptist life was ousted from his prominent pulpit after admitting to a four-year affair with the wife of his youth minister. What many pastors would regard as the most desirable church in our denomination saw its bright young pastor self-destruct shortly after beginning his ministry there because of an affair with a member of the congregation.

Why is it that “the higher they rise, the harder they fall”? Those at the top are often surrounded by excessive adulation, resulting in a sense of pride which makes them cavalier regarding the threat of temptation. Like Icarus in the Greek myth, they soar higher and higher, only to have the hot sun of celebrity melt the wax in their fragile wings of ambition and send them plummeting into the sea. So often and so easily do they exercise power without challenge that they begin to assume that they can control and even conquer whatever they may want. Any resistance to their aggressive impulses only whets the competitive desire to bag one more trophy, whatever the cost may be. Often the price seems small indeed since, for every leader seeking a moment of surcease from the incessant burdens of office, there is always at least one seductress available who is more than willing to trade her favors for the chance to be on intimate terms with power.

Jesus knew how hard it is for those with riches to enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:23), whether they be rich in money, talent, reputation, or status. Contrary to popular opinion, the more exalted the position, the more susceptible its occupant is to temptation. Prominent leaders in any profession must realize that evil would rather corrupt their integrity than that of some obscure subordinate with little influence. So what are those to do who have been privileged to drink deeply from the cup of success? I suggest three strategies: (1) Practice servant leadership involving bottom-up consent rather than top-down coercion, avoiding pride and overconfidence like a plague. (2) Surround yourself with people who will keep you honest by warning candidly when danger signs arise. (3) Never succumb to the view that your burdens are so heavy or your accomplishments are so great that you are entitled to nibble on forbidden fruit.

### III. Sin Always Disguises Its True Character

At the heart of the prosecution of Mr. Clinton was the issue of perjury: Did the President himself lie or influence others to lie on his behalf? Attorneys on both sides have argued about the precise meaning of simple statements, such as to “engage in sex of any kind.” When this exhaustive inquiry resulted in a host of unresolved discrepancies, deliberate ambiguities, and apparent deceptions, they then fell to arguing about just how vague, misleading, or evasive one’s testimony must be in order to constitute perjury. Fearing charges of “neo-Puritanism” or even “sexual McCarthyism,” some were willing to divide the question right down the middle and say of the

impeachment proceedings, “This trial is not about sex, it is about lying.”

Unfortunately, reality cannot be divided into such neat categories because evil by its very nature, is deceptive. In other words, there is no way to sin without lying or to lie without sinning. That is why the epistle of I John equates immorality with darkness and says plainly that “while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth” (1:6). Lust, for example, is a lie because everything about it falsifies the true meaning of sexuality in human experience. Merely to carry out his brief indulgence, the President had to deceive not only Ms. Lewinsky but his wife, his secretary, his Secret Service agents, and his closest confidants, not to mention himself. Long before any depositions were taken, the deed itself was a lie waiting to be discovered. Concupiscence and camouflage are Siamese twins joined together at conception who cannot be separated because each requires the other in order to survive.

This becomes evident as soon as the sin is exposed to public view. Immediately euphemisms are employed in a vain effort to mask its true character. President Clinton had an “inappropriate relationship,” Henry Hyde had “youthful indiscretions,” Dan Burton had “a relationship from which a child was born,” Helen Chenoweth had “a relationship that [she] came to regret,” Bob Livingston “on occasion strayed from [his] marriage.” In all of these sanitized confessions, note the careful effort at damage control. The problem was that of a mismanaged interpersonal relationship needing therapeutic repair. There was hardly a hint either of violating a moral covenant or betraying a transcendent commitment. Contrast the psalmist’s anguished cry, often attributed to David in the aftermath of his affair with Bathsheba, “Against thee, and thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight” (Psalm 51:4).

When we try to disguise “sin” by the addition of a single letter into “spin,” the subterfuge may succeed for a season but is doomed to eventual failure because of the power of pretense to proliferate. Always it takes at least two lies to keep one lie alive, so that the deception quickly multiplies like a Ponzi scheme until it crashes under its own weight. Nixon would concede only that he had “made mistakes” in handling the Watergate break-in, but dodging the issue was itself a mistake that metastasized a “third-rate burglary” into “a cancer on the presidency.” Like a deadly virus that has not been diagnosed, sin that is suppressed begins to spread silently, infecting innocent and guilty alike, until what began as an isolated illness ends as a social epidemic.

It is amazing to contemplate just how disunited we become in the darkness. The Clinton caper involved just one other person, but after only a year its fallout filled both houses of Congress with partisan bickering, prompted an outpouring of angry accusations in the media, and exacerbated the culture wars that already divide our nation into hostile camps. No wonder Paul said that the “works of the flesh” such as “immorality, impurity, and licentiousness” are accompanied by “dissension, party spirit, and envy” (Galatians 5:19-21). Some seem to fear that debauchery in the White House will some-



how corrupt the morals of the nation, particularly its youth, but my concern is that the congressional response has done even greater damage by further polarizing our people and poisoning the spirit of civility so essential to the leadership of any democracy.

By contrast, consider how goodness unites us. The Congress did not wrangle over the testimony which it received from Mother Teresa or from Billy Graham. The pundits who verbally crucified Jimmy Carter when he was President do not now second-guess his missions of mercy to the ends of the earth. Even Protestant-Catholic tensions are transcended when Pope John Paul II tries to relieve the miseries of a repressive regime in Cuba. We usually discount the political impact of goodness, but Paul said that its fruits include “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). I cannot think of anything that America needs more in this troubled hour.

This initial probing of the anatomy of sin, particularly as portrayed in the Clinton-Lewinsky Morality Play, has confronted us with a succession of surprises. That the President of the United States would actually engage in such despicable behavior while on duty in our highest office, then try to cover his tracks with endless evasions, has shown us just how seductively evil insinuates itself into the recesses of the imagination, there to wreak havoc long before anyone discovers its devastating consequences.

But even when due allowance is made for the stealth and stubbornness of sin, surely that does not excuse the culprit from accountability for his actions. Both Mr. Clinton and his detractors are agreed that he is “solely and completely responsible” for his failures. That being the case, we reason, let us determine exactly what happened, pass judgment on its merits in accordance with the rule of law, administer appropriate punishment for any infractions committed, and thereby put the matter behind us. It all seems so simple once sin is forced out of hiding and exposed to plain view. Sad to say, however, this is not when things get easier but actually become much harder to resolve, as we shall see by looking now at each of these strategies for dealing with sin.

#### IV. Sin Distorts Our Efforts to Pass Judgment

Once the indefatigable labors of Special Prosecutor Starr revealed much more than we ever wanted to know about this unseemly episode, the Congress responded by activating the impeachment mechanism provided in the Constitution to determine if “high crimes and misdemeanors” had been committed. A prolonged investigation by the House Judiciary Committee led the lower chamber to adopt four articles of impeachment which were duly forwarded to the Senate for trial. At this point, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court asked each senator to raise his or her right hand and “solemnly swear that in all things appertaining to the trial of the impeachment of William Jefferson Clinton, president of the United States, now pending, you will do impartial justice according to the Constitution and laws, so help you God.”

At last, it seemed, judgment could begin on the bedrock of a sworn duty to apply objective law in equitable fashion. Henry Hyde, chairman of the House managers charged with prosecuting the case, appealed to the sanctity of such an oath as the law’s last line of defense. In a brief introduction, he remarked to the Senate: “To guide you in this grave duty, you’ve taken an oath of impartiality. With the simple words, ‘I do,’ you have pledged to put aside personal bias and partisan interest and to do impartial justice.” After citing Thomas More, who died rather than swear to what he deemed an untruth, Hyde concluded that the significance of an oath taken in public service “will never be the same after this. Depending on what you decide, it will either be strengthened with its power to achieve justice, or it will go the way of so much of our moral infrastructure and become a mere convention full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

So what did the Senate decide to do? It promptly decided to do exactly what the House had done, namely, to caucus and then vote a straight party line on almost every issue involved in the impeachment process. Without attempting to assess the merits of either position, we must ponder what this pattern of response might mean. Does one party somehow have a monopoly on moral judgment while the other party is bereft of ethical insight? Does being a Democrat or a Republican affect one’s ability to understand the plain words of the U.S. Constitution? To be sure, legal experts may sincerely differ on debatable questions such as what constitutes the threshold of impeachability, just as Biblical scholars often disagree on the meaning of some ambiguous Biblical text, but is there any reason why these largely historical and hermeneutical issues should be decided along political party lines? The answer to such questions is painfully obvious. The oath of impartiality enshrines a noble ideal, but disinterested neutrality in judgment seems impossible to sustain even in the Senate of the United States.

The situation is no better in the wider national debate. Our newspapers, periodicals, and talk shows have been filled with endless editorializing, but the pundits are in hopeless disagreement even though the facts of the case are not in dispute. To move from *The Wall Street Journal* to *The New York Times* is to visit two vastly different worlds of opinion, while our local papers easily balance a pro and a con piece on the op-ed page written by commentators of equal erudition, insider information, and political sagacity. These defenders of a free press are sworn to report the news without fear or favor, but their fierce independence seems not to have made them any more impartial than our elected representatives in Congress.

Perhaps the last best hope for dispassionate judgment are those scholars committed to a critical sifting of all the evidence by the highest canons of scholarship, most especially professors of religion whose disciplinary field is political ethics. Such a group recently issued a “Declaration concerning Religion, Ethics, and the Crisis in the Clinton Presidency” signed by some 150 members of their guild. But when they invited dissent to their carefully reasoned case, colleagues of equal academic and religious reputation reached strikingly different conclusions using the same biblical and theological norms.<sup>1</sup>

Consider the implications of this confused situation.

Whether the approach be legal, journalistic, academic, or religious, all of which have erected the strongest possible bulwarks against partisanship, we have not come close to reaching a consensus about how to adjudicate a squalid scandal that everyone agrees was tragically wrong. Why should this be? Because we are not the innocent judging the guilty but are all ensnared in our own complicity with sin that, according to the New Testament, results in futile thinking (Ephesians 4:17), foolish hearts (Romans 1:21), and darkened understanding (Ephesians 4:18). This is precisely why the Scriptures warn so strongly against judgmentalism (Matthew 7:1-2; Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5; James 4:11-12); for, as Paul put it, when we pass judgment upon another we condemn ourselves, because we, the judge, are doing the very same things (Romans 2: 1).

This does not mean that we should give up every effort to render moral and legal verdicts regarding human conduct. But it does mean that we should proceed with extreme caution, recognizing that our own self-interests are always at play. Just as President Clinton confessed to “a critical lapse in judgment” because of his lust for Monica Lewinsky, so does our lust for power, wealth, reputation, or influence corrupt our ability to judge wisely. Before we are tempted to rush to judgment, certain that our conclusions are beyond challenge, perhaps we should notice how often history reverses the verdict of the moment, especially when rendered in a fit of partisan passion.

### V. Sin Frustrates Our Attempts to Administer Punishment

If we are unable to render impartial judgment based on findings of fact, is it any wonder that we are equally divided over what constitutes appropriate punishment? Some would drive Mr. Clinton from office by demanding his immediate resignation or convicting him of criminal acts. Others would publicly censure him, perhaps with a sizable fine for damages, while yet others are certain that he has already suffered enough and should finish out his term as president without further legal harassment. The arguments for each of these options have been debated endlessly and need not be detailed here. Suffice it to say that some wanted to “send a message” to a profligate culture while others feared a puritanical inquisition. Some believed that President Clinton epitomizes a derelict political process while others are sure that Prosecutor Starr represents a legal system gone berserk. Some are convinced that Mr. Clinton has squandered his moral authority while others are equally adamant that his efforts for racial justice and world peace far outweigh his private failings.

As I ponder the briefs for this or that punishment, I see opportunism everywhere: “How can I as a Republican benefit from destroying this man?” versus “How can I as a Democrat benefit from protecting this man?” To be sure, opportunism plays a large part in contemporary politics, but as a moral foundation it is shallow and short-lived at best. To borrow the rhetoric of the old-time revival preachers, is it not time to ask, “Who cares for this man’s eternal soul?” In the Bible, punishment is viewed as a chastisement or discipline designed to bring the recipient to maturity (Hebrews 12:7-11), whereas we

seemed far more concerned with how Bill Clinton’s punishment would benefit *us* than with how it would benefit *him*!

A remedial approach to retribution does not mean that the Bible is somehow “soft on sin.” Indeed its moral rigor towers above our bland ethical relativism, as may be seen from two of its most sobering convictions regarding punishment. First, Scripture couples a warning against a vengeful spirit with the confidence that punishment can be “left to the wrath of God” who will repay whatever vengeance is required (Romans 12:19). This is not the promise of “hell fire damnation” in the afterlife, for Paul had already shown in Romans how the “wrath of God” is a present, active process at work in our world dealing with “all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth” (Romans 1:18). Regardless of how the American people deal with President Clinton, we can be certain that God is dealing with his sin in accordance with the divine will.

Second, Scripture recognizes the bitter paradox that sin itself punishes most those who serve it best. This is vividly pictured in the one-word metaphor of “wages” in Romans 6:23.<sup>2</sup> The term referred in the ancient world to subsistence pay which a soldier received for serving in the military. With biting irony Paul says that sin makes grandiose offers to entice recruits but ends up doling out only a “minimum wage” on payday. Since “wages” are paid continuously for as long as we serve sin, this “death” of which the apostle speaks is not merely the cessation of life viewed as a final penalty, but is that experience of emptiness and helplessness and wretchedness that haunts sinners every day that they live without a fresh infusion of the life-giving power of God. Whatever pain Mr. Clinton may feel from the humiliations heaped upon him for his gross misconduct, it cannot compare with the bitter dregs which he has already tasted from the dreadful cup of poison served up to him by sin.

Consider: here was a man who parlayed his extraordinary political skills into two decisive electoral mandates at a time when a robust economy and the moderation of Cold War tensions offered unprecedented opportunities to lead the American people. With a little luck and a lot of statesmanship, William Jefferson Clinton could have taken his place in history as one of our greatest Presidents, but, instead, he finds his record forever tarnished by a third-rate scandal that, if anything, gives indiscretion a bad name. Having taken the measure of Monica Lewinsky, Paula Jones, and Linda Tripp, we can only shake our heads and sigh, “Seldom has so much been lost for so little!” Every time the President asks himself, “How could I, like Esau, squander so great a birthright for so miserable a mess of pottage?,” he dies another of the thousand deaths which are his to endure for as long as he lives.

When Richard Nixon was in the depths of his despondency over Watergate, he spent one of his last evenings in the White House with Henry Kissinger raging against his defeat. The Secretary of State took his measure of the shattered President in terms reminiscent of our time: “To have striven so hard, to have molded a public personality out of so amorphous an identity, to have sustained that superhuman effort only to end with

every weakness disclosed and every error compounding the downfall—that was a fate of biblical proportions.”<sup>3</sup> Near midnight, Nixon suggested that they pray together in the Lincoln Bedroom. As an obviously distraught President knelt, Kissinger recalled a passage from Aeschylus:

Pain that cannot forget  
falls drop by drop  
upon the heart  
until in our despair  
there comes wisdom  
through the awful  
grace of God.<sup>4</sup>

## VI. Sin Refuses to Depart Once Its Dirty Work Is Done

Already our morality play has demolished two glib assumptions about how to deal with sin: (1) that if only we know all of the facts we will thereby render impartial judgment; and (2) that once we determine the legality of a matter we will, on that basis, administer equitable punishment. Now we must examine a third assumption, namely, that by inflicting appropriate retribution on the guilty we will bring closure to the ugly episode. The two words heard most frequently as the nation has wearied of the Clinton scandal focuses the problem for us: how do we put sin *behind* us so that we can move *beyond* it?

If the recent impeachment proceedings represent the climax of a formal effort to render judgment and inflict punishment, then we may ask if this is to be the end of the affair? Special Prosecutor Starr shows no sign of wanting to close shop, which means that he might exhaust every effort to bring Mr. Clinton into criminal court, either before or after he exits the White House, for a trial which, with appeals, could take up to six years to complete. Regardless of whether this eventuated in the imprisonment of a former President, would the agitation stop there, or would it continue to inflame national passions well into the next century? Indeed, would the death of Mr. Clinton even farther into the future finally put the matter to rest? If we may learn from the prince of philanderers in the modern White House, remember that the most scathing attack on John F. Kennedy’s sexual exploits did not come until thirty-

four years after his death with the publication in 1997 of Seymour Hersch’s *The Dark Side of Camelot*. This is only to say that sin does not willingly disappear “behind” us once sentence is passed on its victim but continues to feed on the carcass of its conquest until every shred of decency has been devoured.

This stubborn refusal of sin to let us move “beyond” it raises in acute form the question: How, then, do we cleanse the stream of our national life once it has been contaminated with moral pollution? When Gerald Ford inherited the presidency from a disgraced Richard Nixon, he quickly realized that he could not focus the nation’s attention on its most pressing agenda as long as it was bitterly divided over the endless legal wranglings in which an embittered Nixon was embroiled with Special Prosecutor Jaworski. His only solution was to “grant a full, free and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States” committed during his presidency. Ford took this action at great political risk, not for the sake of his predecessor, but for the sake of the country. As one of his military aides, Major Bob Barrett, told him: “We’re all Watergate junkies. Some of us are mainlining, some are sniffing, some are lacing it with something else, but all of us are addicted. This will go on and on unless someone steps in and says that we, as a nation, must go cold turkey. Otherwise, we’ll die of an overdose.”<sup>5</sup>

So, who will step in with the cleansing word to keep us from becoming a nation of Lewinsky junkies? The paradox of pardon and punishment—indeed, of pardon as punishment—is especially difficult for decent religious folk to accept, as Paul saw so clearly in Romans 1-3. Justice seems to require retribution, while mercy seems to require forgiveness, and we find it exceedingly hard to reconcile the two. Indeed, how can God be both holiness and love in equal measure to sinner and saint alike at the same time? Some clearly want to make Mr. Clinton the scapegoat for all that has gone wrong in our country since the 1960s, but, no matter how severely he might be punished, it would not finally placate his enemies and would serve to embitter his friends.

No, for all of his incredible capacity both to fall headlong into temptation and then to survive its dreadful consequences, Mr. Clinton cannot serve as our scapegoat for he is ensnared in the same sin that doth so easily beset us all (Hebrews 12: 1). In



the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement, the solution of what to do with sin came in two parts. First, a goat was to be sacrificed as an offering for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:15-19). Then a second goat was to have the sins of the people transferred to its head by the imposition of hands and driven as an innocent victim into the wilderness, never to return, thus bearing all the iniquities of the people "to a solitary land" (Leviticus 16:20-22). This two-fold ritual enacted the drama of sins being both forgiven by the shedding of blood and then forgotten by being removed "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).<sup>6</sup> Now if something like that could happen to the Clinton Sex Scandal, then it would, indeed, be put "behind" us so that we could move "beyond" it.

Do you begin to see how we are being driven by the necessities of our national tragedy into the arms of the gospel story? What if someone took upon himself all the sins, not only of Mr. Clinton, but of his detractors and defenders as well? What if that person were willing to accept all of the punishment that one side wants to inflict on Mr. Clinton and the other side wants to inflict upon his tormentors? What if he offered to take away all of the anger and rancor and contempt that festers in our nation's soul and never bring it back again? I ask you: would such a person, doing such a deed at the cost of his own life, wring from our grateful hearts a sincere repentance, a true confession, and a firm resolve to live by the better angels of our nature? Or would we spurn such an offer, preferring to let him die in vain that we might continue to enjoy the sweet satisfactions of our self-righteous revenge?

Sceptics will doubtless find this solution frankly incredible, as if by magic an innocent party could suddenly appear to offer his very life for a flawed President and his contentious countrymen. Believers may well resent any attempt to take an act which they have long cherished as the source of personal redemption and apply it to the healing of a political crisis not of their making. But I would remind you that Jesus of Nazareth did appear when no one expected him, that he did expose himself to the deadly crossfire of Jewish and Roman hostilities, and that he did manage to get himself killed by the leaders of both groups because he refused to fan their partisan hatreds. The crucifixion of Christ was a *political* execution from start to fin-

ish in which Jesus died to demonstrate to the warring factions of his day a love that carried the potential of reconciling even the bitterest of enemies. At first his revolutionary way was brutally rejected, but soon there appeared a community of the forgiven in which there was neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. Old animosities had been transcended for enemies had become one in him (Galatians 3:28).

If the whole sorry saga of the Clinton scandal tells us anything, it is that we are incapable of dealing with our sin. We cannot resist it, we cannot conceal it, we cannot remove it. Which brings us hard up against the core conviction of the Christian gospel: *only God can deal with sin!* He has revealed a word that names the darkness for what it really is. He has raised up prophets willing to rebuke even kings for their moral folly. He has forgiven the sins of every broken and contrite heart. He has called into being a community where evil is actively opposed as an outrage against the human spirit. Most of all, he has sent his Son to make peace in place of party strife by tearing down the dividing walls of hostility between us (Ephesians 2:14). We have looked to Washington for answers that will never come. This is a time, not for sullen armistice, but for radical healing, a healing which will come as we turn to "the Lamb of God who *takes away* the sin of the world" (John 1:29). ■

<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Fackre, editor, *Judgment Day at the White House: A Critical Declaration Exploring Moral Issues and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999).

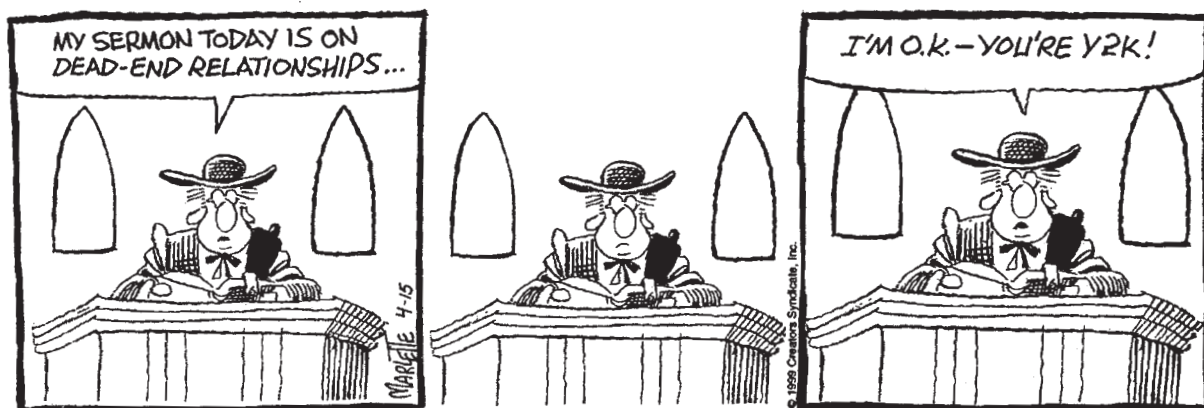
<sup>2</sup> Hans Wolfgang Heidland, "Opinion," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), vol. V, pp. 591-2.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), pp. 1207-8.

<sup>4</sup> Kissinger, p. 1210.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Book of Leviticus," *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), vol. I, p. 1112.



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# Millennial Madness: An Ethical Crisis

By Richard V. Pierard

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Millennial madness is sweeping the land. It's the end of the world as we know it, so the prophets of the end times tell us. Forecasts of doom and despair fill the airwaves as Christian radio and television preachers work overtime to warn people of the wrath of God that is about to be poured out on the earth. Best-selling books and videos, both Christian and secular, and Hollywood movies herald the impending catastrophe. Public attention is riveted on the expected Y2K computer meltdown, and survivalists stockpile food, water, generators, and weapons in preparation for the imminent collapse of technological civilization. In other words, what really is nothing more than an artificial calendar change—from 1999 to 2000 in the Western calendar—has been transformed into an apocalyptic event of unprecedented proportions.

Newspapers are full of stories about the silliness that is occurring in this next to the last year of the twentieth century and second millennium of the “common era.” Just to cite one example, an article in the April 5, 1999 issue of my local newspaper, the *Terre Haute Tribune Star*, described the “millennium baby” craze. The writer pointed out that some medical experts had declared Friday, April 9 to be the best date for a woman to conceive a baby that would be born on New Year's Day 2000. In Chicago some hotels were even sponsoring packages with special rates for couples who wanted a room that night. There were Internet sites with conception tips, and one offered a \$49.99 millennium conception kit, complete with fertility and ovulation predictor, pregnancy test, scented massage oil, and hand-dipped red candles. The staffs at the two hospitals in my community were developing plans to insure that adequate personnel would be on hand to take care of the New Year's Eve rush.

It is easy to dismiss the millennial madness as simply another fad. However, thoughtful Christians have every reason to be concerned about what is taking place. The untrammled apocalypticism of our times has infiltrated the Christian doctrine of eschatology or “the last things” and egregiously perverted it. Jesus had promised his disciples even before his departure from the earth that he would come again, and the New Testament letters are full of references to his imminent appearing. As the church came under increasing persecution, the Book of Revelation was written to assure the faithful that the forces of

good would surely triumph over those of evil and the divine purpose would be fulfilled. Christ would be victorious over all his foes, and his people would live and reign with him on earth. Thus, the return of Christ has been the “blessed hope” (Tit. 2:13) for believers in all places and times. The unfortunate linkage of the Second Coming with the millennial fever of our days by many in the conservative or evangelical community raises some important ethical questions.

## The Obsession with Prophecy and Temptation to Engage in “Date-setting”

The last decade of the twentieth century has seen an obsession with biblical prophecy and the imminent return of Christ. Just as Eve could not resist the temptation of the forbidden fruit in the Garden, so likewise preachers and writers throughout the ages have succumbed to the temptation to set a date for the Second Coming, even though Jesus said in the plainest speech possible in Matthew 24:36 that no one knows the day and hour of his return, not even he himself. Many people remember the prediction of William Miller that Christ would come on October 22, 1844 and the “Great Disappointment,” as Adventist historians named it, that resulted when Jesus did not appear; and of course there were the repeated efforts of Jehovah's Witnesses to set a specific date for the return. The fact that date-setters have had a one hundred percent failure rate seems not to deter others from giving it a try, such as the Bible teacher Leonard Sale-Harrison who in the interwar years identified Mussolini as the Antichrist and placed the return in his own generation.

The post-war resurgence of Protestant evangelicalism has spawned a whole new crop of preachers and writers who are convinced that the Second Coming is around the corner. They reach this conclusion by playing games with numbers in Scripture, a.k.a. numerology, and squeezing concrete details out of obscure texts in Daniel, Revelation, Ezekiel, and other biblical books, much as interpreters of the sixteenth-century French writer Michel Nostradamus do with his materials. Hal Lindsey, the author of the prophecy blockbuster *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) and numerous subsequent works that essentially recycled the ideas (and often the material) he laid out in this first book, predicted that Christ would return for his church in 1988. (Evangelical prophecy aficionados call this pre-Second Coming event the “rapture.”) When that did not happen, he conveniently shelved his forecast and discovered new apocalyptic meanings in the old texts. He confidently assured his readers that they described modern warfare and

stressed that we today are living at the end of the age and are truly the “terminal generation.”

Since Lindsey and nearly all other writers had identified the Soviet Union as the monolithic fountainhead of all evil and the communist bloc as an evil empire engaged in a Manichaean struggle with the free world that would consummate in the Antichrist’s world rule, the fall of communism presented them with a monumental problem. This was quickly resolved by finding a new all-purpose enemy, the New World Order, as described in televangelist Pat Robertson’s 1991 book of the same title. The grand design includes the triumph of New Age religion, the collapse of the U.S. financial system and the turning over of its defense and sovereignty to the United Nations, and the establishment of a one-world government. The new rulers will use computer technology and satellites to control and monitor the actions and movements of all people and introduce a world currency and cashless society that enable them to control all wealth. The next step in this scenario of doom is the appearance of a demonized madman who will seize power in the world-wide, homogenized government and force life into the mold of the New World Order in a manner that communism was never able to achieve. He will even pass himself off as a savior of the people. This period is known as the “Great Tribulation” and here is fulfilled the prophecy of the Antichrist. But just when all seems to be lost, Christ comes down out of the sky in power and glory, destroys this evil world-system at the battle of Armageddon, and establishes his millennial kingdom of peace and righteousness. The saints who have been raptured will accompany him back to earth and those who found Christ as savior during the Tribulation will join them.

Some evangelical writers were even more specific about when Christ would come. Edgar Whisenant created a major prophetic stir in 1988 with his book *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be* in 1988, in which he speculated that Christ would come for his church around September 11-13, 1988. Harold Camping, president of a network of Christian radio stations, published the books *1994?* and *Are You Ready* which forecasted the return on September 6, 1994. When that did not occur, he subsequently set other dates—September 29, October 2, and finally March 3 1, 1995—each time backpedaling because of a prophetic miscalculation. He had developed a chronological blueprint that combined a sophisticated system of dating and numerology.

This year a new crop of date-setting prophets have concluded that Jesus will come on January 1, 2000. They calculate, from the reference in II Peter 3:8, “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day,” that 6,000 years have passed since the creation of humanity. Now it is time for the seventh day, the Sabbath rest, the one thousand year reign of Christ on earth. An article in a recent issue of *USA Today* reported that the hotels in Jerusalem have been booked to overflowing by gullible Christians who believe they will be there to welcome Jesus when the skies open and he descends upon the Mount of Olives (the traditional site of the Ascension). They then expect to rule with him in the millenni-

al kingdom. Some are so confident of the event that they bought one-way tickets to Israel. They don’t expect to be going back home. Look for a scramble at the Tel Aviv airport on January 2!

Most evangelical prophecy buffs operate from the standpoint of dispensational premillennialism, a complex system of biblical interpretation which sees God dealing with humankind in different ways at various periods in time. We are currently living in the age of “grace” or the “church age.” However, when the church is raptured from the earth, God will resume his dealings with Israel, which had been suspended when his chosen people rejected their Messiah. By this time Israel will have returned to the land in unbelief. During this Tribulation period the false savior, the Antichrist, will usurp power in Israel, rule the world from Jerusalem, and eventually be overthrown by Christ himself in the apocalyptic conflict at Armageddon. This means Israel occupies a central role in prophecy; and evangelicals have a special love for this nation. They welcomed the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, as that meant the keystone was now in place in the prophetic structure. The Israeli government, of course, welcomed the unqualified support evangelicals were giving to its existence on the dubious principle of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” and overlooked the prophetic reasons for this backing.

However, the excesses that can arise from such an interpretation were well-demonstrated when on January 14, 1999 televangelist Jerry Falwell, in an unguarded moment, said the Antichrist would be Jewish and male, because that was what Jesus was. As Falwell told a crowd in Kingsport, Tennessee: “Is he alive and here today? Probably. Because when he appears during the Tribulation period he will be a full-grown counterfeit of Christ. Of course, he’ll be Jewish. Of course, he’ll pretend to be Christ. And if in fact the Lord is coming soon, and he’ll [the Antichrist] be an adult at the presentation of himself, he must be alive somewhere today.” This statement evoked a storm of protest from Jewish leaders who declared that calling the Antichrist a Jew could fan the flames of anti-Semitism, and the wily evangelist who for years has courted the Jewish community had to back down and apologize for his tactless comment.

As has been shown, the intense desire of Christians to experience the Lord’s return in their own lifetimes has often led to hasty and rash predictions. We are seeing this phenomenon again in the millennial madness of this year. The inevitable failure of the specifically forecasted events resulted in embarrassment and disappointment in the past, yet people keep making new predictions for the future. The temptation to set dates for Christ’s coming is just too great to resist for many earnest believers.

### Sensationalism

The second ethical problem facing Christians this year is sensationalism. Some of it is a by-product of the prophetic excesses, but more important is its “chicken little” interpretation of the Y2K computer problem. The doom and gloom reports are flooding the airways and bookstores. The pessimists

suggest that computer clocks will jump back to 1900 at midnight, January 1, 2000, because of the universal use of two-digit dates in programs (the last two digits of the year) and computer-governed equipment will simply shut down. All sorts of horror scenarios have been envisioned—planes crashing, electrical power and water systems failing, bank computers crashing, the stock market in turmoil, an economic recession, and so on. As one of the most popular prophets of doom, Michael S. Hyatt, warned in the January 11, 1999 *Christianity Today*: “We’ve a digital hurricane coming that’s got the potential for simultaneous, multiple disruptions. I am more pessimistic today than I was. That this hasn’t been raised to a national emergency is amazing.” His best-selling non-fiction book, *The Millennium Bug*, and novel, *Y2K: The Day the World Shut Down*, are regularly featured on the evangelicalism’s most popular radio show, that of James Dobson.

Religious right activists believe that the Y2K meltdown will paralyze the country and turn it into a battle zone. When America and the rest of the corrupt Western world is plunged into anarchy, the way will be open for fundamentalist leaders to seize control, set up a theocratic government, and usher in the kingdom of God. This is clearly the belief of financial guru Gary North, an exponent of Christian Reconstructionism, the idea that the Old Testament legal codes should be made normative in our society and that will reorient it toward God. In contrast to the premillennialists, he rejects the idea of a great tribulation and believes that Christians can overpower the forces of evil and implement the reign of Christ.

Many Y2K alarmists believe that the breakdown is purposely planned by liberals or nefarious characters to bring in a one-world government. When the social collapse occurs, people will look to some global realignment, some leader, who will restore order and care for us. Perhaps this will mean the rule of the Antichrist is at hand. In fact, the dire predictions of the Y2K hysteria hawkers could become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. People may begin to panic, withdraw their money from banks, and destabilize the economic system, thus forcing the Federal government to take firm action to shore up the economy. In doing this, individual freedoms could be jeopardized as the regime moved to combat social chaos.

Others are taking no chances and making preparations for

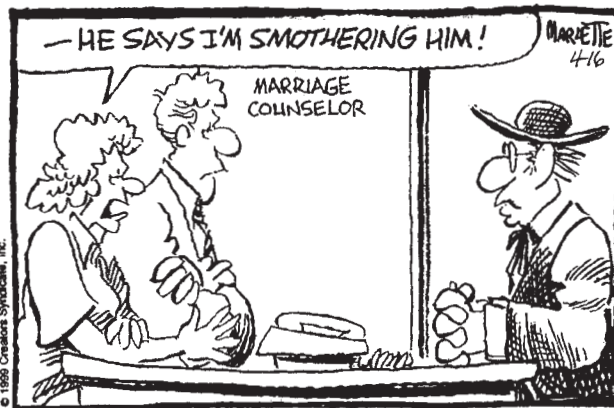
this possibility. They are the survivalists who are stockpiling freeze-dried and canned food, storing up wood and coal, drawing money out of the bank, purchasing generators and hand mills, and even gathering weapons to drive off those who had not prepared for the crisis. Some survivalists even have taken to the woods, as they anticipate life in the cities will come to a complete standstill and urban chaos will be the order of the day. They even have a proof text, Proverbs 27:12: “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.”

This needless fear and alarmism flies in the face of the message of Jesus who taught his disciples to “fear not.” Yes, humankind should fear God’s wrath, but it will not be experienced if one has turned to Christ in faith and received him as Savior. Our mission is to spread the gospel, the good news of Christ who died for our sins that we might live with him throughout all time and eternity, not to encourage people to hunker down for a millennial crisis, real or imagined.

### The Quest for Commercial Gain

The millennial madness has opened the way for enormous profit-making. All one has to do is run some of the millennial sites on the world-wide web or read the ads in an average evangelical magazine in order to see what is for sale. One can find preserved foods, generators, wood stoves, food mills, medical supplies, multipurpose soap, fuel tanks, and all sorts of other survival gear for sale. Others will help you to accumulate gold, the only thing that will have value when the money system collapses.

Even worse is the shameless exploitation of the Y2K fear and the hope of Christ’s imminent return by the evangelical media. For example, Michael Hyatt is marketing *The Millennium Bug Personal Survival Kit: Everything You and Your Family Must Know to Get from One Side of the Crisis to the Other*, which includes audio tapes, a resource manual, and a copy of his non-fiction book on the topic, all for a limited time price of \$89, a fifty percent savings, so the advertisement in a leading evangelical newsmagazine says. Shaunti Christine Feldhahn, who claims to be a former Federal Reserve Board analyst, recently published the book *Y2K: The Millennium*



*Bug—A Balanced Christian Response*, which shows Christians how God can use the turmoil and crisis to accomplish his ultimate purposes. To make sure the profits keep flowing, the 31-year old author started a “ministry” called the Joseph Project 2000. She travels around the country speaking and holding conferences to show churches how they can work across denominational and racial lines to prepare for the crisis by checking out their computers, buying and storing food, working with utility companies to see that they are Y2K compliant, and even digging wells where emergency water might be needed.

The January-February 1999 catalog of the Christian Book Distributors (Peabody, Mass.) is a good indicator of just how much is out there. It contains two full pages of books, videos and audio tapes on “Prophecy & End Times,” and I counted 131 titles by such authors as Steve Farrar, Michael Hyatt, Tim LaHaye, Jim Bakker, Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe, John Hagee, and Grant Jeffrey, all currently big names on the millennial circuit. Books on these topics are such hot items that CBD’s 1999 Winter Closeout Catalog only listed four items in its “prophecy” section, and two of these were scholarly works. One could never accuse end times devotees of having scholarly interests. Sensationalism sells books; carefully thought out ideas do not.

Perhaps the biggest bucks of all currently being made on end times themes are the *Left Behind* novels, co-authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Succinctly described by *Christianity Today* as a “seven-volume post-Rapture, dispensational soap opera,” they center on the lives of people left behind on planet earth after the Rapture. The first four titles that had been published by the end of 1998 had sold in excess of three million copies, and at one point the novels held the top three positions on *Publishers Weekly’s* religion best-sellers’ paperback list as well as number one on the hardcover list—a first-time publishing feat. The newest title even made the *New York Times* list in spring 1999. For children ages 10 to 14 there was *Left Behind: The Kids*, a series of brief paperback novels about four children who had missed the Rapture but then found Christ and realized how urgent it was to tell others. Hal Lindsey, the all-time moneymaker on the prophecy circuit, has had to take a back seat to this series of end times blockbusters.

### What Does This All Mean?

Speculation about the events surrounding the Second Coming and its timing have fascinated people since time immemorial, and it will continue into the new millennium. In fact, the apocalypticists manifest a “have your cake and eat it too” state of mind. As Christian computer expert Steve Hewitt points out in the online version of his magazine *Christian*

*Computing*, an enormous amount of progress has been made solving the Y2K problem. Yet those who are on the speaking circuit around the nation have books and videos to sell, and they continue to instill fear and panic about the upcoming crisis. Many of them feel that technology has been made into a god, and thus the anticipated Y2K meltdown is a good thing that will bring us back to the old-time religion and the values of yesteryear.

They see this as a punishment for America because of the decline of moral values. They are like Jeremiah, warning us that disaster is coming as a result of our sins. Thus with Y2K becoming less and less of a threat to disrupting our society, they are starting to feel like Jonah who was sent to tell Nineveh to repent or be destroyed. After the people of the city repented and the destruction was averted, he was depressed and angry.

Hewitt notes that another reason for the difficulty in letting go of Y2K as a national or worldwide disaster is that these prophets have seen it as a “sign of the times,” that is, of the soon coming of the Lord. The end of technology will be the beginning of the Tribulation. One could argue just as easily that the increase of technology—the ability to track every person and for all of our money to be kept electronically—as a sign of the soon coming of Christ. However, if one has made Y2K a “sign of the times,” then he or she cannot go back and say that we are actually solving the computer problem without in some way saying that the Second Coming has been delayed.

What the prophets of doom tell us is: “It’s the end of the world as we know it.” But what if it is not? What if life continues into the twenty-first century with no significant disruption other than hangovers from the big millennium parties that will be occurring around the world from Times Square in New York to the Great Pyramid in Egypt to Sydney Harbour in Australia? Will the preachers of hysteria apologize to the rest of us for having been wrong, for having misread the signs of the times? No, of course not. They will tell us that God heard the prayers of his people and stayed the hand of judgment—at this time. Still the apocalypse will occur. It has only been postponed, but they will come up with new predictions of disaster.

In January 2000 the remainder tables in the Christian bookstores will be piled with unsold books prophesying that which did not happen. But the ideas and emotive descriptions will be recycled into new books proclaiming new disasters. After all, sensation sells. Once the millennial madness has passed, the ethical problems of profiting from the return of Christ and building up false expectations among sincere believers will remain. It is unlikely that conservative evangelicals will learn much from the millennial washout. ■



# The New Millennium Manual: A Book Review

By Darold Morgan

[Dr. Darold Morgan is President Emeritus of the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.]

*The New Millennium Manual.* Robert G. Clouse, Robert N. Hosack, and Richard V. Pierard. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999. Paper \$12.95.

Here is must reading for anyone interested in the millennial issues which are now making headlines. Tied in with an effective historical overview of millennial theology are the inescapable ethical issues which result from some obvious applications.

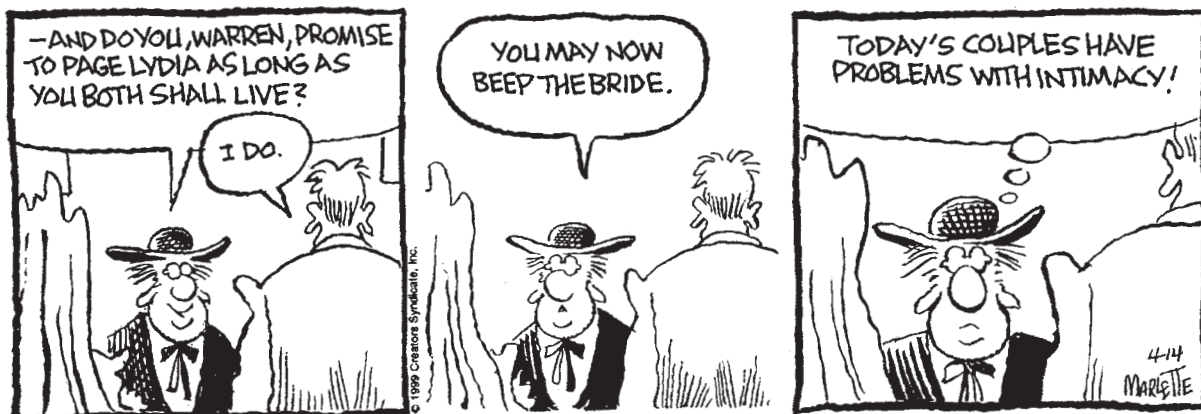
The current Y2K crisis for our computer-driven economy, now nearing the twenty-first century, has produced a veritable army of evangelical alarmists who are preying on the fears of uncounted individuals. Many of these are quite possibly sincere in their beliefs. The results, however, are a strange combination of some questionable (though highly profitable) business ventures related to an escalation of eschatological frenzy that will inevitably run into a crashing dead-end.

This book, *The New Millennium Manual*, has a distinct calming effect to the sincere Bible student. It combines an excellent historical overview of millennial theology with a generous dose of common sense. It will be effective in countering the histrionics of the current "millennial madness." And at the same time the sincere student of end-times trends will discover in these three authors' approach a balanced, sensible, timely direction which is urgently, I think desperately, needed.

Some of the strengths of "The New Millennium Manual" are: (1) Its format is refreshing and readable. (2) The use of illustrations and cartoons adds to the reader's enjoyment. (3) Though there are three authors, there is throughout the book

an obvious unity in style, content, and conclusions. Let's face it—eschatological theology can be both controversial and cantankerous. These authors avoid both pitfalls. (4) They present clearly and even-handedly the outlines and backgrounds of the various millennial positions with the unspoken assumption that the reader is responsible for choosing his or her own direction. (5) An additional plus of this book is the very helpful background of each millennial concept from the early days of Christian theology to the current frenzy being whipped up by some of the "terminal generation" zealots. From Augustine's adoption of the amillennial position to Hal Lindsey's contributions of a colorful and debatable dispensationalism, these authors delve into the extremes and norms of end-time theology. They touch upon the sexual promiscuity of David Koresh and the Branch Davidian movement, the blatant racism of some of the para-military movements which have an apocalyptic overtone, and the exorbitant monetary rewards in Hal Lindsey's publishing enterprises. They believe one needs to be aware of the abnormal movements as well as the more normal ones embracing the sincere hope for the soon return of Jesus to this world. It is all a part of understanding what they call "apocalyptic madness."

Their fresh and succinct handling of the varied approaches of millennial theologies really come down to this: this book is mandatory reading for serious Bible students. Premillennialism, post-millennialism, amillennialism, and dispensational millennialism are reviewed briefly but objectively and helpfully. Dispensationalism comes in for the most extensive treatment perhaps because it is the most vocal of all the positions. Dispensationalist views about Israel, their insistence on biblical literalism and inerrancy when it serves their purposes



es, and the on-going Near East political crises have contributed much to the current debate about millennial issues.

It comes as no surprise to discover that the “date-setters” in eschatological events are as old as Christian theology itself. An additional conclusion comes inescapably: nothing seems to phase them. The Y2K crisis is simply fresh fuel for an old subject. This volume calmly approaches the end-time speculations of several highly publicized figures today such as Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, Hal Lindsay, Tim LaHaye, and others. Much of their concern here is directed toward the wider impact of the influence of these teachings on the “international, social, political and cultural landscape.” (p. 137.)

The authors’ treatment of millennialism as a worldwide phenomenon is especially valuable. They trace “the development of American political and moral destiny within a religious framework” with Ronald Reagan being the prime example as a secular exponent of civil millennialism. Whether or not one agrees with their conclusions, the reader can hardly ignore these provocative insights. Fascism, communism, Islamic millennialism, Catholic apocalypticism, and occultic prophecy are examined from this eschatological point of view. It makes for fascinating reading.

One of the finest quotations in the book (and there are many) is the excerpt from St. Augustine: “He who loves the coming of the Lord is not he who affirms it is far off, nor is it he who says it is near. It is he, who, whether it be far or near, awaits it with sincere faith, steadfast hope, and fervent love.” This introduces the final chapter on the meaning of the millennium. The authors reflect a balanced philosophy and interpretation that not only results in an enhanced appreciation of the doctrine of the Lord’s return, but it serves as an enlightening guide in this field of thought where many extremes abound.

Eschatology is a vital part of biblical truth, but its powerful edge has been often blunted by radical extremism. This book reaffirms the ultimate triumph of God, moderates the excessive emphasis placed by the dispensationalists on current events, puts in focus the peculiarities of religious nationalism, and wisely dampens the current millennial madness. With refreshing candor in this unusual doctrinal setting, the authors conclude with a strong call for justice, peace, equality, and stewardship. These, they say, should be the natural outworking of a dynamic faith in Jesus Christ as Lord who, in God’s time, is coming again! ■

## A WOMAN’S YEARS

By Kathryn Shamburger

[Kathryn Shamburger lives in Tyler, Texas and is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

Where did the years go?  
I turned and they’d fled.  
My sandpile, my paper dolls  
Under my bed.  
My shiny bicycle  
All silver and blue  
Long ago vanished.  
My doll Patsy, too.  
Those years wearing bobby socks  
A sweater and skirt  
Arms filled with books  
And yet still time to flirt.  
That walk down the aisle  
And vows spoken with prayer  
It seems such a little while  
Since we were there.  
I can just see the diapers  
There on the line  
Clean babies all fed  
And to think they were mine.  
Each stumbled a little  
But held my hand tight.  
Now their babies wake them  
In dead of the night.  
Where did the years go?  
Oh, they could not stay  
And I would not keep them.  
Hey, what’s on today?

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# The Secular State in Historical Perspective

By John M. Swomley

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

Americans today are faced with a serious ethical problem. Are we prepared to give up separation of church and state, the unique American contribution to constitutional government adopted at the end of British colonial rule? Or will we be seduced into adopting the political agenda of the Vatican and its right-wing Protestant allies? That political agenda, however much some of whose items may appeal to our prejudices, can only be achieved by religious control of the Congress, the Presidency, and the Courts.

When our ancestors decided against remaining a confederation of British colonies, they decided to form "A more perfect union." That union was not only a break with monarchy but became an openly and intentionally secular state unlike those in Europe that claimed divine authority or religious allegiance. The United States was organized by the will of the people. The only reference to religion in the Constitution was Article 6, Section 3, that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification for office or public trust under the United States." Even the requirement to support the Constitution could be taken either by an oath or by affirmation.

This decision that the United States must be a secular state was in large part a reaction to theocracy or religious rule by the clergy or established churches in colonial America. This was the case in Massachusetts under the Puritans and in Anglican Virginia where the Governor exercised the ecclesiastical prerogatives of the English crown and also supervised the Anglican episcopacy. Except in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, there were elements of theocracy or religious requirements or established churches in the colonies.<sup>1</sup>

There was also censorship and severe penalties in some colonies for blasphemy. Even in Maryland where there was an "Act of Toleration" granting religious liberty, there were penalties for derogatory "speeches, words or language concerning the Holy Trinity or any of the three persons therein." Critical words concerning the Virgin Mary or the Apostles were punishable by "force, whipping, imprisonment and banishment."<sup>2</sup>

The situation in the United States today is quite different as a result of the Constitution's first ten and the fourteenth Amendments and various Supreme Court decisions. There are, however, numerous actions by state and national legislatures that compromise the maintenance of a secular government and even greater threats by religious pressure groups.

Before outlining these it is essential to discuss the meaning of

the word "secular", which comes from the Latin word "saecular" meaning "age" and also "world." It had a particular meaning to the early Christian church, which saw the existing political authority or social system as distinct from the church, which was the community of those who had already entered the new age of loyalty to a specific Christian understanding of God.

A second meaning is identical with the word "neutral." A secular school is neutral with respect to religion. It takes no position for or against the various religious expressions such as Judaism, Islam, Christianity, or its Protestant and Roman Catholic branches. It also takes no position for or against humanism, atheism, or other non-religious movements. The absence of a formal expression of religion signifies verbal neutrality. A teacher's attitude of respect for persons, and teaching which values cooperation and caring may demonstrate religious values. However, a teacher may not verbalize or attempt to teach specific doctrines of a religion.

A third meaning of the word "secular" was given some years ago by V.T. Thayer, who used it in the description of a "secular method of teaching." By this he meant a) an avoidance of dogmatism and indoctrination and a rejection of all attempts by "pressure groups and parochial-minded people to use the schools as instruments for imposing their partisan . . . convictions" on students; b) endorsement of Horace Mann's statement that the function of education is not so much "to inculcate opinions and beliefs as to impart the means of their correct formation;" c) respect for the convictions of others: "the absolutes which a person cherishes for him or herself . . . are to be viewed as relative when applied to one's neighbor"; and d) an assumption that the school does not supply all the ingredients for a full life. Many things must be left to the home and to other community agencies, religious, and nonreligious.<sup>3</sup>

A fourth meaning of the word "secular" is freedom from ecclesiastical control. Such freedom is the result of a process known as secularization. Secularization is a historical process rooted in the concept of monotheism and doctrines of creation, wherein Judaism and Christianity held that humans were given responsibility for the earth as God's stewards. This destroyed the belief that events on earth were dictated by the stars or a pantheon of gods such as Jupiter and Venus. Because this view robbed the Greeks and Romans of their gods, the early Christians were called "atheists." This view of a world created by a dependable and omniscient God whose laws could be discovered led to investigation of the laws by which the world operates, in other words, to modern science. In turn, modern science destroyed the three-dimensional view of heaven above, earth below, and hell beneath the earth and bolstered the idea that we are not puppets

of cosmic forces and cannot blame our human condition on God or a devil. It is humans who created the war system and racial segregation. It is humans who can eradicate disease such as cancer and can end war by disarmament and a global community.

Unfortunately there was a tremendous set-back to secularization when a powerful church in the centuries following Constantine not only identified itself with the imperial structure of the Roman Empire, but sought to dominate it. It ignored Jesus' rejection of the Jewish theocratic state and its legalism. "Man was not made for the Sabbath," Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man." He refused to identify the Kingdom of God with any state or law and rejected the idea of religion as dominance or control by defining his own mission as one of servanthood.

The process of secularization was damaged by theological dogma and ecclesiastical hierarchies and attacks on Copernicus, Galileo, and Darwin. Nevertheless events such as the Protestant reformation which sundered a monolithic church; the American and French revolutions; the industrial revolution which urbanized and organized people around another set of values; and world wars, all contributed to the process of secularization.

The effort of the Vatican to maintain its power over Europe through concordats such as those with Mussolini and Hitler, its support of fascism in Croatia, Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain and Portugal, and silence about the Jewish Holocaust also contributed to the ongoing process of secularization. It exposed the Roman Catholic church as a power structure and handmaiden of nationalism; and the continued findings of science eventually forced such embarrassments as the admission of error in opposing the views of Copernicus and Galileo.

However, after World War II the Vatican again tried to shape the world in the image of the Holy Roman Empire. Vatican-sponsored Christian Democratic parties were organized in most of Western Europe and some Latin-American countries. Then, for a time, the Second Vatican Council began the process of dialogue with the world rather than conquering it. This effort had its success in continued dialogue with Protestants and Jews; but with the ascendancy of Pope John Paul II, things changed again.

John Paul II not only identified the Roman Catholic church with nationalism in Poland and Eastern Europe, but encouraged an alliance of the church and the military such as in Argentina, which resulted in the disappearance of tens of thousands of people merely suspected as subversives. On April 21, 1986, during the Cold War, he raised the twenty-nine military vicariates to the status of dioceses with military jurisdiction and governed by a prelate, who is accorded the same rights and privileges as a bishop. Subsequently he attacked liberation theology in Latin America, which he mistakenly believed was inspired by Marxism. The result in many countries was a renewed relationship between the Roman Catholic church and the rich and powerful against serious social change, and the appointment of bishops who cooperated with approved political structures.

In a long statement published in the *National Catholic Reporter* October 11, 1985, a leading European Catholic theologian,

Hans Kung, wrote about the repudiation of Vatican II and a return to the medieval church, "No one is burned at the stake anymore, but careers and psyches are destroyed as required . . . . In very important cases such as that of the recalcitrant Latin American episcopate, [Cardinal] Ratzinger journeys with a whole posse to the relevant country to make unequivocally clear what the 'Catholic truth' is."

In the United States as elsewhere, Pope "John Paul has put his stamp firmly on the American hierarchy, filling vacancies left through the retirement or deaths of moderate bishops with conservative men who reflect his own views."<sup>4</sup> Those views are those envisioning a theocracy for America where his moral views would be enacted into law. One of those appointees was Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, who was involved in shaping both a Catholic political and legislative campaign to enact papal views into law.

A prominent Catholic professor of theological ethics at Jesuit Rockhurst College in Kansas City, in reviewing a book of Bernadin's fifteen major addresses, wrote, "Bernadin apparently envisioned, for lack of a better term, a civil theocracy for America. By this I mean he hoped that moral positions taken by the Roman Catholic Church regarding the issues would become law . . . ; moreover, he states that a 'consistent ethic of life' provides a means for 'assessing party platforms and the records of candidates for public office.'"<sup>5</sup>

Bernadin and his colleagues were not just theoretically advocating theocracy; he became politically involved. He led a delegation of his colleagues to meet with presidential candidate Jimmy Carter August 31, 1976. As a result the bishops agreed not to endorse Republican candidate Gerald Ford in return for putting two federal agencies with family planning programs under Catholic control if Carter were elected.<sup>6</sup>

The evidence of a Vatican drive toward theocracy in America is overwhelming and includes the following:

- In 1975 the U.S. Catholic bishops issued their "Pastoral Plan for Pro-life Activities" to mobilize all church agencies in "a public policy effort directed toward the legislative, judicial and administrative areas so as to insure effective legal protection of the right to life," which was basically opposition to legal abortion. In his book, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, Catholic writer Timothy A. Byrnes called the bishops' plan the "most focused and aggressive political leadership" ever exerted by the American Catholic hierarchy.
- In 1980 Ronald Reagan became President and effectively changed U.S. foreign policy as the Vatican proposed. *Time* magazine February 24, 1992 reported that "in response to concerns of the Vatican, the Reagan Administration agreed to alter its foreign aid program to comply with the church's teachings on birth control. . . . 'American policy was changed as a result of the Vatican's not agreeing with our policy,' said William Wilson," who was Reagan's ambassador to the Vatican.
- In 1981 the Roman Catholic bishops were instrumental in getting Congress to adopt the Adolescent Family Life Act, which prohibits the distribution of funds to groups that pro-

vide any abortion-related services, including counseling and referral, or that subcontract with any agency that provides such services. As a result the law discriminates in favor of aid to Catholic institutions and against other religious organizations that do not accept Catholic doctrine on abortion. That Act promotes periodic abstinence from sex as the only means of birth control approved by the Vatican, and would discourage the use of contraceptives.

- In 1983 the U.S. Catholic bishops filed an *amicus* brief with the Supreme Court in *Mueller v. Allen* in an effort to invalidate the American concept of separation of church and state in matters having to do with aid to Roman Catholic institutions.
- In 1985 Reagan's Secretary of Education, William J. Bennett, a Roman Catholic and a Vatican loyalist, proposed at a Knights of Columbus meeting in Washington, D.C. "the issuance of vouchers to parents for their children to attend parochial or other private day schools." This was in addition to a 1972 proposal by the Catholic bishops for tuition tax credits for parochial schools.
- In September 1991 William Bennett announced the formation of the Catholic Campaign for America which included such persons as Patrick Buchanan, Cardinal John O'Connor, Robert Dornan, Mary Ellen Gork, Richard Santorum, Phyllis Schlafly, William Simon, Richard John Neuhaus, and Keith Fournier, among others. According to the *National Catholic Register* the Campaign was organized to "bring a politically powerful and distinctively Catholic influence on public policy issues."<sup>7</sup> It avoids publicity by design and works through right wing Catholic activists and the Catholic press.
- Although there are numerous other little-publicized efforts to advance the Roman Catholic agenda, it is important to note the control for many years of the Republican Party's Platform Committee by Roman Catholic loyalist Henry Hyde who incorporated in the platform the church's long-time papal position that "the unborn child has a fundamental right to life that cannot be infringed." This means that men and fetuses have a fundamental right to life, but pregnant women do not. In an open letter Hyde invited Catholics to develop the Party's 1996, platform. He wrote, "Catholics are a powerful voice of moral authority and fulfill

a growing leadership role in the Republican Party." That letter also said, "As a Catholic, I believe the basic principles of Catholic teaching are ideologically, "philosophically and morally aligned with the Republican Party."

In addition to such Vatican-inspired activity not identified as such, there are open efforts by the Vatican to influence American politics. One example is the Vatican instruction released June 25, 1992 to American bishops with respect to legislation about discrimination.<sup>8</sup> Its opening sentence states, "Recently legislation has been proposed in some American states which would make discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation illegal."

An egregious Vatican intervention to influence American public policy occurred in 1987, entitled *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation*. In this it announced its opposition to at least fourteen current medical technologies, among them artificial insemination and *in vitro* fertilization.

The chief criticism which must be leveled against this Vatican "Instruction" is the demand that papal sexual ethics be legislated in America so that everyone has to be ruled by Vatican dogma. The following is a key part of the Instruction: "Politicians must commit themselves, through this intervention upon public opinion, to securing the widest possible consensus on such essential points...." They are expected to enact into law "appropriate penal sanctions" for any abortion, for artificial procreation, artificial insemination using the sperm of a third party, embryo banks, post mortem insemination, and "surrogate motherhood."

Again, on March 25, 1995 the pope tried to exercise rule over the United States through his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. The following are the crucial sentences in a much longer papal decree:

No circumstances, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit [that] which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the church.

Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear



obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection.

In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is never licit to obey it, or to take part in a propaganda campaign in favour of such a law, or *vote for it*. [emphasis supplied]

The pope also insisted that his authority to interpret what is moral must be placed ahead of democratic judgments of people whose interpretation of the will of God differs from his. He specifically stated, "Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality." He also said, "As a result we have what appears to be dramatically opposed tendencies."

Another papal intervention is a 1990 papal directive, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* ("From the Heart of the Church"), which required U.S. bishops to exercise control over Catholic institutions of higher learning in their dioceses.

This is intended to involve bishops in course content and faculty appointments at the colleges and universities in their dioceses to insure that everyone is in line with papal orthodoxy. Both the bishops and the college presidents tried to avoid this by recommending "continuing dialogue" between local bishops and the colleges. The Vatican vetoed this in 1997 and told the bishops to come up with more specific rules.

Catholic universities have reason to fear the Vatican, which banned competent professors not only in Europe but in America from teaching if they veered from papal rules or criticized official doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

Even before this Vatican effort to put all Catholic universities under its control, the Vatican demanded a loyalty oath taken with hands on a Bible, required of "teachers in any university whatsoever who teach disciplines which deal with faith or morals", as well as of pastors, deacons, seminary rectors, and rectors of universities.

The Vatican is intent on requiring Catholic universities, some of which have 25 percent or more non-Catholic students, to teach its position on moral issues.

Pope John Paul II is not only a dogmatic monarch expecting absolute obedience from his subjects, but is also a person who seeks the adulation of crowds in every country where he travels. Hans Kung said, "One must not be fooled by media spectacles. Notwithstanding many speeches and costly pilgrimages that have put some local churches deeply into debt, there has hardly been any meaningful progress in the Catholic church and ecumenicity."<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the pope's focus on changing the United States and at the same time keeping himself, even after death, as the center of American attention is his decision to build a memorial to himself in Washington, D.C., as reported in a July 23, 1997 report in the *Washington Times*. "The \$50 million Pope John Paul II Cultural Center is planned adjacent to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Construction of the 100,000-ft. center will be financed by an as yet unnamed Detroit foundation. Planning for this has been underway for about ten years."

The key to the purpose of this center is found in its focus on

the teachings of the current pope and on such issues as abortion, birth control, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and ordination of women. In other words, it "is intended to be akin to a presidential museum for the Pope" and also an agency to supplement the already Catholic-led Heritage Foundation, National Empowerment Television, and Free Congress Foundation. These have been promoting Vatican ideology in the American political sphere ever since Paul Weyrich, a deacon in the Catholic Church, founded them. He turned over the leadership of the National Empowerment Television to William Bennett of the "Catholic Campaign for America."

The *Washington Times* reported that Detroit's Cardinal Adam Maida said the pope wanted this memorial in Washington (instead of Rome or Jerusalem).

Theocratic efforts such as those listed above have frequently been supported by Protestant right wing personalities such as James Dobson, Pat Robertson, Gary Bauer, and Tim and Beverly LaHaye. There has been no obvious published repudiation of such initiatives either by such Protestant leaders as these or even by mainline Protestant theologians. Criticism has come chiefly from Roman Catholics who want to reform their church rather than have Vatican legalisms entrenched in U.S. law. Mainline Protestant silence is hard to understand, even when caused by ecumenical fear of offending the Pope or fear of being labeled anti-Catholic.

Defense of separation of church and state, including recognition that just laws are made openly with the consent of the people, and not by foreign or domestic religious hierarchies and their pressures, is the bedrock of constitutional democracy. This is obvious to most secular democratic organizations and to many Christians and Jews. Why should it not move ethically sensitive church leaders to its defense as well? ■

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Leo Pfeffer, *Church, State and Freedom*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1953), third chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V.T. Thayer, *The Attack Upon the American Secular School* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1951) pp. 29-32.

<sup>4</sup> Gustav Neibuhr, *New York Times*, January 30, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> *National Catholic Reporter*, January 15, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> R.T. Ravenholt, M.D., "Pronatalist Zealotry and Population Pressure Conflicts: How Catholics Seized Control of U.S. Family Planning Programs" (Center for Research on Population and Security, Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709) May, 1991, 27 pp.

<sup>7</sup> *The New Republic*, February 15, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> "Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislate Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons," released from the Office of the General Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, June 25, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> *National Catholic Reporter*, March 17, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> As quoted in J.L. Conn, "Unholy Matrimony," in *Church and State*, April, 1993.

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# Leave No Child Behind

*By Marian Wright Edelman*

[Marian Wright Edelman is the Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund. In preparation for their annual National Conference scheduled for Houston April 29-May 2, she wrote a brief introduction for their official program, a part of which is shared here.]

"...As the Children's Defense Fund 1999 Annual National Conference meets on the cusp of a new era, few matters concern Americans more than the quality of education provided for our children. Our future as a thriving nation depends on having a literate, skilled population with the ability to reason clearly, solve problems, and apply and advance knowledge. A sound education for each child will contribute enormously to a population in the next century that will be able to succeed in the workplace and achieve financial and personal growth and security. Yet, at this critical moment in time, America's educational system fails to provide millions of children with the tools they need for success.

- By numerous indicators, only a fraction of the students in most of our schools are achieving at high levels and many leave school without the critical skills they need to succeed in the workplace.
- Far too many students drop out of school before they have the credentials to compete for good jobs that will provide financial security for themselves and their families.
- A rapidly growing economic gap has developed between those who complete four years of college and those with only a high school education or less. In 1997, college graduates on average made over \$40,000 compared to less than \$23,000 earned by the average high school graduate—a wage gap of 76%.
- Far too many students and families still lack appropriate access to medical care due to a lack of insurance and still more lack the option of quality child care and preschool experience in the early years when parents have to work or are unable to afford or provide it.
- Today, more than 14 million American children (nearly

one in five) live in poverty even though the economy continues to expand, and more and more millionaires are created each day.

- While the number of poor children has not decreased during the past five years of America's economic expansion, the number of poor children living in working families has steadily increased. Indeed, nearly 10 million of these 14 million poor children live in a household where at least one person worked in 1997.
- And, more poor children are very poor. The number of children living in families with incomes below one-half of the federal poverty line (which equals about \$6,400 a year for a three-person family, or less than \$123 a week) increased in 1997 for the second year in a row. The number of these children has increased by 20 percent since 1995.

Clearly, the face of poverty in America today is that of a child. Children make up 40 percent of America's poor, and it hurts them. It hurts them terribly. It stunts their growth, impairs their healthy and successful development, undermines their ability to be ready for school, and reduces their likelihood of success in school. Schools pay more when poor children need special education or must repeat a grade. Businesses pay more when poor children grow up to be less educated, less productive workers. Taxpayers pay more for education, social services, medical care, and for the criminal justice system that must respond to societal problems caused by poverty, illiteracy, and poor health....

But the news on the child education front is not all bleak. While the challenges facing education in America today are great, the public's interest in improving the quality of education is also great. Concern about the quality of education was at the top of the list in numerous public opinion polls taken in 1998. This heightened level of public attention provides a unique opportunity for leadership in achieving the kinds of educational reform that will benefit all children and the nation...." ■

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# Easter Eggs and Starting Over

*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*.]

Every Easter I remember a story that fell into my hands several years ago. There was a woman named Kay who was Associate Pastor of a Methodist congregation in Georgia. After twenty-five years of marriage her husband came in one day and told her he wanted a divorce. He had found someone else prettier and younger. He wanted to be free and she gave him his freedom. She writes that she and her sixteen-year-old son had to begin life over again, rebuilding their family, just the two of them. There was a two-year separation before the divorce, which she found very difficult as she tried to adjust to single life again. She leaned on her pastor-colleague continually. He was a great man who would listen to her without judgment. She said she would sit in his office and cry and wring her hands and say, "I don't know what I am going to do. I just do not know what I am going to do." One day, between sobs, he pulled from his desk drawer an Easter egg. He gave it to her and said, "I'm going to give you this plastic egg. One of these days you will use this egg to bury your relationship and let life begin again." Those were the only instructions he gave her. He told her she would know what to do with the egg when the time came.

Two years later the divorce was to be finalized in Myrtle Beach. She and her son flew down for that unhappy occasion. As she sat in the office of the lawyer she remembered that day in 1963 in Oklahoma when a nineteen-year-old and a twenty-year had been gloriously in love. As the lawyer droned on and on, she remembered the happier times. The lawyer kept saying: "You get this, he gets that...." Finally the divorce decree was granted, and she stumbled out of the courthouse. Kay said that she brought with her the plastic egg her pastor had given her. She and her son walked down to the Atlantic Ocean. She took out of her purse a picture of a young couple and the happiest Christmas they had ever spent. She took the picture and folded it and placed it inside the Easter egg. She walked across the sand to the water's edge and threw the egg as far as it would go. She ran through the sand, grabbed her boy and they sobbed and sobbed. Mother and son began to walk slowly back to the car. She remembered praying, "Dear God, bring something good out of this bad thing. Let Easter happen to me."

Kay reported that she was tempted to look back hoping to see a butterfly emerge from that egg. She longed to hear a voice that would say comfortingly, "He's going to come back. It's going to change. It's going to get better." But she did not look

back. She heard no voice. She just kept walking toward the car. Later she would realize that painful act of throwing away that egg with the picture of her and her husband inside was really the first funeral she ever conducted as pastor.

After reading her story, I gave each person who came to church the next Easter a plastic Easter Egg. I told them Kay's story. I asked everyone to take a scrap of paper we had provided and write down a word that represented some hard thing in their lives. I then instructed them to place their petition inside the egg and ask God to give them a fresh start. After all were finished writing, the ushers came forward with large baskets, collected the eggs and brought them to the altar. At the front of the Church on the communion table the broken things of all our lives covered that table that morning. Eggs of blue and green and yellow and red symbolized our need for Easter. We had a prayer that day in which we asked God to take the broken things of our lives and make them right.

I wrote the Methodist preacher and told her how much I had appreciated her story and what I had done that Easter morning with her experience. Kay wrote me back and said, "That's not the end of my story. I moved on to another place and have two churches where I am now Pastor. And since I have moved here I have met someone. We are getting ready to get married. He understands me and I love him and I have never been happier." She ended the letter by saying, "There really is life after death. I ought to know."

Every Easter I keep remembering Pastor Kay and her story. I also remember my church and that mound of Easter eggs. I remember the last words of her letter: there really is life after death. Easter says it doesn't matter how difficult things may be. We can start over again. We can all begin again. Life really does come after death. ■

## Black History

*By Roger Lovette*

Black History Month has come to an end. All month long we have been observing the richness of the black tradition in the church I serve. One of my pastor friends finds this strange. He writes: "Why in the world would a primarily Caucasian congregation observe Black History Month?" He goes on to ask: "Why not have a 'White History Month?'" Good question. I wrote him back that all my life I have been observing White History Month. Growing up in Georgia in



the forties and fifties, the racial lines were carefully drawn. There were no blacks in my neighborhood, my school, or my church. There were a few domestics that cleaned our houses, shined our shoes, and took away our garbage. Across the street from the little mill house where I lived, blacks would sit on the curb three times a day getting ready to go to work in the cotton mill. You would see them at 6:30 in the morning, 2:30 in the afternoon, and then at 10:30 at night waiting for the shifts to change and go to work. The lines of demarcation were carefully drawn. Blacks on one side of the street, whites on the other. They never talked or laughed or sat together. It was only years later that I learned that the black folk who worked in the mill were paid much less than their white counterparts for the same jobs. When we opened our books at school there were no stories of black heroes. I knew little of W.E.B. Dubois, Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington. They simply did not exist in our world. Ralph Ellison wrote, years ago of the "invisible man." I can now look back at a whole culture and say that it was invisible. It was White history month all the way.

When I moved to Birmingham in the fifties to attend Howard College in East Lake, blacks were still invisible. Maids cleaned our rooms. Down the hill a black woman washed and ironed my shirts for fifteen cents each. Walking across the Baptist campus, the black Janitor would always say: "Fine, Suh, How you." We young, green eighteen year olds had no idea that only miles away there was another world of cultural richness of which we were largely unaware.

Moving back to Birmingham in the nineties, I looked around at a different world. We had a black Mayor. I was asked to serve on boards where I met black community leaders as sharp and astute as citizens anywhere. Through the years I have come to meet and appreciate a multitude of black friends. They have been preachers, architects, interior designers, business leaders, and statesman. I walked across the Samford campus one day and learned that the President of the student body was a black man. Slowly I have begun to discover the richness of the black culture in Birmingham that my white history had strangely ignored.

So all month long we mostly Caucasians in my church have listened to stories of grace and courage. We have heard about miracles when somebody left a life of crack and cocaine and alcohol, got their lives together and is making a contribution to the community. We have heard of black men, raised in the project houses, who shook away the heavy burdens of poverty and are now themselves changing lives. We have heard a prominent black lawyer tell about all the roadblocks that were thrown in his way when he simply tried to register to vote in Alabama. Probably the most moving story we have heard is that of the young woman who survived the bombing at the Sixteenth Street Church in September of 1963. She lost four friends in

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dow. We have to go  
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remember the events.*

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that Sunday morning bombing. Seeing her stand there, competent, articulate, we wept as we thought of those other four girls who would have been her age, whose promise and possibility were snuffed out that sad Sunday morning in 1963.

When friends come to visit Birmingham, I always take them by the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. I want them to see the stained glass window in the balcony of that church. After the bombing of the church, the people in Cardiff, Wales heard of the loss of life and the damage to the church. The children in Cardiff wanted to respond to the church in Alabama. So they established a penny fund. They collected pennies to replace one of the bombed out windows of a church in Birmingham, Alabama. The business community in

Cardiff learned of the children's efforts and commissioned a great stained glass artist, John Petts, to design the stained glass window. The project would come to be known as "The Wales Window of Alabama."

This is the window I always want my friends to see. It was placed in the balcony of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. As the sunlight shines through the window, the sanctuary is filled with the light. The shadows from the large form of a black Jesus, touch all who worship. It is a parable in stained glass. Jesus is portrayed as reconciler and demonstrator—his outstretched arms reaching outward taking the abuse, the fire hoses, the hatred that comes.

John Petts, the stained glass artist, wanted the window to symbolize the struggle of black people everywhere, not only in Birmingham but wherever people suffer from injustice. Underneath the black Jesus are the words: "You Do It To Me." This was to be the Pastor's sermon topic that Sunday morning in September. It was never preached. But maybe that sermon is preached after all. Week after week. Sunday after Sunday as we look up at the Jesus with the outstretched arms and remember, the sermon comes to life.

When I take my friends to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church I always try to go inside. You can't see the richness and the color of stained glass on the outside. Maybe all of history is like the viewing of a stained glass window. We have to go inside. We have to hear the stories and meet the faces and remember the events. History is not white or black. History is simply history. Looking at the window from the inside of the church, I marvel at the richness of the dark colors. Birmingham is like this, too. Without the diversity of this city, Birmingham would be poorer, smaller, different than the city we know. In looking up at the colors and the richness streaming through the window, we are moved to be better persons and to make this city a far better place. ■

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# Prayer at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Birmingham, Alabama on the Occasion of the 35th Anniversary of the Bombing

By James R. Barnette

[Dr. Barnette is Minister to Samford University and is Interim Pastor at the Southside Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.]

O God who sees us through the wilderness,

We acknowledge with weary hearts  
that one score and fifteen years was not too long ago.  
Indeed, O God, one score and fifteen years is frightfully recent.

And so, call us back to just yesterday—  
Just yesterday when a dream deferred exploded  
Just yesterday when a voice was heard in Ramah  
Just yesterday when worship turned to wailing  
Just yesterday when white dresses were blood-spattered

Just yesterday when we wept and raged  
Just yesterday when You wept and raged with us.

And yet, O God, even in that wilderness  
of smoke and stone  
of blood and brokenness  
of hard and cowardice

You turned our hearts toward Canaan,  
And you promised again

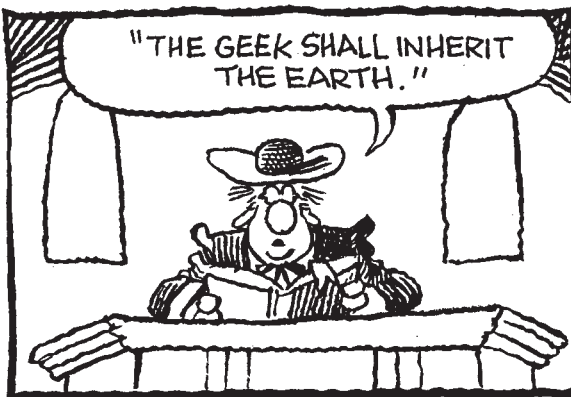
a day of reckoning, and  
a day of being reconciled.

But we confess, O God, that the smoke has not cleared,  
That still we see Lady Justice through a glass too darkly,  
That we still have miles to go  
before our throats are cooled by the milk of justice  
before our tongues savor the sweet honey of righteousness  
before you let it all roll down in a thundering stream.

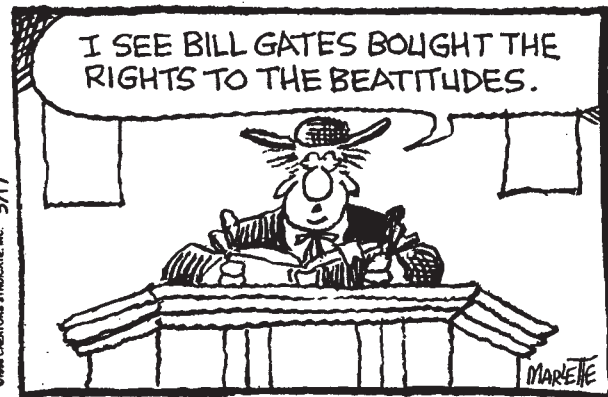
And until that Day, O God,  
Remind us that the day is young,  
That just yesterday  
Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, and  
Cynthia Wesley  
Came here to help lead a worship service  
and instead helped lead a Movement.  
And that just yesterday  
their deaths breathed new light  
into our Journey toward Canaan.

We gather tonight, O God, to take another step toward that  
Blessed Land.  
And so, in shared step we say together,

Amen, and Amen. ■



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# Sunrise for Jacob at Jabbock

*By Jimmy R. Allen*

[Dr. Jimmy Allen is Chaplain at the Big Canoe resort community in the Georgia mountains north of Atlanta.]

I wrestle in the blackness of night with the Specter  
Knowing not whether He would do me good or  
evil

It is enough that life is closing in with suffocating  
pressure  
Options of youth have evaporated...  
faded with the passage of time

Decisions long made bear bitter  
fruits of confusion  
One would think by now I would know who and  
what I am

But the Force rising and seizing me, thrashing  
in the darkness,

Says I do not yet know the Destiny  
Awaiting me

Holding on with fierce determination, knowing  
that if I let go all is lost  
Implacable Divinity probes my soul with the  
deepest and most painful question of all...

How can I name myself? What is my life about?  
What is throbbing within my soul?  
Can I trade trickery for trust, stop using  
and risk loving?

The sun rises as I stagger lame and  
limp from battle,  
Can my new name really mean that God and I have  
grappled and in the Mystery

Have I heard the VOICE of LIFE? ■

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# Star Maker/Sparrow Watcher

It's a long way from twinkle, twinkle little star  
To finding out that earth is a tiny planet surrounded  
by Stars many times her size

It's a long way from space probes discovering planets  
Massive and many  
To knowing that there are billions of stars and even  
Billions of Galaxies

The heavens declaring the glory of God shout in  
Decibels far off the scale

But they point to reality that none of these could be  
Without Intelligence of awesome majesty.

Star Maker You are and my mind is overwhelmed.  
My faith is renewed  
I am paralyzed by wonder.

The puzzle of my life lies not in the idea that You  
Are Star Maker  
The puzzle of my life lies in the claim that You  
Are Sparrow Watcher. ■

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# Secular Government: One of God's Greatest Gifts

By Franklin H. Littell

[Dr. Franklin H. Littell, a Methodist minister, college professor, Holocaust expert, scholar, and world citizen is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

By a curious coincidence, two symbiotic items reached my desk the same day. One was an interview with Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua which was featured—with a fine front page photo—in a newsletter from Liberty University (Lynchburg, VA). The other was a newspaper story about Rabbi Hertz Frankel in Williamsburg-Brooklyn (NY).

What do a Roman Catholic prelate, a Hasidic rabbi, and the PR instrument of a Protestant Fundamentalist (Jerry Falwell) have in common? How do they represent a clear religious and political alliance, very real although rarely visible?

The news item about Cardinal Bevilacqua is older. He was giving an extensive interview in criticism of the public schools, in praise of the “sense of community” in the Roman Catholic parochial schools, and in hope of tax support of the latter. One of his more memorable statements was this: “Public schools are a kind of socialism, one of the last vestiges of socialism!”

Equally memorable was his response to the interviewer's expressed hope that Pennsylvania might “succeed with vouchers.” The Roman Catholic leader responded, “We're going to try again this year and if it doesn't work we're going to try again

and again and again; and we're going to keep working and gradually, slowly build up a culture that this is the obvious thing to do, that this is the sensible thing to do.”

Rabbi Frankel of the Satmer sect has had less patience. During the period 1973-94 he managed a scheme that siphoned off more than six million dollars (\$6,000,000) from the public school district. The money went to support a sectarian religious school, before, as one witness said, the public authorities even “decided whether they were going to be able to rehire all their teachers or buy new books.” Controlling a critical Hasidic bloc in the electorate, Rabbi Frankel was able to corrupt public officials; as he said when interviewed after pleading guilty to one count of “conspiracy,” he believed, “The end justifies the means.” The court sentenced him to three (3) years of probation and payment of one million (\$1,000,000) in restitution (of tax-payers' money).

What, then, do a Protestant Fundamentalist, a Roman Catholic prelate and a Hasidic rabbi have in common? The Protestant Fundamentalist in the case has said that he believes America is a “Christian nation;” that is, he does not believe in the American experiment in Religious Liberty with “separation of church and state.” The Roman Catholic prelate, assuming he follows the official statement of the Ecumenical Council: Vatican II, believes in religious toleration rather than Religious

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*Looking at the disasters, including genocide, that have accompanied 20th century combinations of organized belief systems and organized political systems, most of them professing perfectionist or utopian purposes, we do well to remember David Hume. Hume, a Scottish philosopher and public servant who died in the year of our Declaration of Independence, never saw the launching of the American experiment. But he knew a truth that is a corner stone of our liberties: “To reach for perfection, to seek an ideal, is noble but dangerous, and is therefore an activity that individuals or voluntary groups may pursue, but governments certainly should not.” And let us all say, “Amen!”*

*Let the public schools, as institutions serving all children of the citizens, receive energetic support, both spiritual and financial. And let those who want their children to have an education of special ideological or religious flavor do so without civic disabilities, disabilities they exact of others in countries where they are dominant. And let them do it at their own expense.*

## Rocks

(continued from page 2)

Roman province of Britain,

- of the cannon-ball sized piece of quartz with moss still on it which I found recently on the banks of the River Wye in Wales,

- of the small smooth flint rock I found in Israel like one David could have fitted into his sling shot for, as his faithless detractors imagined, his fool hardy face-off with Goliath,

- of the piece of one of the great pyramids of Egypt which some ego-crazed Pharaoh ordered as a memorial for his own royal, he believed divine, self,

- of the old slate shingle which some rustic mountain man long ago fashioned with his ancient zax, for a part of a roof for his cowshed in the shadow of Switzerland's Matterhorn just a short walk outside of Zermatt,

- of the shiny chunk of mica I picked up in Colorado while waiting to ship home the body of my good friend, Charles Trentham, killed in a tragic car wreck on his way to our cabin in Red River, New Mexico,

- of the fist-sized chunk of conglomerate composed of pure white coral sand and coal black lava pebbles ground down by a pounding Pacific surf on the windward side of Kauai to a perfect goose-egg shape,

- and of the neat paving stone from the Appian Way just outside the city of Rome with the marks of a thousand Roman chariots well worn into the surface.

I really want to go on and on.

But I have to stop.

Every rock holds the memories of a lifetime. Too, as Shakespeare in *As You Like It* has the Duke to say about the good life in Arden Forest, there are "books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." Indeed, there are "sermons in stones." Although I'm sorely tempted, I'll refrain from preaching them since this column is dedicated to whimsy and things unsubstantive. My specialty.

No wonder Chevrolet has stuck with its immensely successful sales pitch, "Like a rock. Um-m-m. Like a rock."

And especially no wonder that our great and wonderful God who is himself the Rock of Ages is also the Rock of our salvation.

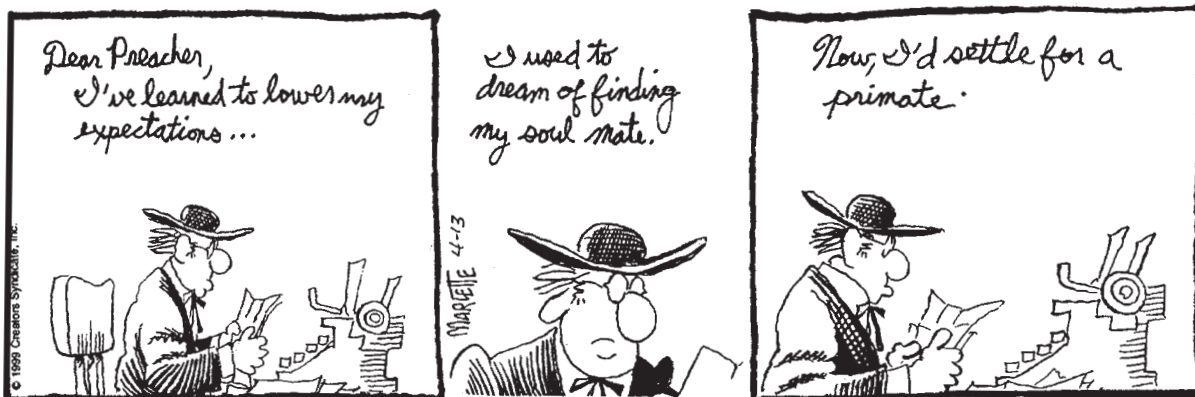
Hooray for rocks. ■

Liberty. (In its finished form, "toleration" means that the publicly supported church does not persecute lesser religious societies.) The Hasidic rabbi is less shifty: he has no use for the *goyishe velt* except as it can be used in the interest of his own sect.

One wonders how, after the 20th century's record of mass murder by regimes hag-ridden by religious or ideological furies, there are still American leaders unable to affirm one of the Lord's greatest gifts: **secular government**. Secular, limited, checked and balanced government can carry on the everyday, pedestrian business of public affairs, leaving ultimate commitments to guidance by the churches or synagogues. In contrast to the facade that is about all that is left of "Christendom," in the climate and practice of American Religious Liberty both "church" and "state" have prospered, each in benevolent independence of the other, neither in subservience to the other.

Looking at the disasters, including genocide, that have accompanied 20th century combinations of organized belief systems and organized political systems, most of them professing perfectionist or utopian purposes, we do well to remember David Hume. Hume, a Scottish philosopher and public servant who died in the year of our Declaration of Independence, never saw the launching of the American experiment. But he knew a truth that is a corner stone of our liberties: "To reach for perfection, to seek an ideal, is noble but dangerous, and is therefore an activity that individuals or voluntary groups may pursue, but governments certainly should not." And let us all say, "Amen!"

Let the public schools, as institutions serving all children of the citizens, receive energetic support, both spiritual and financial. And let those who want their children to have an education of special ideological or religious flavor do so without civic disabilities, disabilities they exact of others in countries where they are dominant. And let them do it at *their own expense*. ■



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# Watching the World Go By

By Ralph Lynn

[Dr. Ralph Lynn is a retired professor of history at Baylor University and is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

## The Early Settlers: Heroes or Cowards?

The people who settled the United States were running away from their problems.

This is not to say that the early settlers were not admirable people. But it is to say that a good many myths have been concocted about them and sold to millions of unsuspecting people.

One of these myths is that the early settlers were such heroes. Actually, they were running from problems in Europe. They were running from lands where they were denied freedom of worship. They were fleeing lands where taxes were high. They were running from compulsory military service. They were running from lands where opportunities for economic and social advancement were few.

In a word, instead of staying and solving their problems, they ran off and left the problems.

Another of these myths is that the early settlers came to these shores in order to build a free, open society. Actually, many of them--the Puritans in particular--came so that they could have the freedom to expel from their political kingdom anyone they deemed a heretic. They wished to have religious freedom so that they could deny religious freedom to others. You must pick your founding fathers with some care if you wish to credit them with the intention of providing for religious freedom as we now interpret it.

Still another myth is the notion that the founding fathers were supermen of some sort who succeeded, against overwhelming odds, in establishing a free society. Actually, they practically fell into freedom.

In the new world, there was no strong, well organized, rich, established church to exercise a near totalitarian control. In the new world, there was no established aristocracy with full control of the land, the administration of justice, and many other areas of life. In the new world, the King and the King's army were thousands of miles and many months away. In a word, the English colonists in North America found freedom relatively unavoidable in a virtually uninhabited wilderness.

In 1776, therefore, when these Englishmen in North America decided to fight for the traditional rights of

Englishmen, they could and did get away with it. But the Englishmen still in England, who were no less brave and who loved liberty no less, could not successfully oppose a despot on the throne of England. Unfortunately, the liberty-loving English, the King, and the King's army were bottled up together on that tight little island.

In sharp contrast with the situation of the early settlers in the United States, we now have no place to run to. We have no place to hide.

But we are discovering that the problems the early settlers thought they had left behind really crossed the ocean with them. There are those among us now who would restrict freedom in religion, freedom in speech, and freedom of the press. Our taxes are high and are getting higher. We have often embraced a form of universal, compulsory military service which when military expediency calls for it, becomes more and more demanding. And automation and the all-pervading sophistication of modern life are making it more and more difficult for the underprivileged to find a satisfying place in society.

If we are able to solve these problems in our time, we shall have to be much more wise, much more resourceful, much more given to calm deliberation, and much braver than the founding fathers were.

We must stick it out right here. It is accurate to say that we are condemned to be both brave and brilliant if we are to succeed, against mounting odds, in maintaining the free life which the early settlers could hardly avoid. ■

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## Toward Progress in Public Schools

About 150 years ago, in *Hard Times*, his novel of searing social-political criticism, Charles Dickens depicted the chief participants in our own public school controversies.

Dickens has Thomas Gradgrind representing the politicians and Josiah Bounderby representing the business community—both of whom give uninformed, unwelcome, and unending advice to poor Mr. McChoakumchild, the schoolmaster.

We have made some significant improvements. The politicians and the business people who are interested in education are now much better informed and their motivation is often most admirable.

The education bureaucracy has improved so much that Dickens would be incredulous. We have added women to the mix and we now try to stimulate rather than to choke off child-

hood creativity, wonder, and spontaneity.

Since electronic wizardry has solved the problem of arithmetic, public interest is now centered on the complaint that the children are disorderly and that they fail to learn spelling, grammar, and composition. What shall we do about these problems?

Before tackling these specifics, perhaps we should understand and come to terms with some unpleasant realities.

First, our commitment to democracy and our admirably unselfish desire to help each student realize his full potential compel us to try to do the impossible: to educate (that hal- lowed phrase) “all of the children of all of the people.”

Second, we should come to terms with the brute fact that not all of the people of school age (including the college years) have either the inclination or the ability to profit from conventional school offerings.

Third, we need to discover the potential of each student and give each the training from which he can profit. It is utter nonsense to argue that one teacher can do this in a roomful of students with widely differing interests and abilities.

Fourth, we must come to terms with the unpleasant fact that our current level of financial support of our education services is grossly inadequate. Moreover, we ought to begin to apportion the education funds equitably both within the states and in the nation.

Fifth, we must recognize that it is unforgivably stupid to expect teachers, no matter how gifted, well-paid, and devoted they may be to be able to motivate the disinterested and to teach abstractions like grammar and higher mathematics to the slow-witted. Teachers who do not become merely perfunctory either are sorely tempted to abandon the profession or to burn out completely.

Now, for some specifics.

The problem of disorder: It may be necessary to put an empowered, uniformed adult in each classroom and in each restroom every hour of the school day. Put the incorrigibles in “probation schools” schools with retired army sergeants as teachers until they learn a bit of common courtesy.

The problem of spelling, grammar, and composition: Understand that a relatively small percent of the general population has the inclination, the ability, or even the need to master these demanding studies.

These few can probably profit most from attentive, disciplined reading of good writing coupled with their writing a weekly essay in English classes. By a kind of intellectual osmosis, the students will learn what correctly spelled words look like. They will begin to be sensitive to proper sentence and paragraph structure. The rhythm of good writing will become part of their intellectual equipment.

Unfortunately, little of this will occur without competent teachers—lots of them. These English teachers must have the time, the admittedly expensive time, to read these essays carefully and to make constructive criticisms both orally and by actually rewriting portions to show how it should be done.

Obviously, every teacher is a teacher of spelling, grammar, and composition. Even teachers of mathematics and the sci-

ences might discover that occasional essays on the history and social significance of their subjects are effective teaching aids.

We have made incredible progress since Dickens’ time in the areas of science and technology— where the Gradgrinds and the Bounderbys can make money.

Yet times are still hard for millions of our people. Perhaps it is possible that the very survival of our nation, however, depends upon making the general sort of progress suggested here.

We cannot afford to waste the talents of either hands or heads.

One thing should be abundantly clear to thoughtful observers of the educational scene: the current push for vouchers by which public tax money would be taken away from public schools and given to elitist private and parochial schools is one of the least desirable alternatives to be advanced since Charles Dickens wrote *Hard Times*.

On this critical issue let the churches, then, stand up and speak out. ■

# 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

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## 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.

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