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Doxology

By Foy Valentine

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.” So Solomon said. And he was right.

There is a time to start and a time to stop, a time to edit and a time to quit editing.

For me, the time is now. My fast-approaching 77th birthday underscores the rightness of the decision.

The sheer ecstasy of this impending serendipity has settled over me and nestled down around me like a warm blanket on a cold night. It feels *good*.

It is not that the “night” of editing this journal has been all that cold or all that dark. Not really. But the warmth of the blanket of deliverance from the everlasting deadlines (deadlines of reading and hunting and searching and eliciting and cajoling and calling and checking and fixing and proofing and couriering and proofing again and publishing and mailing) has become so inviting that I am determined to pull it up under my chin and tuck it in all around me. No regrets. No tears. No moaning at the bar. No looking back.

Hallelujah.

Doxology!

This, then, is to be the last issue of *Christian Ethics Today* that I edit.

What a wonderful ride it has been.

Starting in the Spring of 1995, *Christian Ethics Today* was conceived as substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen, tangible proof that the cause of Christian ethics was alive and well and that its partisans were willing and able to nurture it. As energy and finances permitted, we said from that first Issue, we would, God’s willing, stay by the stuff and make it happen. This is the 28th such happening.

Of course, many fortuitous and providential factors have combined to bring the journal to this point.

Financial contributors to the enterprise have been unfailingly faithful and generous. Not once have we been in financial jeopardy. Never once have I panicked because of lack of funds. Not one time have I sent out an emergency appeal pleading for money. Heartfelt thanks therefore are extended to *hundreds* of thoughtful and generous supporters who have enabled this project to happen.

Encouragers, from the first Issue until now, have spoken, called, written, faxed, and buttonholed me personally and out

of the blue to make editing this journal a ministry of deep fulfillment and unvarnished joy.

Working partners in the project have been major players. They deserve unqualified praise and a hearty salute: Marilyn Davis who has used the computer to make magic transformation of typed material into wondrous little discs, Randy Shebek who has used his layout expertise to prepare yet other magic discs ready for me to take in my trembling and age-spotted hands to the printer, the Etheridge Printing Company whose dedicated and highly competent employees have consistently produced extraordinarily attractive journals of high quality, and James Kim at Postal Tech, Inc. who has efficiently and helpfully processed the mailing for each issue. Especially deserving of praise and thanks is Mary Louise, my wonderful wife of 53 years who has patiently, uncomplainingly, and with uncommon excellence proofed the copy of each issue in the four or five stages each one went through, thus assuring a far better finished product than would have otherwise been possible.

The authors, usually about a dozen of them for each issue, deserve major credit for their notable contributions in making this copy-driven publication effective beyond our early hopes. The authors have shared their gifts, and often their genius, to carry the journal without benefit of staff, art, slick paper, four colors, illustrations, or advertising. Wow.

So. There you are.

And here am I—wishing all the readers of *Christian Ethics Today* all good things and the blessings of God as we move now into the future.

Whither the Center for Christian Ethics?

The Board of Trustees of the Center for Christian Ethics has voted to disband on June 1, 2000 when the direction of the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University passes entirely into the hands of the new Director, Dr. Robert Kruschwitz. Dr. Kruschwitz will be a tenured faculty member at Baylor with all the rights and privileges and duties and responsibilities “appertaining thereto.” This is an inordinately happy development. It has come to pass slowly, but we believe providentially. Dr. Herbert Reynolds who was then President of Baylor University, was the first person at Baylor to start this ball to rolling. When he retired, Dr. Donald D. Schmeltkopf,

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Baylor's Provost, enthusiastically and with remarkable vision and courage took this ball and carried it, with the advice, consent, and support of Baylor's new President Dr. Robert Sloan. In due time, Baylor's Regents blessed the enterprise, Dr. Kruschwitz was enlisted, and the Center for Christian Ethics Trustees signed off on it.

I believe that good and great things are ready to come of all this. In short order, Dr. Kruschwitz and Baylor will enlist an Advisory Board for the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor. Exciting and visionary initiatives are in store. A staff will be enlisted. Financial assistance will be sought. Foundations will be approached. Conferences will be sponsored. New programs will be implemented. And the cause of Christian ethics will be greatly strengthened and significantly expanded. Dr. Kruschwitz has announced his intention of editing and publishing a new quarterly journal beginning in the Fall of 2001. We should all look forward to these new initiatives with keen anticipation.

Dr. Kruschwitz and the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University will have my full cooperation, my enthusiastic support, and my unqualified blessing.

What's Up for *Christian Ethics Today*?

Christian Ethics Today has from its beginning been defined as a journal of Christian ethics published within the constraints of energy and finances about every other month. From the beginning it has been sent without charge to those who have requested it. Its purpose has been to be a voice for Christian ethics championing the moral values without which civilization itself could not survive, addressing the ethical dimensions of public policy issues, and focusing on Christian insights that challenge the people of God at the point of social

concerns. Contributions of Baptist individuals and churches through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship together with those of about half a dozen special friends of the cause of applied Christianity have been the major financial lifeline for the publication; but about as much financial support has come each year from the generous gifts of individuals and local churches, ranging from \$5 to \$10, \$20, \$25, \$30, \$50, \$100, \$500, and occasionally to \$1,000. If the journal has accomplished good things across the years, major credit must be pinned on the lapels of these generous contributors.

Since many readers strongly believe that the journal has met a need and deeply feel that it should be continued in its present form and format, a nonprofit corporation has been formed called the Christian Ethics Today Foundation to carry out this purpose. Dr. Joe Trull, former professor of Christian Ethics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and the distinguished author of a best-seller textbook on Christian Ethics, *Walking In The Way*, has accepted the editorship of *Christian Ethics Today*. In the next issue he will present a distinguished company of incorporators and Board members. The August issue, Number 29, will be his first issue to edit, and he expects to publish Issue 30 in October and Issue 31 in December. Then before the first issue of 2001, Number 32, he and his Board will review its reception, its reader response, its supporting contributions, and its overall viability. They look with hope toward the indefinite continuation of this voice for Christian ethics. Dr. Joe Trull will have my full cooperation and blessing as he assumes his editorship of this journal. From time to time I would like to be able to contribute something in writing to it. I would promise, of course, not to judge his corn by my nubbins.

For now, however, Doxology once again or, to be more precise, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." ■



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“Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise”: The Witness of the Wesleys

By Ralph C. Wood

[Dr. Ralph Wood is University Professor at Baylor. The article printed here was delivered as the Carleton-Willson Families Lecture at McMurry University, in Abilene, Texas on March 9, 2000.]

Occasions such as these are occasions for remembrance and thanksgiving. When we recall benefactors such as the Carleton and Willson families, we are made grateful that they have given so generously to a university like McMurry. And when the whole academic community is gathered—trustees and administrators, faculty and students—it is good to remember the tradition that has been handed down from the past. When we use the word “tradition,” we mustn’t think of something stuffy and old-fashioned and oppressive. Rather we should think of tradition as Jaroslav Pelikan and G. K. Chesterton define it. Pelikan calls tradition “the living faith of the dead.” “Traditionalism,” he adds by way of warning, “is the dead faith of the living.” G. K. Chesterton offered a similar reading of tradition. Whenever we honor our true tradition, he said, we enfranchise the dead: we grant voting rights to our ancestors. To remember and to recover the past is to admit that we who are living constitute but a tiny minority within the totality of the earth’s inhabitants, and that we are far from the most important people who have ever lived. To remember and give thanks for our tradition is, in short, a way of breaking bread with the dead.

The dead whose tradition I urge us gratefully to remember today are John and Charles Wesley. They sparked a reform movement in the 18th century that shapes us still. Whether we are Methodist or Baptist, Catholic or Jew, Muslim or Hindu, pagan or atheist or none-of-the-above, we have all been touched by the Wesleyan revolution. It has left a permanent mark on American cultural and religious life. It is fair to say, in fact, that many of us would not be Christians if our forebears had not been converted during the 19th century revivals that swept frontier America under the impetus of the Wesleyan movement. McMurry University would not exist, we should add, if it had not been for these remarkable brothers. Though many of you know their story, let me briefly sketch it.

I. The Wesleyan Revival

John and Charles Wesley were born in 1703 and 1707 respectively, the 15th and 18th of Samuel and Susannah Wesley’s nineteen children. Wags have noted that, if birth control pills had been available in the 18th century, Methodism

might not exist! Susannah Wesley was a woman of remarkable piety and keen mind, and she would influence her sons far more deeply than their father. Yet, as if to prophesy the future of his youngest sons, Samuel Wesley had a talent for stirring up trouble. He was the minister of the Anglican church in the village of Epworth, and he aroused such opposition that the town malcontents set the church rectory on fire as the Wesleys lay sleeping. The entire family managed to escape, all except 6-year old Johnnie who was seen at an upstairs window screaming. It was too late to get a ladder, and so a small man was set on the shoulders of larger man to rescue young John, just before the blazing roof collapsed. John would hark back to this event all his life long. Even more literally than St. Paul, he regarded himself as “a brand plucked from the burning,” a child mysteriously saved from death that, as a mature man, he might bring others to life.

The Wesley brothers were diligent students at Oxford. They mastered mathematics and logic and the other liberal arts. They also organized a group of students and faculty who met every evening for study of the Greek New Testament. This was a rigorously intellectual enterprise, not a trite and emotional “sharing,” where everyone told what a particular Scripture passage meant “personally” to them. The Wesley brothers were nothing if not tough-minded. They studied the liturgy and theology of the ancient church, especially Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo, as well as more recent writers such as Thomas à Kempis and William Law. They and their band of Christian radicals took communion often, fasted frequently, and regularly visited condemned felons in Newgate prison. They also exercised mutual discipline, holding each other accountable for their moral and spiritual lives. Their aim, as they said, was to restore “the Church to its primitive dignity” and thus also to reform the entire English nation. Yet for all their effort and dedication, John and Charles’ group earned the contempt of their colleagues. Their fellow students gave them derisive nicknames: the Holy Club, the Bible Moths, the Supererogation Men, the Enthusiasts, and most notoriously of all (because they emphasized a systematic and *methodical* observance of Christian discipline) they were called Methodists.

Rather than being daunted by such mockery, the Wesleys took it as a sign of honor, adopting the epithet as the name of their new movement. Yet it got off to a very slow start. John and Charles were appointed in 1735 as Church of England missionaries to bring the Gospel to America, specifically to the Indians located in the newly formed state of Georgia. Their

venture was nothing less than a disaster. John was driven out of Georgia by the Savannah bailiff for jilting his daughter Sophia Hopkey. Yet on their way to America, the Wesleys had met a group of Moravians who left a permanent mark on them. Amidst a terrible sea storm, the Moravians sang hymns and prayed with such calm confidence that the Wesleys were hugely impressed. When John asked the Moravians to account for their extraordinary peace in the face of death, they replied, “Know ye not Christ?” John replied that he was an ordained Anglican minister, a professor at Lincoln College, Oxford, and thus that he knew all *about* Christ. “That wasn’t the question,” replied the Moravians. “Know ye not *Him*?”

Haunted by the Moravians’ serene piety as well as their troubling question, the Wesleys welcomed a visit by a Moravian minister named Peter Boehler when they returned to London in 1738. Boehler recommended that Charles read Martin Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians*. Charles was so deeply stirred by its message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone—and not through the legalistic doing of good works—that he underwent a dramatic conversion to evangelical faith on May 21, 1738. John read Luther’s *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* and was similarly stirred. Three days later, on May 24, 1738, his 35th birthday, he underwent his own spiritual renewal at Aldersgate Chapel, where he felt his heart “strangely warmed.” No longer would he base his faith on an austere life of self-denial, but rather on a constant awareness of God’s saving presence.

Inspired by the example of the evangelist George Whitefield, John Wesley was soon preaching in the open air to great masses of coal miners and industrial laborers, often 30,000 in number, whom the established church had failed to reach. His motto was “holiness of heart and life.” When Joseph Butler, a prominent Anglican theologian and bishop, complained that it was unseemly to preach in the fields, John Wesley replied that Jesus himself had set the precedent by preaching his own Sermon on the Mount. Told by another critic that he should confine his ministry to his own parish, Wesley famously replied “The *world is my parish*.” During the 52 years of his itinerant ministry, Wesley traveled more than 200,000 miles and preached more than 40,000 sermons. John accomplished such stunning evangelistic feats by riding in a special backward saddle, composing many of his sermons and books at a writing board that had been mounted on the horse’s rump, as his inkwell sloshed and as his quill jerked across the page.

Yet the enduring power of John Wesley’s reform movement would have been robbed of much of its power without the hymns of his brother. Charles Wesley was an artist schooled in the best poetry of his time—the poetry of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, for example. (It’s as if contemporary Christian song writers were steeped in the work of Seamus Heaney and Richard Wilbur). He had mastered the neo-classical technique of rhymed couplets and formal meters, of accent and rhythm and stress. His diction was so concise and clear, his images so vigorously biblical, that we employ his hymns still today: “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” “Come, Thou

Long Expected Jesus,” “Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim,” “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today.” It is estimated that Charles Wesley wrote as many as 10,000 hymns, most of them eminently forgettable. Yet the ones which endure offer us a fine guide to Christian thought and practice in our time. Like John’s sermons, Charles’ hymns are imbued with the three indispensable qualities of Methodism that I want to emphasize today: *orthodoxy* (right belief), *orthopraxy* (right practice), and *orthopathy* (true feeling). The first is rooted in wonder, the second in love, and the third in praise: hence my title taken from the last stanza of what may be Charles’ finest hymn, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.”

II. Orthodoxy: Right-Believing Wonder

The two Wesleys were especially concerned to honor the God of truth by maintaining true doctrine: orthodoxy. They knew that what we believe determines how we live. If we believe little or if we believe wrongly, we will be small-souled creatures who live wrong-headed lives. Without clarity and conviction about our foundational beliefs, the Gospel degenerates into mere moral striving, a sort of civic club Christianity. The Wesleys thus rejected the notion, now popular in certain evangelical circles, that believers ought to be brainless. On the contrary, they both regarded an unthoughtful Christian as an oxymoron, and perhaps just an ordinary moron. “It is a fundamental principle with us,” John Wesley wrote, “that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion.”

As I have said, Charles and John Wesley were first-rate students and scholars, the masters of books and languages and sciences. They were concerned that their followers be schooled in the best thought and art of their time. John Wesley thus wrote and published digests of several major Enlightenment thinkers, including David Hume and John Locke, in order that his followers would be able to engage their thought. He also sought to master the best science of his time, convinced that “the book of nature is written in a universal character, which every man may read in his own language.” He urged his followers to study the natural order as it was being opened up by science: “Life subsisting in millions of different forms,” John wrote, “shews the vast diffusion of [God’s] animating power, and death the infinite disproportion between [God] and every living thing.” There is little doubt that, if the Wesleys had lived in the 19th century rather than the 18th, they would have engaged the evolutionary biology of Charles Darwin—just as they would have sought, in our century, to integrate the physics of Einstein and Heisenberg into their theology. For the Wesleys, an anti-intellectual faith and anti-scientific faith is no faith at all but a form of religious cowardice.

What reason and revelation both teach, the Wesleys agreed, is that God remains radically transcendent and utterly other to us. God is not our chum and buddy, a heavenly step-and-fetch-it, a sacred Santa Claus who rewards us when

we are not naughty but nice. God is not one being among the world's other beings, not even the Supreme Being: God is the God who alone can identify himself. The theologians of the Eastern church taught the Wesleys to understand God fundamentally as *mystery* and *wonder*. These words don't point to an insoluble puzzle or intellectual conundrum but rather to God's inexhaustible Reality. Hence our descriptions of God are fundamentally negative rather than positive: immortal, invisible, immutable, incorruptible, ineffable.

This means that all true doctrine must begin with the astonished *wonder* that the unknown God has made himself known to us in Jesus Christ. Orthodoxy thus values paradox in the precise sense defined by Chesterton. Paradox, said Chesterton, is truth standing on its head and waving its legs to get our attention. The more fully we comprehend the God who has revealed himself to us, it follows, the less we have truly comprehended Him. Charles Wesley's rousing hymn "Rejoice, the Lord is King" gets at this central claim of Christian faith, which was also voiced by the prophet Isaiah: our ways are not God's ways, and our thoughts not God's thoughts. Nothing in heaven or on earth is to be worshipped. Like all things mortal, they are doomed to die. By refusing to make them our gods, we have real hope for victory:

Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and
King adore;
Mortals, give thanks and sing, and triumph
ever more.
Lift up your heart! Life up your voice!
Rejoice! Again, I say, rejoice!

Charles and John Wesley were struck with wonder at one truth above all others, and it lies at the heart of their orthodoxy. They helped restore this doctrine to prominence, not only among Methodists, but also among the many other Christians who were influenced by their revival. It is the doctrine of universal atonement. We may find it strange that many 18th century Protestants did not believe that Christ had died for the sins of everyone, but for the elect only. Yet the Calvinists had convinced many, including George Whitefield, that the atonement is limited to those whom God has predestined to salvation. John Wesley got into such a heated debate over the question of predestination that he and Whitefield had a serious falling out. Yet both Wesleys persisted in their conviction that the salvation wrought in the Cross is meant for every human being, not for a few.

We must be ever so clear about the Wesleys' staggering wonder before the fact of universal atonement. They never take it for granted. Much less do they read it as proof that God is too kind and fatherly a deity to bring just judgment upon the world. On the contrary, the Wesleys' shock at this great mystery derives precisely from their awareness of our human sinfulness, and thus of the divine wrath that we so fully deserve. It is the Wesleys' exhilarated wonder at the universality of Christ's atonement that we have largely lost. The Methodist theologian Stanley Hauerwas has said that most

American Christians have but two articles in their creed: (1) God's kinda nice, and (2) we ought to be kinda nice also. Compare this pathetic heresy with the rich orthodoxy expressed in the very first line of Charles Wesley's signature hymn. Charles seeks to startle us out of our shallow ease by resorting to biblical syntax. He does what every English teacher forbids us to do: he begins with a conjunction. He wants to isolate and to magnify the wonder of his own personal redemption, while at the same time showing that it belongs to the long chain of God's redemptive acts—from the clothing of fallen and ashamed Adam and Eve all the way down to the saving of a local Welsh coal miner:

And can it be that I should gain an interest
in the Savior's blood!
Died he for me? who caused his pain! For
me? who him to death pursued? Amazing
love! How can it be that thou, my God,
shouldst die for me?

Charles Wesley stands amazed before this unfathomable, mind-reeling wonder—that God himself has died, not for the righteous and the good, but for those who chased and hounded and drove Christ to his Cross. The only rhetorical device that can render it in words is paradox: the joining of radically opposed things that seem to contradict each other but finally do not. Charles thus stretches language to the point of breaking as he tries to get at the incomprehensible wonder that Christ dies for everyone, even the worst, even us. The one word that covers this wonder is *Mercy*, the Mercy that chases and hounds and finds us who crucified Him—not that He might punish, but rather than He might forgive us:

'Tis mystery all: th'Immortal dies! Who can
explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries to sound
the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore; let angel
minds inquire no more.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my
God, it found out me!

III. Orthopraxy: Right-Acting Love

If orthodoxy is the root of the Wesleyan witness, then orthopraxy is its fruit. The Wesleys taught that right doctrine issues in right practice. It is impossible to believe that we have been justified by Christ's atoning death, they insisted, without living a sanctified life. If Christians are not imbued with a Christ-like holiness through the love of God and our neighbors, then we are not of his Kingdom. Both of the Wesleys were worried that too many Christians are converted without any noticeable result: we remain very much as we always were. We are guilty of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer would later call "cheap grace," a grace that justifies not the sinner but the sin. Such cheapened faith lets us live self-satisfied lives, as if Christ

had died in order that we might persist in our complacency.

John Wesley believed that the change which Christ works in human life is so drastic that it must be called a *second* work of grace. Justification—Christ’s atoning death in our stead—is the first work of grace that makes us righteous before God. Sanctification—the Spirit’s indwelling power at work in us—is the second work of grace that makes us holy. Together, the two operations of grace make Christians into what St. Paul call “a new creation.” John Wesley ventured a further and even more radical step. He took seriously Jesus’ admonition that we are meant to be perfect even as God is perfect. And so he insisted that true Christians are cleansed from all Adamic corruption and given total newness of life. Wesley was not so naive as to believe that we will be free of all moral faults. On the contrary, our shortcomings will certainly remain. Yet Christians will not commit what John called “willful transgression of a known command of God.” Once the Spirit dwells fully in believers, we do not deliberately, knowingly, consciously, defiantly violate God. Charles seeks deliberately to correct Luther’s contention that we remain infected with evil, even when we have been justified: Christ “breaks the power of cancelled sin.”

Much mischief has been made of this Wesleyan doctrine of entire or complete sanctification. It has led to self-righteous moralism on the left and to self-righteous pietism on the right. Yet the abuse of a good thing does not take away its use. Rather than reject John Wesley’s teaching on Christian perfection, we ought to reclaim what is right about it. As a good Latinist, John knew that the word “perfection” comes from the verb *perficere*, which means to carry through, to accomplish, to do or to make thoroughly. What Wesley sought, therefore, was for Christians to live *finished* lives—for believers to be “made through,” from the start all the way to the end. To turn back from this great task is to commit the most egregious of all sins: apostasy. Hence, the huge divide between John Wesley and his Calvinist opponents: Wesley believed that we can indeed fall from grace, backslide into willful sin, and thus relinquish our salvation. But if Calvinists were right to insist on the indelible character of divine grace—that salvation is a road with no u-turns—Wesley was also correct to claim that the life of faith is a demanding adventure in growth and progress, not an affair of flacid ease and static sameness. This is why, when students ask for my chief complaint against atheism, I reply that it is so bloody boring and utterly uninteresting. The only real interest, the only real excitement, and the only real adventure lie in following this

But if Calvinists were right to insist on the indelible character of divine grace—that salvation is a road with no u-turns—Wesley was also correct to claim that the life of faith is a demanding adventure in growth and progress, not an affair of flacid ease and static sameness.

divine and dangerous quest for wonder, love, and praise.

The Wesleys learned, to their pain, that the path of Christ-like love is strewn with hazards and threats. I suspect they would wince at hearing my evangelical students speak of their Christian “walk.” Surely the more biblical metaphors for the Christian life are found in such words as “struggle,” “contest,” “battle,” “warfare.” “*Soldiers of Christ, arise,*” Charles Wesley cries out in one of his best hymns, “and put your armor on.” “Wrestle and fight and pray,” he adds, “tread all the powers of darkness down and win the well-fought day.” This call to Christian arms was no mere metaphor. The Wesleys repeatedly stirred up riots in the towns where they were preaching. In a place called Devizes, for example, the local Anglican ministers were so riled by their influence on the masses that they aroused a mob against them. These ruffians first stoned and then flooded with firehoses the house where the Wesleys were staying. The hooligans ripped off the shutters and drove the preachers’ horses into a pond. Local Methodist leaders were ducked in the pond; others had bulldogs set upon them, their homes looted, their businesses ruined. Thus did the Wesleys understand the cost of being lost in Christ’s sanctifying love. As

the Irish Catholic theologian Herbert McCabe starkly puts it: “If you do not love, you will not be alive;...if you do love, you will be killed.”

Charles Wesley may have written one of his most remarkable hymns, “Jesus, Lover of My Soul,” in response to the frightening incident at Devizes. It is a deeply mystical, even a spiritually erotic hymn; for it speaks openly of Jesus as the Christian’s spouse and lover. Yet there is nothing smarmy about such intimacy with Christ. Set to a minor key by Joseph Parry, it has a haunting quality that makes one tremble at the thought of fleeing to Christ’s breast as our only security in the midst of life’s floods and storms, whether they be human or natural. We are naked to evil, Charles confesses, unless Christ shields us:

Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless
soul on thee;
leave, ah! leave me not alone, still support
and comfort me.
All my trust on thee is stayed; all my help
from thee I bring;
cover my defenseless head with the shadow
of thy wing.

Lest we think that a sanctified and perfected life has to do

only with personal and private piety, we must remember John Wesley's saying that "There is no holiness that is not a social holiness." The Wesleys were profoundly concerned with the amelioration of human suffering—poverty and illiteracy, sickness and criminality, hunger and homelessness. Yet they were not romantic about God's "preferential option for the poor." Sin infects the poor no less than the rich, even if it does greater harm in the rich than the poor. Poverty can be the occasion for a terrible envy, just as wealth can induce a terrible complacency. Both rich *and* poor need saving. Charles Wesley's hymn gets the matter exactly right: it is not the poor as such, but the "humble poor" who believe. Nor was it physical deprivation alone that the Wesleys cared about. John was so troubled by mental illness that he practiced an early form of electro-shock therapy. At the Wesley Museum in London, one can still see the machine he devised for attaching electrodes to the temples and then turning a hand-cranked generator to try to silence the inner demons that plagued some of his followers. Some of Wesley's home cures we now find funny, as in this remedy for baldness: "Rub the [bald] part morning and evening with Onions, 'till it is red; and rub it afterwards with Honey."

It has often been said that the Wesleyan revival did so much to relieve human misery that, almost by themselves, the two Wesleys prevented a violent and destructive revolution from occurring in England such as happened in France in 1789. Yet while they were opposed to the American Revolution, the Wesleys were not political reactionaries. John especially abominated the institution of slavery. One of his last acts before dying was to call the social reformer William Wilberforce to his bedside and to encourage him in his battle against the slave trade. Two days before his death, Wesley called slavery "that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, of human nature....Reading this morning a tract...by a poor African [Wesley wrote in his journal] I was particularly struck by [the] circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged and outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a *law* in our colonies that the *oath* of a black man against a white goes for nothing. What villainy this is!"

IV. Orthopathy: Praiseworthy Feeling

To be lost in the wonder of universal atonement is the only orthodoxy, and to be lost in the love of God and neighbor is the only orthopraxy, the true way to a finished and perfected life of holiness. Yet the Wesleys also believed that orthodoxy and orthopraxy are sustained by *orthopathy*: a true feeling for God's presence. Here we come to what is surely the most controversial and dangerous aspect of the Wesleyan tradition: the insistence that conversion is sudden and dramatic and emotionally overwhelming. Notice that I end where the Wesleys began. They had *felt* their hearts strangely warmed in 1738, and their experience of radical personal renewal is what fired their mighty movement. George Whitefield joined them in making this call to supernatural rebirth: not to be born of blood alone like Nicodemus, but to be born *again* of water and

the Spirit. Thousands heeded their call and were converted, both in England and America, in this great spiritual awakening.

The danger inherent in this strong stress on feeling is that it can lead to a dreadful subjectivism. If our fundamental assurance of God's reality lies solely or chiefly within our own feelings, how do we know that we have not fallen prey to auto-suggestion? How do we know that the God we *feel* is not our own invention? Surely this is a very real peril in our time. I know so-called Christians who have virtual contempt for the church as the body of Christ because they believe that their faith depends entirely on their personal *feelings* about Jesus. Because they have Jesus in their heart, they feel no need for the community of Christ. A secret atheism often lurks beneath the surface of such feeling-based religion. It makes one depend on spiritual binges and emotional orgies. Once these religious sprees are finished, they prove so unsatisfying that they then have to be ratcheted up to a new and higher level of intensity. Such emotionalism also leads to contempt for the life of the mind. A former bookstore manager tells me that many students at a certain Methodist seminary refuse to buy their textbooks because they regard theological learning as an obstacle to their intense emotional experience of Christ. Why learn Greek and study church history when you can get high on Jesus?

There was no such emotional self-indulgence at work in the Wesleys. Reading some of John's sermons again recently, I was startled to see how often he employs Greek biblical phrases in the midst of ordinary discourse, not to show off his sophistication, but to deepen his people's understanding of the Christian life. Nor did the Wesleys ever stop stressing the importance of what Whitefield called the "externals"—the ordinary (and often uninspiring) daily practice of self-denial, the routine doing of good for people in trouble, the sometime dutiful observance of prayer and fasting. Their deep religious feelings were thus founded on careful Christian discipline, not on emotional egotism.

We need also to notice that the Wesleys' orthopathy was profoundly sacramental. They knew that their feeling for God's transforming presence was not self-generated precisely because it was rooted in objective sacramental acts that signaled God's own prior act. For example, they never surrendered the practice of infant baptism. This came as a tremendous surprise, since most evangelists insist that only the converted should be baptized. The Wesleys indeed maintained that people who had been baptized as babies must confirm and claim as their own the deed that has once been done in their behalf. Yet their very call to a deeply felt conversion could be heard, the Wesleys also believed, because of the grace that had been instilled at baptism. In baptismal regeneration, they insisted, God enters children's lives and makes a place for himself that can later be filled, whether instantly or gradually. The Wesleys also insisted on frequent observance of the Lord's Supper. It was not for them a mere memorial for a dead hero, but a life-giving encounter with the living Lord in his very real presence through consecrated bread and wine.

The Wesleys' deepest source of feeling came from their

conviction that faith is not something that can be earned or merited. Much less can it be chosen like another consumer item. The Wesleys were not decisionistic Pelagians. "It is not you who chose me," they often quoted Jesus' saying from the Fourth Gospel, "but I who chose you." John Wesley never tired of reiterating the point that "faith is the free gift of God." We cannot give ourselves faith, he said; it is the mysterious grant of the gracious God. "No man is able to work it in himself," wrote John Wesley. "It is a work of omnipotence. It requires no less power thus to quicken a dead soul than to raise a body that lies in a grave. It is a new creation; and none can create a new soul but He who at first created the heavens and the earth." That God has given us faith is the true occasion for joyful and grateful feeling. Such praise for the gift of faith made John Wesley declare that "every Christian, in the proper sense of the word, must be an enthusiast." And yet a single enthusiastic tongue is utterly inadequate to sing our great Redeemer's praise.

"O For a Thousand Tongues" is, to my mind, the deepest expression of the Wesleys' orthopathy. It is no mindless praise-chorus: one word, two notes, three hours. It is, instead, a great hymn of praiseworthy feeling.

In Christ, your head, you then shall know,
shall feel your sins forgiven;
anticipate your heaven below, and own that
love in heaven.

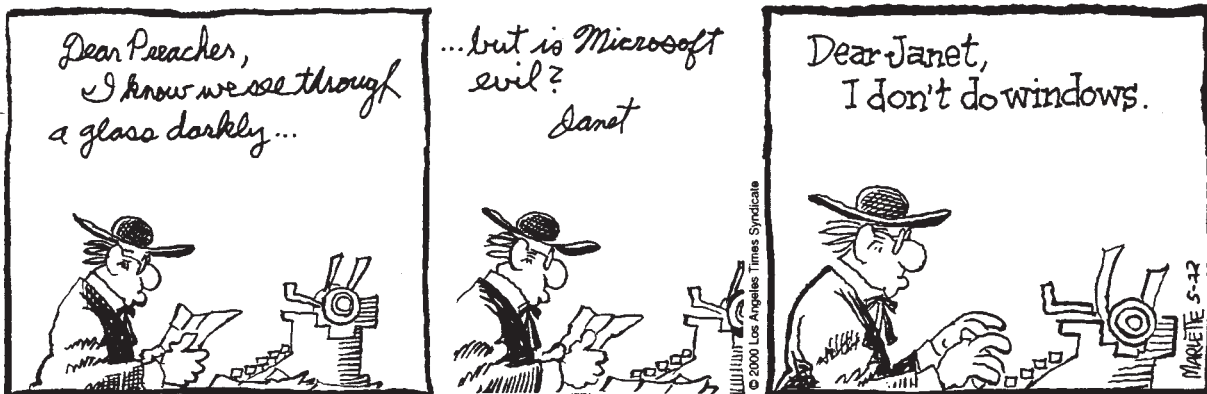
The most stirring lines of all, for me at least, are the least politically correct. Most hymnals abandon them altogether, while the latest Methodist hymnal has an asterisk indicating that they may be omitted. I believe, by contrast, that these lines constitute real orthopathy and thus must not be left out:

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb, your
loosened tongues employ;
ye blind, behold your savior come, and leap,
ye lame, for joy.

As the late Christopher Lasch reminded us in *The Culture of Narcissism*, we have virtually defined deformity out of existence with our lumbering euphemisms. We speak no longer of freaks and lunatics and spastics but of the mentally challenged and the temporarily disabled. What we have gained in sensitivity, Lasch notes, we have lost in true compassion. Charles Wesley truly cared about the deaf and the dumb, the blind and the lame. He knew that their grotesque condition is a sign of our own spiritual lack and want. We all learn to hear the Word of life when Christ unstops our ears. We all speak Truth when He loosens our stumbling tongues. We all see the world aright when He lifts the scales from our blinded eyes. We all leap for true Joy when He heals our spiritually lame bodies and souls. This deep praise for the God of our redemption is the one unfailing orthopathy. Here is true and praiseworthy feeling because—grounded in the Alpha and Omega, the end of faith no less than its beginning—it sets our hearts at liberty.

V. Conclusion

This, as I understand it, is the enduring witness of John and Charles Wesley. Their theology was rooted in an orthodoxy centered upon sheer wonder before the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ's atoning death for every human being. Their faith issued in an orthopraxy based on a social holiness to be lived through a life of sanctifying love of God and neighbor. Their Christianity, far from being an emotional orgy of good feelings, produced an orthopathy based on the praise of God for the free and utterly undeserved gift of faith. To be lost in wonder, love, and praise is not, therefore, to be set adrift from the ordinary concerns of life and wafted into a stratospheric spiritual realm. It is to be lost to mere self-interest and self-concern. But chiefly it is to be found by the God who, as St. Augustine said, grants what He demands: the best of our minds in true belief, the best of our wills in true action, the best of our hearts in true feeling. ■



Epiphanies

By Argye Hillis

[Dr. Argye Hillis is a woman for all seasons. The wife of Dr. William Hillis, a world-class scientist with an M.D. degree from Johns Hopkins who has until recently been Vice President for Student Affairs at Baylor University, she holds a Ph.D. degree from Johns Hopkins and recently retired as Professor of Clinical Surgery at Texas A & M College of Medicine. She is the Mother of two sons and a daughter who are themselves achievers of renown in their chosen professions. (One son has just won a prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship grant.) Dr. Argye Hillis is an active churchwoman and a widely traveled world citizen with a wide variety of wonderful gifts and fascinating interests. I am indebted to my friend Bob Mitchell for passing along to me his discovery of this article.]

There have been two epiphanies in my life, when I really felt like God was speaking clearly to me. I didn't physically hear or see anything, but both times the content of the message was surprisingly clear. The first time it happened was at Girls Auxiliary camp in 1945. The minister was giving a strong emotional plea for people to dedicate their lives to be full-time Christian workers. I had always planned on being a missionary, anyway, so I really expected a call. I felt NOTHING.

"Beg him," the speaker called to us. "Say Lord, please call me to be a missionary! Call me to be a music minister. Whatever it is, I'm ready!"

So I did. I prayed to be called. I promised to answer, no matter how hard the path looked (I tried to push the idea of all those pretty costumes out of my mind). Then, to my surprise, it came. Not to be a missionary (so much for the travel and the pretty costumes) Not to be a great writer (getting harder). But to be—AN ORDINARY WOMAN. For me, that meant a wife and mother, no fame, no glamour. Now that was hard. Surely, I thought, God didn't really mean it. I struggled. He pled. I struggled. He kept pleading. I rationalized. The plea continued. I waited. Finally, at the last minute, I stumbled, crying, down the aisle into the speaker's arms.

He pulled back and looked me in the face. "Yes! You've decided to do his will! And what has he called you to do?"

"To be an ordinary woman!" I sobbed.

"OK. Well, God bless you," he said lamely.

When we were all lined up in front, mostly tear-dried, he introduced us.

He came to me about third.

"And here is little Argye Briggs. She's not exactly sure what God wants of her..." he faltered.

Oh, yes, I am sure! I screamed in my mind. *An ordinary woman! Not famous! Not exotic! Just a plain woman.*

"But whatever it is, she wants to follow his will," the preacher finished apologetically.

I didn't have the nerve to correct him in public, but nothing had ever been clearer to me. As it has turned out the call to be an ordinary Christian woman in these times has turned out to be an extraordinarily exciting challenge, demanding every bit of intelligence, resourcefulness, and, yes courage that I could muster. I wouldn't change it if I could.

The second epiphany was much later when my mother contracted a terrible illness.. They thought at the time that it was infectious encephalitis. In any case, it left her severely handicapped—unable to walk, talk, or carry out any of the normal activities of daily living. She was what I now know is called "locked in." Locked in is what happens when a person has no means of communication. Her cerebellum—the center of coordination—had been destroyed. When this happens, there is no way to speak, no way to signal. Try to signal and your hands fly wildly like startled birds. Try to speak and a scream comes out.

Because Mother was rapidly dying in the hospital, my husband and I took her to live with us. Surely we could care for her better than the hospital was doing. I stood beside her wheelchair and looked in her eyes, trying to see if there was any meaning there. Suffering, yes. But I couldn't be sure of meaning. *If she is not there and I act like she is, I've just wasted my breath. But if by some miracle she is there and I act like she is not, what a tragedy!*

So I decided to work on the assumption that she was there. I copied out poetry in huge letters on newsprint and pasted it on her ceiling, where she stared at night. I dressed her every morning before the children even, brushed her hair, and lifted her into the wheel chair to work with her. I was torn between the needs of my mother and of my children—especially Beth. Danny was five and in kindergarten at the neighborhood church. David had just turned three and pattered around entertaining himself. Beth was 18 months old. We moved her crib into the boys' room to make room for Mother. Every day Beth stood patiently beside the wheelchair, watching, her big blue eyes solemn. Thinking.

At the beginning of Mother's illness, I'd prayed simply for her to live, but that was wrong. Sometimes now I prayed for her just to die, but that was wrong, too. Finally, I learned just to pray for God's merciful presence. Sometimes, as I sat with mother I read Toynbee's *Study of History*. Sometimes I talked or read to her. Sometimes I lifted her into the car and we drove with the children, but she usually found this too tiring.

Within a few weeks I was completely exhausted. Dad sent from Oklahoma and hired a sitter for the nights. The first night that the sitter was there I put Mother to bed and introduced the sitter to the situation. Then I enjoyed an uninterrupted few minutes reading to the children and tucking them in. All quiet in the children's room I went back to my room and lay across the bedspread. Through two shut doors I could hear Mother screaming every time she drifted off.

WHY? The agonized question rose from the depths of my being. Surely, this is not the way life was supposed to be! This is definitely not abundant living. As I lay there on my back about to drift off, I remembered the first movie I ever saw. The movie was a color extravaganza with Shirley Temple and I must have been six or seven. The Bluebird of Happiness. In it two children visit the Land of the Unborn Children, where sailing away on a beautiful fullmasted sailboat to be born into real life is each child's dream. Is life really such a privilege, I wondered?

Then I had something like a vision. I didn't literally see or hear anything, but I kind of dreamed that I had not yet been born and that the Lord was asking me whether I wanted to be a part of real life. I saw stretched before me, like a giant mural, all of human history as Toynbee had so dramatically described it.

Did I want to be a primitive man, grubbing laboriously for food unaware of the heavens swirling above? The crusades? No—a terrible time! One by one, we discussed various possible lives for me to consider. Then it was as though there was a zoom camera that focused down on my little yellow house in San Antonio. And the Lord said, "I need someone here. I have these three wonderful, gifted children to be raised. Moreover, I need someone with the resourcefulness to reach this woman trapped in a body that doesn't respond."

Oh, I gasped. That's the place for me! I know I could do it! What a challenge, what an opportunity! How creative! What an epiphany!

I chose it. No answer as to why. No promise about outcome. But I chose how I would respond.

Still with no evidence one way or the other, I continued to assume Mother was in there and needed my companionship and love. Finally, one bright morning as I worked around the house, pulling her chair along with me, I was chatting about

my reading and casually asked rhetorically, "I don't even know if Toynbee is dead or alive, do you?"

uh HUH

I spun around and looked at her.

You said "yes," didn't you?

Uh HUH!

Can—you—say—"no"?

HUH uh!

Do you know about Toynbee? Is he still alive?

uh HUH!

Are you sure?

uh HUH!

At a university or something?

uh HUH!

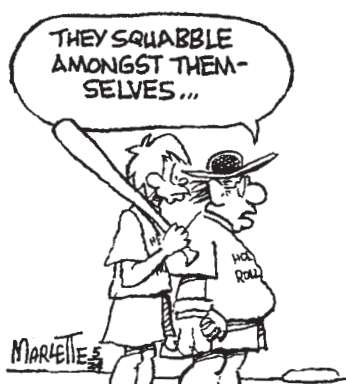
Remembering the old game of 20 questions, I sat down with her and asked one yes-no question after another. It took half an hour, but she told me where Toynbee was and what he was doing. Then I sat down beside her and we both cried.

I knew.

And she knew that I knew.

My assumption that Mother was "in there" turned out to be truer than I had dreamed possible. Only her coordination had been destroyed; her courageous spirit, her brilliant brain, her love and creativity were all untouched. She lived another 35 years. She never liked to talk about the lost months much, but she told me enough to show that she was aware of and remembered every single event of her illness. Eventually she learned how to speak some other way. I can't explain it. Those who knew her or put in the effort could usually understand what she said. She never walked again or regained many of her previous activities, but courageously and oh-so-slowly she fought her way back to a productive and satisfying life.

Today Beth, the toddler who stood for hours beside Mother's wheelchair, is a neurologist on the faculty of Johns Hopkins. She works especially with adults with brain damage from stroke or disease and has a priceless gift for looking beyond the worst physical handicaps and reaching the person inside. It was she who finally diagnosed my mother's illness convincingly as paraneoplastic cerebellar degeneration, a condition that was unknown at the time of mother's illness, and it is she who now cares for others with the disease. ■



The Shape of Justice

By Charles Wellborn

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

What is justice?

At first glance that appears to be a simple question. Many people would answer, "Justice is fairness," and be satisfied. Yet the distillation of the essence of justice and the perplexing problem of determining what constitutes "fairness" in real-life situations have occupied the attention of many of the world's best legal, philosophic, and religious minds for centuries. From Plato and Aristotle in the ancient Greek world through Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period to modern legal scholars such as John Rawls, the meaning of justice has been endlessly debated.

In a recent issue of this journal (October, 1999) Dr. Ruth Ann Foster of the Truett Seminary at Baylor University gave us a perceptive delineation of "Biblical Justice." She rightly emphasized the partiality of that justice and its inherent bias toward the marginalized and oppressed individuals in society. The inbuilt final purpose of Biblical justice is the redemption of human beings, body and soul. Forgiveness, mercy, and compassion are seen as powerful forces in the redemptive process.

An oft-used example of the workings of Biblical justice is the familiar story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11). The woman had committed a crime. Jesus did not condone or excuse her crime. Rather, he illustrated his trust in the power of redemptive love by forgiving the woman of her sin. With mercy and compassion he told her, "Go and sin no more." At the same time he focused attention on the hypocrisy of her accusers: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." Many Christians have found in this story an insight into the core of the Christian gospel.

If we study this incident in the search for the full meaning of justice, however, we must remind ourselves of certain salient considerations. It is important, for instance, to note that Jesus was not operating within the precincts of a formal court of law. He was dealing with an individual in a one-to-one relationship, and he was free in that context to exercise forgiveness and mercy, unhindered by any statutory codes of jurisprudence.

Clearly, the actions of Jesus in this particular case provide a valuable pattern for the personal moral conduct of his followers. Compassion and its accompanying special concern for the downtrodden and oppressed in this world are essential elements in the Christian life. They are not options for the believ-

er but ethical imperatives.

When we seek to translate those imperatives into real-life situations, however, we face some major difficulties. In our society the Christian must be aware of two types of justice—*Biblical* justice and *legal* justice. The distinction between the two is necessary and inescapable. In ordinary life people are constrained to operate within communities and under governments. This means that we are bound by the limits of statutory prescriptions, as enacted by legislatures and interpreted by courts of law. Quite clearly, Biblical justice and legal justice are not one and the same thing. Thus, in this area, as in many others, the Christian citizen faces the problem of how to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's."

In Professor Foster's article, previously referred to, she correctly rejects the traditional symbol of justice as a blindfolded woman with a pair of scales as an inadequate representation of Biblical justice. Still, that figure is frequently used as a symbol of legal justice. The woman with her impartial scales stands above the entrance to the Old Bailey, London's Central Court of Criminal Justice. It is possible to argue that, while inappropriate as a symbol of Biblical justice, the figure is significant as a representation of impartiality, which is an essential element in legal justice.

When a Christian citizen sits as a judge or as a member of a jury, he or she is subject not only to Biblical imperatives but also to the complex demands of a statutory judicial system. Had Jesus been in such a position with the adulterous woman as an indicted prisoner before the court, he would not have been free to say, "Go and sin no more." Legal justice, in contrast to Biblical justice, does not—and cannot—operate in that fashion. It demands that all relevant facts be presented and a decision made as to the guilt or innocence of the person on trial. If, in the type of case we are discussing, the prisoner is found guilty by a jury, it is normally the responsibility of the judge to impose a sentence within certain strictly defined limits. In this situation the symbol of the blindfolded woman is entirely appropriate. Ideal legal justice is characterized by equality of treatment for all those who come in conflict with the law, regardless of factors such as race, gender, religion, or social and economic distinctions.

Does this emphasis upon the differences between Biblical and legal justice mean that they are irreconcilable and that there are no relevant points of contact between the two? I think not.

When we recognize the partiality and special concern for the poor of Biblical justice, it is necessary to remember certain

important considerations. First, Biblical justice does not condone or overlook the seriousness of criminal and unloving acts, whether these acts are committed by the rich and powerful or the poor and powerless. If a murder is committed, for example, one must recognize that a human life—often, a totally innocent one—has been tragically ended. The consequences for that person and his or her family and associates, all beloved by God, are inescapable. It is in this sense that the revolutionary and violent terrorist, however just he or she may feel their cause to be, cannot plead justification for destructive acts purely on the basis of poverty, oppression, or marginalization in society. Every human life is infinitely precious to God. Because all of us are individuals with a significant degree of free will and moral choice (though the scope of that freedom will vary from individual to individual), we all must necessarily face the consequences of our actions. The man or woman who commits a legal crime must be judged by legal justice, if a community, state, or nation is to function rightly.

The second important thing to remember in this connection is that Biblical justice does impinge in fundamental ways upon legal justice. Biblical justice demands that, within the operations of legal justice, every individual should be treated, not as an object or a “case,” but as a human being. The legal concept of “fairness”—equality before the law—is a reflection of an important essence of Biblical justice. Insistence in legal practice upon the veracity and validity of evidence and the right of every accused individual to a speedy, orderly, and impartial judgment by his or her peers is certainly consistent with the structure of Biblical justice. Furthermore, Biblical justice insists that the state abstain from certain types of “cruel and inhuman” punishment—torture, for instance. Biblical justice constantly seeks to inject into legal justice elements of humane and civilized behavior.

I want here, however, to go beyond this basic area of identification between Biblical and legal justice to emphasize one particular way in which legal justice, *within its own structures* can be shaped by in the injunctions of Biblical justice with its emphasis on special attention to the poor and socially impoverished elements in our society, the so-called “shadow people.”

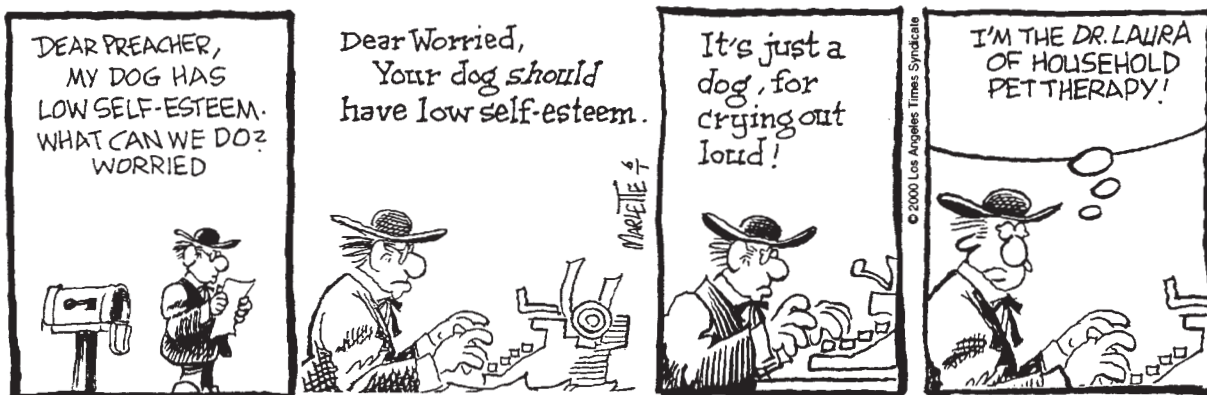
In the early development of English law, the most important basis of the American legal system, the major constituent of jurisprudence was the “common law.” In the absence of any

substantial body of statutory legislation in medieval England, judicial decisions necessarily had to be based on and reflect the common customs of the society and community. Many cases were decided by reference to previous judgments, or precedents. Out of these precedents grew general rules which guided judges in particular cases. Subsequent cases, however, might reveal new and different circumstances for consideration. Many of these unique situations were the result of the constantly changing social and technological dimensions of the society. In such cases, the common-law judge was free to depart from precedent and establish a new rule of decision, thus establishing a new precedent for other magistrates adjudicating in similar situations. In this way common law incorporated a dynamic for change. As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in his treatise, *The Common Law*, (1881), “The life of the common law has not been logic; it has been experience.”

Alongside the common-law courts in medieval England a parallel system of jurisprudence developed—courts of equity. At first, equity courts were administered by the Church, but gradually they became part of the state’s legal structure. Equity courts originated in English law when subjects petitioned the monarch for relief in specific legal situations, especially those instances in which the common law did not seem to provide opportunities for justice. Equity developed into a special body of rules and judgments over and above those administered in other courts. Courts of equity provided legal remedies based on ideas of “fairness” to litigants or accused whose situations could not properly be judged by common law.

Over the centuries the development of extensive systems of specific legislation and judicial statutes took over most areas formerly covered by common law and equity, so that in modern times in both Britain and the United States statutory law has come to encompass most legal situations. Both the common law and the concept of equity, however, remain important in the interpretation of statutory laws, many of which are restatements of common law and equity principles.

It seems to me that the precepts of legal equity provide a significant bridge between legal and Biblical justice. In his influential book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971) John Rawls, the contemporary legal philosopher, draws extensively on ethical



considerations, primarily those involving equity, to support his understanding of the meaning of justice. He develops the proposition that no advantage for any one group in a pluralistic and diverse society has the moral right to exist if that advantage does not in the long run benefit the most highly disadvantaged elements of that society. This implies that legal decisions should incorporate as an essential element a consideration of the relevant social, environmental, and economic circumstances of the accused or the litigants. Such an approach to legal justice certainly involves an application of the core of Biblical justice, though Rawls himself does not explicitly spell out this connection. Whenever the important background factors are ignored, serious miscarriages of justice, especially from the standpoint of Biblical norms, are all too likely to occur.

An over-simplified illustration may illuminate this point. Most people—certainly most Christians—would agree that the transgression of a poor woman who steals a loaf of bread to feed her hungry family ought not to be judged on the same level as the crime of an individual who, out of selfish greed, defrauds thousands of people out of their life savings. True, both acts are thefts in statutory terms, but considerations of equity should certainly operate in the assessment of punishment or penalty. (As an aside to any attorneys who may read this, I am not presuming to deal with specific legal aspects of equity but rather with a general concept.) While considerations of equity cannot override statutory specifics, the idea of “fairness” as a working legal principal is certainly necessary.

For the Christian citizen there is also another avenue of connection between legal and Biblical justice. Statutory law is enacted by legislatures, setting up judicial procedures and penalties. In a democratic society the Christian citizen has the opportunity to be involved in the political process in which laws take shape. From a Christian standpoint legal statutes should, wherever possible, be influenced by Biblical concepts such as the equality of all individuals before the law and the essential humanness of judicial procedures and penalties. As an example, it is certainly a Christian imperative to seek to emphasize in our penal system the necessity of rehabilitation as well as retribution—a concept sadly too often forgotten in our modern prisons, labeled by many experts as “universities of crime.”

A sensational recent murder case in Britain can serve as a vivid illustration of what I am trying to emphasize here. I am quite sure that similar illustrations could be drawn from American legal history.

In February, 1993, two boys—Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, each aged ten years—enticed a two-year-old child, James Bulger, away from a shopping mall where his mother had left him unattended while she browsed in one of the mall’s shops. The boys took the toddler with them to an isolated area near a railroad track and there, for reasons never adequately explained, killed the child. (It never became clear whether both boys, or only one, actually participated in the murder.) No apparent motive existed. James Bulger was not sexually

assaulted and had nothing of value for the boys to steal.

The horror of this brutal act, plus the lack of motivation, made the crime one that could easily be sensationalized, and the press, especially those tabloids known in Britain as the “gutter press,” took full advantage of the opportunity. By the time the two boys were arrested and charged with the crime, a climate of “mob justice” and “lynch law” had been created. The police, the courts, and politicians were all under tremendous public pressure. Even before the boys were tried and found guilty, editorials and screaming newspaper headlines were demanding vengeance in the name of the slain two-year-old and his distraught family.

In this atmosphere the events which occurred were not surprising. The two boys (by the time of the trial one was eleven, the other still ten) were tried in what was essentially an adult court. They sat through complicated judicial procedures which were obviously beyond their comprehension. In the months before they were found guilty they were given psychiatric examinations but were denied any treatment for what any objective person could see were greatly disturbed personalities.

During the trial the presiding judge refused to allow any testimony regarding the home, social, or economic background of the two boys, ruling that such evidence was irrelevant and inadmissible. The only fundamental question raised was, “Did the boys have any recognition of the fact that what they were doing was wrong?” In fact, both children came from broken and impoverished homes and had been reared in an atmosphere of contempt for the police and the law. They were frequent school truants whose parents had made no serious attempt to keep them in school. The quality of whatever moral training the boys had received could be seriously questioned. None of these circumstances was allowed to influence the final verdict and sentencing.

The guilty verdict was reached after less than an hour of jury discussion. The trial judge then assessed what were in effect life sentences on both boys but fixed a minimum eight year period of detention before they could be considered for any possible parole. Upon reviewing the verdict the Lord Chief Justice raised the minimum term to ten years. The press screamed its protest at the verdict, and the Home Secretary, who in Britain is the political head of the judicial system, gen- uflexed to the popular outcry and overrode the judgment of the courts, raising the minimum period of imprisonment before possible parole to fifteen years.

Britain does not have capital punishment, but elements of the British people and press are continually calling for its return. For these people—those who demand a wasted life in payment for a wasted life—the Bulger case provided a powerful platform from which to shout for the blood of the two convicted children.

The case re-emerged in the public consciousness in late 1999 when the Inspector of Her Majesty’s Prisons, a highly respected public official, ventured the opinion, based on his study of the development of the two boys during their years of detention, that they might well be considered by the Home Secretary for an earlier parole hearing than had been pre-

scribed. Both boys had been model prisoners and, in particular, Robert Thompson had made significant progress in his schooling and was preparing to take college entrance examinations, called “A-levels” in Britain.

The outburst that followed this announcement was predictable. The Inspector was accused of being “soft” on crime and a “weak-kneed liberal.” Understandably, James Bulger’s parents reacted with indignation. Less understandably the “gutter press” screamed with horror and fury. The Home Secretary apparently put pressure on the Inspector, and he publicly retracted his statement.

One further development is significant. Early in 2000 the European Court of Human Rights, which within the structure of the European Community has jurisdiction over British courts in this type of case, ruled on an appeal of the now six-year-old verdict, that the two boys had not received a fair trial, since the proceedings of an adult court would be intimidatory and incomprehensible to children of their age. The Court also specified that hearings in such cases should be held in private or at least with limited public and press attendance. The Court further declared that purely political individuals, such as the Home Secretary, should not interfere in the legal process and that sentencing was a matter properly left to a judge and jury. The Court’s decision raised the possibility of a new trial for Robert Thompson and Jon Venables.

Are there important lessons to be learned from this sorry incident for the Christian citizen seeking to relate legal and Biblical justice? I believe there are several such propositions.

(1) At what age does a child become morally and, therefore, criminally responsible for his or her actions? A precise answer to that question is extraordinarily difficult, but any answer must certainly take into account individual differences. It is absurd to say that all children reach an equal age of accountability at a set calendar age. Social and environmental factors, as well as the quality of the moral training which the child has received, must be taken into consideration.

Virtually every reputable child psychologist would agree that children, in general, are less able than most adults to realize the long-term consequences of their actions on other people, to reflect on their behavior, or to experience feelings of guilt and shame. These abilities develop as the child’s personality develops and matures.

(2) I repeat here my conviction that neither legal nor Biblical justice allows those who commit crimes such as murder to escape responsibility for their acts. The individual concerned is guilty and must be punished, and the public as a whole must be protected from such further acts on his or her part. But it must also be stressed that the type of punishment should be, certainly in terms of Biblical justice, redemptive and rehabilitative. I submit that this concern is doubly important when the law deals with acts committed by children. While, ideally, all penal sanctions should carry the element of

rehabilitation, the opportunities for such redemptive treatment are obviously much greater when we are dealing with very young offenders. It is, I believe, unchristian to believe that a child’s life is totally ruined beyond repair, however terrible an act he or she has committed. I know no scripture which supports such an idea.

At the very least, children should not be tried for offenses in an adult court setting. In Britain and, so far as I know, in the United States, (though the exact age may differ), criminal offenders under the age of 18 who are charged with less serious crimes are dealt with in youth or juvenile courts. Such practice implicitly recognizes the inappropriateness of adult courts for these individuals. Yet, in Britain when charged with murder or other more serious crimes, children must be tried in an adult setting. Following the recent school shootings in the United States, some people have demanded that the culprits—none of them adults—should be handled as if they were fully responsible individuals. To accede to these demands seems to me to be little more than an illogical sop to an atavistic public.

To return in conclusion to my general proposition, I have argued that Biblical justice should not be confused with legal justice. The actions of Jesus in a one-to-one personal relationship outside a formal court of law cannot be simply and without modification transferred to the domain of legal justice, bound by statutory law and judicial precedents.

I have also argued, however, that there is a viable bridge between Biblical and legal justice provided by judicial equity or “fairness,” and that this bridge provides a way of introducing the Biblical demand for consideration of all relevant circumstances relating to a crime or an accused criminal. In this way the Christian concern for the poor and the oppressed becomes an important constituent of legal justice. Such an approach is consistent with the dimensions of Biblical justice in real-life situations. It avoids a naive, over-simplified approach by Christians to complex problems. In this regard the oft-asked question, “What would Jesus do?” is a legitimate one, but only if its application is fully understood.

I would suggest that in an increasingly complex society, the question might well be rephrased as “What *could* Jesus do in this actual situation (assuming that Jesus acts in this case in his fully human capacity, as we mortals must act)?” Put in this way, the question recognizes the concrete and inescapable limits within which human beings must choose and act.

The common phrase, “the art of the possible,” applies not only in its original sense to politics, but also to the total ethical and moral task of Christians in a modern world. This does not in any way constitute a watering-down of the moral imperatives of Jesus or an abandonment of any of the ethical demands of the Christian faith. Rather, it opens up in practical ways the opportunity of Christian citizens to influence effectively the “shape of justice” in everyday life. ■

Moses and the Founders

By Ross Coggins

[Ross Coggins is a former college Religion professor, missionary to Indonesia, Christian Life Commission associate, and State Department specialist dealing with world hunger. He now lives in the Washington, D.C. suburb of Sherwood Forest in Maryland.]

Thank God for Charlton Heston! Whenever I turn on my television lately I find his ruggedly handsome image and his Moses-down-from-the-mountain voice exhorting us to reject the counsel of our lying leaders who would take away our guns or force us to register them. His logic is irresistible—especially when he intones the clincher: *What would the founders think?*

The appeal to the founders is long overdue. Just as our fundamentalist Christian friends insist on biblical literalism, we should insist that our politics be guided by the precepts of the nation's founders. When they guaranteed constitutionally the right to bear arms, they rebutted every argument for gun controls. Never mind that they defined this right in terms of “a well regulated militia” or that conditions in colonial America were different. Our right to carry a gun is forever set in concrete. Every time we have forsaken the founders' clear guidance, disaster has resulted.

Take the right to vote, for example. The founders strictly limited suffrage to white propertyholding males. Consider the chaos of our current political scene! Can any sane American argue that it would not be better if all these poor people, these minorities, these women were barred from the voting booth? The founders envisioned a more stable, a more tranquil society. They knew that by limiting the vote to the better element, peace, public righteousness, and civic order would follow. As a white, male propertyowner, I cherish the hope that this great nation one day will wake up and restore the founders' electoral system.

Closely linked to suffrage is the way congressional representation is determined. Seats in the House of Representatives were apportioned on the basis of a census count. Here once again we have diverged from the original constitution, accord-

ing to which the founders stipulated that in the allocation of congressional seats to the states, slaves were only counted as three-fifths of a person. (When Thomas Jefferson was consorting with Sally Hemmings, did he feel that the adultery was only three-fifths of a sin? A venal rather than a mortal sin? Has Jerry Falwell offered an opinion on this?) Back to our thesis: the founders were right. Think of the turmoil that has resulted from equal political representation for all: countless struggles for civil rights have disturbed our tranquility since 1870, when for the first time all humans in the nation were accounted as equals in the census. Give people equal representation and the next thing you know they'll demand equal rights. As Charlton Heston says, What would the founders think!

We could list any number of subversive betrayals of our founders' vision, but the present challenge is to our right to bear arms. There are those who say that the proliferation of gun deaths across our nation constitutes a mandate to control the sale and use of guns, particularly hand guns. We must resist this. Fortunately, one of the presidential candidates, Governor George W. Bush, is a proven champion of the second amendment, even to the extent that he promoted and signed a Texas state law permitting citizens to carry concealed weapons, subsequently clarified to permit carrying them into churches. Unfortunately, there is recent news of a shooting in a church. A man entered a Texas Baptist church in Fort Worth and shot four people before taking his own life. *Gun control nuts will miss the real lesson in this tragic event!* In all probability the victims were unarmed. Where was the pastor's weapon in the moment of crisis? Could not a pistol-packing pastor have saved the day? In view of the proliferation of church conflict today, should not every pastor, every deacon, and every elder carry a gun?

Some of our Christian friends wear a button inscribed WWJD, meaning “What would Jesus do?” In these troubled times, I believe Charlton Heston would be happy to see us wear a WWFT button—What would the founders think—as we confront the complex ethical problems of this Brave New Millennium? ■

The Tower

By Hal Haralson

[Hal Haralson practices law in Austin, Texas.]

The Tower at the University of Texas was made infamous by Charles Whitman's sniping.

This Tower is orange when UT wins and the lights say: "Number One" when the Longhorns are on top.

The Tower attracts suicides like the San Francisco Bridge.

I looked at the afternoon *Austin American-Statesman* headline: UT Employee Plunges to Death from the Tower. Then I saw the name and felt failure and anger. "Douglas Miller, age 25 . . . plunged 29 stories today."

I had met Douglas Miller (not his real name) two years earlier.

Shoalcreek Hospital has a pleasant psychiatric ward. It was my last day there and I was feeling good—so good that I called my office and had my correspondence and portable dictating machine sent out. My doctor had put me on Lithium, the treatment of choice for manic depressive disorder. I was very optimistic.

I was enjoying working when the curtain in the room was pulled back by a bushy-haired young man with bandages on his forearms.

"Hi, I'm Douglas," he said, with a kind of eagerness that annoyed me and seemed most inappropriate under the circumstances.

"What's your name?"

"My name is Hal Haralson," I said and tried to focus my attention on my work.

Doug didn't take the hint. "What are you doing?" he persisted. I told him, "Dictating letters."

"What kind of work to you do?"

"I'm a lawyer."

"Oh."

He was silent for a few minutes. It was as though my last answer caught him off guard and he didn't have another question.

Relieved, I returned to my work. I didn't want to get involved

with someone on my last day in the hospital.

"What are you doing in here?"

"My doctor has put me on Lithium and there are possible side-effects that require hospitalization."

"I never heard of Lithium; what does it do?"

I replied, "It has been found to help control certain types of depression."

"I'm depressed," Douglas blurted out. "That's what happened last night. I got so sick of myself and the whole world, I just couldn't take it. I cut my wrists. I nearly bled to death before they found me."

Then he looked directly into my eyes. I knew what was coming: "You ever try to commit suicide?" "Yes, Douglas, nearly 10 years ago. I had been very depressed. Life wasn't worth continuing. My wife and our child had left to go home to her mother and father. The only thing worse than being depressed is being depressed when there's no one around to be impressed with how depressed you are."

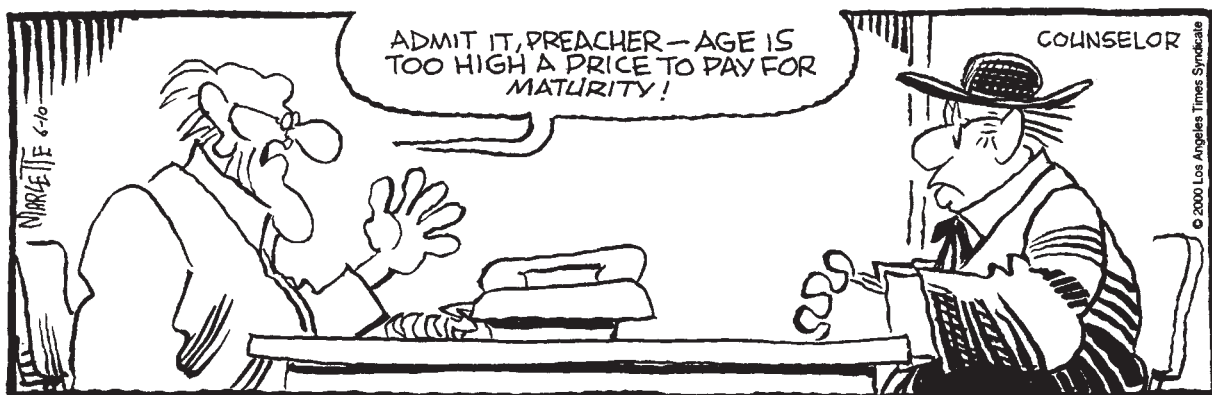
"I got up in the morning and turned on all the gas jets in the house. I went back to bed but nothing happened—no unconsciousness, no sleep—so I got up and took a match and lighted it. I was in the bedroom and the explosion of the gas blew me out the door."

"At that moment the phone rang. It was my psychiatrist wanting to know why I hadn't gone to work. I told him the house was on fire; and then I cut and ran out the front door. I was committed that day to the San Antonio State Hospital where I remained for three months and 13 shock treatments."

"What happened? How did you get out?" Douglas was all ears.

"I told God that if I had to continue living life the way I had been, He could have it. If He would accept me the way I was, then He could have me. He did! It was the most beautiful thing that has happened to me."

"I don't understand. What did you do before entering the hospital?"



"I was a minister."

"But you said you're a lawyer."

"I am. After getting out of the hospital, I left the ministry and became a businessman and later went to law school when I was 33."

"But if you were a minister how could you have gotten so depressed? Couldn't you just pray?"

"Douglas, what I had heard about God—and what I told others—was depressing: judgment, fear, guilt, striving for perfection. Live to please others and God. I just got tired of it. I was like a little boy straining to be tall enough to be a man and never quite making it."

Doug was puzzled. "What happened in the hospital to change that?"

I tried to make him understand. "I told God I had had it with being someone other than me to please Him and others. My prayer was essentially, "If you want me like I am, OK; otherwise, shove it!"

Doug laughed out loud. He liked that.

"My folks go to church," he said. "I used to go to Sunday School. I'm really depressed and confused. Do you suppose God would take me? Could He love me even if I tried to commit suicide?"

"He did me, and he wants to do the same for you. But you must ask Him. He won't force Himself on you."

There were many questions. Especially about fear and uncertainty, symptoms of depression.

Finally, Doug prayed after I had prayed.

"Dear God. I'm scared. I don't know if You hear me but if You do, please come into my life. I need You and I'm afraid."

I met Doug's parents in the hospital room and he told them that he had invited Christ into his life. We talked and prayed and then I was gone. I gave Doug's name to some Young Life staffers and they reported back that he was studying the Bible with them.

Over a year later, there came a letter from Doug's parents. He had been to a Guru in California and was not doing well. There was an Austin address and a request that I go by and visit Doug.

I went by but Doug wasn't there. It was one of those commune apartments west of the university campus, the drug scene area. It didn't look good.

I was going to go back.

Then the paper! Headlines!

UT EMPLOYEE PLUNGES TO DEATH FROM TOWER . . . TWENTY-NINE STORIES. Doug Miller's mind was finally at rest.

How could this have happened after Doug's prayer turning his life over to God?

I don't have an answer to that question. I heard Doug's prayer and believe God heard it, too.

Mental illness is a disease. Doug was sick. Sometimes depression ends in death.

Is the person who takes his own life because of depression any less acceptable in the out-stretched arms of God than someone who dies of cancer?

I think not. I hope you agree. ■

"Charitable Choice": An Analysis

By John M. Swomley

[Dr. John M. Swomley is professor emeritus of Social Ethics at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. He is a frequent contributor to this journal.]

When the welfare reform bill was before the Congress, Senator John Ashcroft of Missouri amended it with what is known as the "Charitable Choice" provision. On the surface the idea of involving charitable religious or other private organizations in work with poor or needy persons sounds like a worthy cause, but it is not what it pretends to be.

It is first and foremost an effort to have federal and state governments pay churches, synagogues, and other charitable enterprises for what they are already doing.

This device requires religious and other groups to sign government contracts which make them become government agents rather than private organizations doing good and helpful work as a part of their religious mission or reason for existence.

Therefore it is essential to examine carefully any legislative efforts to have government finance and direct religious and charitable enterprises which were organized as non-governmental agencies with religious, sectarian, or other ministries to people.

1. The Charitable Choice provisions are part of a larger public law which is entitled The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. That legislation provides for federal "Block grants to states" as well as a state program "funded under Part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act." What this means is that states would be forced to enter contracts with and engage in government oversight of religious institutions, however sectarian. The word "forced" is used because any religious organization could sue a state on the same basis as any other non-governmental provider that wanted a government contract. That suit is possible because the law specifically provides that "neither the Federal" government nor a State receiving funds under such programs shall discriminate against an organization which is, or applies to be, a contractor...on, the basis that the organization has a religious character."

2. If the State of Missouri, for example, were to provide any financial aid to religious organizations, it would violate the State Constitution and make it vulnerable to lawsuits. That Constitution states "[No] money shall ever be taken from the public treasury, directly or indirectly, in aid of any church, sect or denomination of religion, or in aid of any priest, preacher, minister or teacher thereof, as such..." The State could be sued

if it violated its Constitution because the Constitution refers to “public” money—not just State money.

3. One of the “Charitable Choice” provisions would permit the provision of government social services in a house of worship and grant religious contractors a right to display “religious art, icons, scripture or other symbols” in any area where government-funded services are provided.

4. The “Charitable Choice” provisions would permit religious contractors to discriminate for or against employees based on their religious beliefs, even though they are paid with government funds.

5. Under the “Charitable Choice” provisions the religious organization receiving and expending funds shall be subject to government financial regulations and audits unless it sets up a separate organization to do its work and disburse government funds.

6. The same law provides that no government contract funds “shall be expended for sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization.” Yet it provides no enforcement mechanism and explicitly forbids government control over the “practices and expression of its religious beliefs.” In any event, the provision against “worship, instruction or proselytization” is unenforceable because government may not monitor or censor what churches express in their worship or other expression.

7. Although this law specifically provides that beneficiaries of religiously transmitted government assistance who object “to the religious character of the organization” can “within a reasonable period of time after the date of such objection” receive “assistance from an alternative provider” nothing in the legislation provides for notice to be given to beneficiaries to inform in them of such a right or of the right not to be subject to compulsory religious worship or proselytization.

8. The “Charitable Choice” legislation is likely to do serious damage to the religious mission of churches that already provide benefits to needy individuals with private funds. If other religious organizations in the same area are funded by the government more lavishly, there will be religious competition and in effect encouragement or “coercion” of non-participating churches to get into the government program.

9. If churches become government agents, one likely result will be less active participation by church members and increased dependence on government funds. Many European countries have already gone down this slippery slope, thereby gravely damaging the attendance, stewardship, and spiritual vitality of their churches.

10. Finally, in almost every city and county there are numerous churches. Presumably state governments cannot furnish each of them with funds either equally or equitably. Undoubtedly the churches, sects, or denominations with the most political influence would get government funding. When the government chooses one or more churches or other religious organizations over others or when churches seek government funds, there is thereby an establishment of religious organizations by the government.

It is evident that this legislation would seriously damage or

destroy separation of church and state by nullifying the First Amendment clause that government “shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” This measure not only authorizes federal and state governments to fund churches and other religious institutions “on the same basis as any other non-governmental providers” but also to make them agents of the state.

Are there alternatives to this blatant invasion of religious liberty? There certainly are. One is for government directly to fund its own welfare program with paid employees who are trained for social service to persons in need.

Another is to provide a channel for religious and other charitable organizations to make referrals to government agencies and even to share information about existing programs.

Still another is for legislatures to encourage private giving by tax incentives which would allow income tax deductions for non-itemizers to deduct 50 percent of their charitable gifts over a specified amount, such as \$400 or \$500.

Still another alternative is for religious organizations to form separate entities to provide secular social services with tax money. This is already being done by the Salvation Army, Church World Service, Lutheran Services, and Catholic Charities.

Among the national organizations opposed to “Charitable Choice” provisions are Protestant and Jewish groups such as the American Baptist Churches, the American Jewish Congress, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Church of the Brethren, United Methodists, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, and the Unitarian Universalist Church.

Among the secular groups opposing this scheme are the American Civil Liberties Union; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Americans for Religious Liberty, the National Education Association; the National Black Women’s Health Project; N.O.W. Legal Defense and Education Fund; People for the American Way; and others.

It is significant that not one far right religious organization opposed it, such as the Christian Coalition, James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, or the Catholic Right to Life movement. Was it because they oppose separation of church and state, or because one of their chief spokesmen in the Senate, Senator Ashcroft, was advancing their agenda?

Certainly this “Charitable Choice” scheme violates the Establishment Clause of the Constitution, numerous Supreme Court decisions, and the whole idea that people of religious faiths and none should not have their taxes used to support government financing of religious organizations or any religion.

In short, the “Charitable Choice” concept strikes a heavy blow against the American doctrine of separation of church and state. Although the Congress has now passed this legislation and the President has signed it into law, it is to be hoped that the courts will overturn it on the clear basis that it is an egregious violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution, the very cornerstone of our liberties. ■

Brian's Story

By Roger Lovette

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

The wedding invitation I held in my hand intrigued me. Bryan was marrying Rachel. I began to smile as the wheels of memory started turning.

In 1986 this groom-to-be was then twelve years old. He became very sick one day and was rushed to the hospital. After a series of tests it was discovered that Brian was in renal failure. His family was called in because he was gravely ill. Further tests revealed that Brian was suffering from acute leukemia.

So Brian, his family and the doctors began the battle for his life. For two years he would be on a roller coaster ride of chemotherapy, cranial radiation, and remission. There would be bouts of violent sickness, terrible nausea. His hair fell out and he became very weak. Then there would be a brief respite called remission and the scary ride would start again. For a little boy on the edge of adolescence, this was a most difficult time.

For a while it looked as if the treatments had been successful. Brian went into remission, returned to school and his life returned to normal. That normalcy was short-lived. Brian relapsed and the old tug of war between red and white corpuscles raged again. His only hope now was a bone marrow transplant. But the doctors warned that this procedure was risky, painful, and very dangerous.

Having no other choice, Brian and his family decided to try the transplant. A bone marrow transplant is a complicated process. The patient's own bone marrow must be killed which would leave his immune system practically non-existent. He would be subject to the slightest infection. He would have no immune system to fight back. New bone marrow would have to be aspirated from someone else and then placed in Brian's body. But like blood types, bone marrow varies from person to person. The search began for a perfect bone marrow match. His mother and father and many friends were discounted. Their bone marrow did not match. And then his eleven year old sister, Missy was tested. Her bone marrow was a perfect match and she volunteered for this scary procedure.

Weeks later, Brian, his mother and his sister flew to a cancer center in Seattle which his doctors had recommended. In Seattle Brian and his sister were prepared for his transplant. First, Missy was wheeled into surgery where two units of her bone marrow were painfully extracted. That afternoon, Brian's mother and sister watched through a plate-glass window while

Missy's bone marrow slowly dripped into her brother's arm.

Brian would be in isolation for 35 days. Infection is one of the great dangers for this risky procedure. The family was warned that there was a chance that Brian's body might reject his sister's bone marrow. Those days were not only long and lonely, but they were very scary. Bryan was sick, nauseated, and in great pain as his body fought to survive. During that time of isolation, nine young people on his floor died of acute leukemia.

But Brian was more fortunate. Three months later he was well enough to return home to Memphis with his family. Slowly his recovery began. He would remain at home for a year so that his immune system could return to normal.

Brian worked very hard during that year. Even though he was very weak, he rode an exercise bike day after day. He began to run around the block and then two blocks and then more. By the next fall he was well enough to return to school and even joined the cross-country track team. He graduated with his high school class the next spring and was awarded the President's Academic Fitness Award.

The next fall Brian enrolled in the University of Memphis. He was a busy young man. Besides his college work, he did volunteer work at St. Jude's Hospital and sang in his church's choir. His story was so remarkable that a film of Brian's brave journey was produced and shown in seven states. He has met Presidents and a multitude of other famous people. He has been the recipient of many awards. He went on to graduate from college and holds a good job. Miraculously, Brian is cancer free.

Last Saturday he stood at the altar and married Rachel. I am sure that most of those gathered for that ceremony had lumps in their throats. For they were watching a miracle that is still unfolding. How proud his mother must have been. There were so many times when she was so afraid that her oldest would never make it to adulthood. But she was not any prouder than Brian's sister Missy. Standing there as a bridesmaid, she must have known that her brother could never have stood there at that altar without that gift of her own bone marrow.

Truth really is stranger than fiction. Often we sufferers have a tendency to give up much too soon. I will keep that wedding invitation close at hand. And when life is hard or when I talk to someone having a difficult time, I will remember Brian and Rachel. But I will also remember his faithful mother and courageous sister. Who knows? If it happened to a boy like Brian and to those who loved him most, might not wonder and grace happen to us all? ■

Knowing Jesus in the Breaking of Bread (Luke 24:30-35)

By W. Clyde Tilley

[Dr. Clyde Tilley has been a college professor and has more recently served as Pastor of the Piedmont Baptist Church in Dandridge, Tennessee. He is a prolific writer and is a previous contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

Strange it is that they would not have recognized him—these two people who walked together on the road to Emmaus. For two days they had thought of little else. They spoke painfully of him as they walked. Their hearts ached for his loss. Then he joined them on the road. He conversed with them and they heard his voice. He ministered to their grief as he interpreted the scriptures. They saw him as he walked and extended him an invitation to be their guest. He accepted their hospitality—and still they did not know him.

Stranger still it is that they should come to know him in this particular way: He broke bread and they knew him. What an astounding source of revelation! More articulate than the words he had spoken was his breaking of bread. More vivid than his countenance was his breaking of bread. More revealing than the gait of his walk, the inflection of his voice, and the familiarity of his manner was his breaking of bread. More penetrating than the scriptures he expounded was his breaking of bread.

Or maybe it was not so strange after all. How often they had seen him break bread! He had distinguished himself as a hearty and even controversial eater. He brought down the wrath of the religious elite upon himself because of his dietary customs. He ate food with sinners and tax collectors in violation of the sanctimonious taboos of his day. When he was hungry on the Sabbath, he proceeded to help himself to the standing but forbidden grain and to lead his disciples to do the same. Choosing the celebrative feast rather than the somber fast as the hallmark of his ministry, he had actually been accused of being a glutton.

In fact, he enjoyed a good meal so well that he felt everyone should be entitled to adequate provision. When the multitude had heard him eagerly throughout a long day, he refused to send them away until they had been fed. His followers had seen him take a little boy's lunch of two fishes and five loaves, bless this food, break it, and then distribute it to a throng of people that numbered in the thousands. He had actually taught his disciples that when they fed another who was hungry, it was as though they were doing it to him.

On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus had insisted upon eating the Passover meal with his disciples. After supper, in what was to be his last meal with them before his death, he once again broke bread with them saying, "This is my body"; he shared the cup with them and likened the wine to his blood, soon to be shed.

These were among the flood of memories these men brought with them to the table at Emmaus. Thus it is less mysterious but no less moving that we read: "When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him..." (Luke 24:30-31). They came to know Jesus, their risen Lord, in the breaking of bread.

This event on a Sunday in Emmaus need not be an isolated event of revelation. Nor has it been. It has been the testimony of the centuries that not only the devout have recognized him anew but that also those of the world have come to know him when bread is broken. When bread is broken, Jesus is known in the hands that break the bread. He is known in the hungry who take the bread. He is known in the bread that is broken and taken.

First, *he is known in the hands that break the bread*. Jesus was moved with compassion when he encountered human needs—like hunger. The Great Liberator came to set people free from every sort of bondage—including hunger and including the greed or complacency that withholds bread from others. With his own hands he solicited bread, received bread, and broke bread. With his own words he called people to follow and participate in his life-giving, life-sustaining ministry.

He still calls us today and judges us when we fail to respond.

"If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go and be filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?" (James 2: 15-16).

"If any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 John 3: 17).

In his name, in his place, in his stead he calls us to give a cup of water, a piece of bread.

Deprived now as he is of the earthly body of Jesus of Nazareth for soliciting and breaking this bread, the Christ did not intend to be left without a body by which this same life sustaining ministry of giving bread could be continued. His ministry was not completed. Luke told the story in his gospel "of all that Jesus *began* to do and teach" (Acts 1:1), but a whole separate volume—the book of Acts—was needed to tell how Christ *continued* to do and teach these same things through his second body—the church. In saving us, Christ is incorporating us into himself. We become people in Christ. We become his

new body—the body of Christ.

Quite frequently Paul spoke of the church as a body, but most notably he speaks of it in 1 Corinthians 12. He speaks not only of the unity of the body (v. 4), and the diversity of the body (v. 14), but he speaks also of the identity of the body (v. 27). It is Christ's body that we comprise. Although metaphor, this is no mere metaphor. Christ takes his identity with his church seriously. Encountering Saul on the road to Damascus, he asked Saul who had never seen the historic Jesus, "Why do you persecute *me*?" He proceeded to identify himself by saying, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Christ's identity with his church is so real and personal that for Saul to persecute the church was to persecute the Christ.

We who are in him constitute no less than the very body of Christ. Our ministry performed in his name is no less than an extension, a projection of the incarnation of God in Christ. If there is a difference between these two bodies, it is one of degree rather than of kind. God who perfectly incarnated himself in Jesus of Nazareth is incarnated, however imperfectly, in those who bear his name.

Though by now the words may seem trite, they are no less true:

God has no hands but our hands
To do God's work today.
God has no feet but our feet
To take God on the way.
Annie Johnson Flint

It is ours to be the continuing agents of our Lord's ministry, including the ministry of breaking bread for our hungry world. The early church broke bread both in joyous celebration and in equalizing distribution "as any had need" (Acts 2: 44-46). Across the years and the miles, Paul gathered funds from the adequately fed Gentile churches so that the impoverished and famished saints of Judea might be fed, "that there may be equality" (2 Corinthians 8: 14). We are still God's agents of ministry to make Christ known in the hands that break bread.

In addition to being known in the hands that break bread, *Christ is also known in the hungry who take the bread.* Just as he identifies himself with the blessed hands that bless and break bread for the hungry, so he also identifies himself with the

hungry who live when we break bread and who starve when we do not.

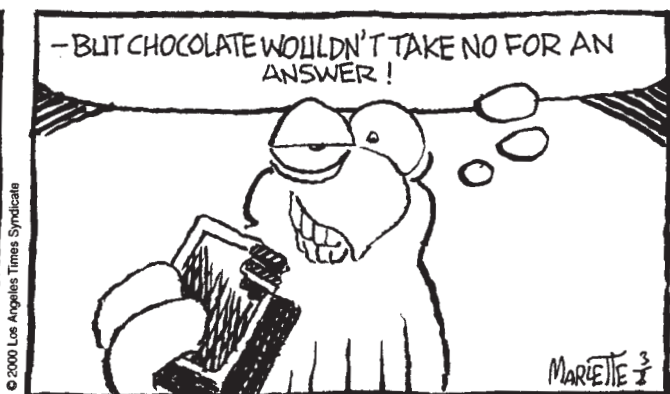
A few days before his death Jesus spoke of the great judgment of the Son of Man before whom the nations of the worlds shall be gathered (Matthew 25: 20-46). Those who are present shall be separated into sheep on his right hand and goats on his left hand. To those on his right his words shall be, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food. . . ." In utter surprise the righteous shall answer: "When did we see you hungry and feed you." And the king shall respond: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it unto me."

But that is not all of the story. To those on the left, the King will say: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and you gave me no food. . . ." Then they shall answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry. . . and did not minister to you?" His rejoinder shall be: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not unto one of the least of these, you did it not to me." Surely we cannot read this story without drawing the obvious conclusion: Jesus identifies with the poor and the hungry and he is known in their faces. He is known in their *glad* faces when bread is broken. He is known in their *tearful* faces when bread is withheld.

Conrad, a kindly German cobbler, lived alone. One day, according to Edwin Markham's well-known poem, "How the Great Guest Came," when Conrad received a revelation that Christ would be a guest in his home, his joy knew no bounds. He busied himself feverishly with preparation for the Holy Visitor. But he was not so busy that he could not help three needy strangers who came intermittently to his door throughout the day—a cold beggar, a hungry woman, and a homeless child.

The day sped on and still the expected guest did not appear. As the day slipped away, Conrad knelt in puzzled prayer: "Lord, what has delayed you?" Out of the silence came a voice:

Conrad, be not dismayed, for
Three times I came to your friendly door
Three times my shadow was on your floor.
I was the beggar with the bruised feet;
I was the woman you gave to eat
I was the child on the homeless street.



The growing millions of hungry people in our world are both a judgment upon our overstuffed affluence and an opportunity that presses urgently upon us. When nearly ten million people in our land, over 1/3 of them children, live in households experiencing hunger, Jesus is present demanding a response. When one in ten households in our affluent nation reports that its access to food is extremely limited or uncertain, Jesus is present awaiting a response. An estimated eight hundred and twenty-eight million people on our planet are undernourished. Christ is shown in mercy when his people break bread to them; he is shown in judgment when we do not. Never did Lazarus press closer to the rich man's door than does the hungry world that presses its claim upon us in Jesus' name right now. God's people ought to break bread to them in sacrificial giving, in political action, and in economic sharing of our abundant resources. The challenge is to find the way rather than to bemoan our helplessness.

Finally, *Jesus is known also in the bread that is broken and taken*. "The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it, and said: 'This is my body which is broken for you.'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-24). In the very bread itself Jesus is revealed. When God's people gather together to share the common loaf and to partake of the common cup, Jesus is present—revealed.

But do not think that these are words alone for the cloistered sanctuary or the sheltered altar. They are his words also for the dirty hovel and the lengthening breadlines and the makeshift canteen. Whenever bread is broken in his name he is being recognized.

It was not in an upper room aloof from the common people but perhaps on a grassy knoll the day after Jesus fed the masses that he said to them, "My father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world....He who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6: 32-35) The church may preach God's love with great eloquence yet there is no eloquence so persuasive as that expressed when God's people as Christ's body feed the hungry in this world. They are the ones with whose needs Christ fully identified himself. Then does the loaf itself make known the Lord of the Emmaus road. We rightly sing

Bread of heaven, on thee we feed,
For thy flesh is meat indeed;
Ever let our souls be fed
With the true and living bread.

God feeds his people not only that we may be filled but that we may feed. We feed in order that he who "is all and in all" (Col. 3:11) may be known. And how is he all and in all? He is the hands that break the bread. He is the hungry who take the bread. He is the bread that is broken and taken. ■

How I Have Changed "Reflections on Thirty Years of Theology"

Edited by Jurgen Moltmann
Trinity Press International
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1997

A Book Review
By Darold H. Morgan

[Dr. Darold Morgan is the retired President of the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and prior to that was Pastor of the Cliff Temple Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas.]

To say this is a fascinating book is a distinct understatement. It is almost one of a kind. Coming out of the debacle of World War II there was a generation of exceptionally brilliant men and women who turned to Christian theology almost as a last hope from the nihilism and atheistic existentialism of that era. Most of these individuals are German or Swiss. Protestants and Catholics both are represented.

This volume consists of addresses and biographical insights from these people enlisted for this project by one of the world's foremost theologians, Jurgen Moltmann. The symposium, marking his seventieth birthday in 1996, bears down on the fact that this group of influential writers are in the same age group. This likely means that they are nearing the end of their remarkable productivity. The invitation had gone out under the theme, "How I have changed" in these decades since the war years. The last half of the twentieth century have been marked by some of these most momentous events in all of history—the destruction of Nazism, the fall of communism, and the revelations of the death camps, especially Auschwitz. Alongside these monumental historical facts has been a unique renaissance of theological and philosophical teachings in Germany, of all places.

One of the most interesting dimensions of the book comes from the biographical insights the speakers were asked to give about themselves. A surprising majority came from non-religious homes. Some came from ultra-conservative backgrounds. Some knew the bitter struggles in a postwar, divided Germany. Many knew first hand the horrors of war and imprisonment. Tragedy, suffering, privation, the sad revelations of Germanic racism as the evidence from the death camps mounted—all combined to produce a surprising generation of theologians who found a challenging outlet in this field of theological study. One cannot understand this particular group apart from their background and heritage.

It is strange how Germany has produced in a century and a half not only military and political violence of unprecedented proportions, but also a series of seismic theological waves which have been worldwide in their influence. There was the outpouring of rationalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The neo-orthodoxy of Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, and others figures prominently in the education of this group. Repetitiously, these theologians tell of their pilgrimage beyond this influential group of teachers. The third wave is represented in this small volume as writers who have produced the famed concept of "The Theology of Hope", Catholic thinkers, particularly Hans Kung, who challenged the infallibility of the papal office, women who are in the forefront of a feminist theology, and the traditionalists who are anything but reluctant to defend their position. There simply is not a dull page in this book!

Ethical issues abound in this volume. Originally begun as a tribute to Moltmann, these ethical issues are rooted in the biographical notes about these lives as well as in their deeply held views. Racism, abortion, euthanasia, poverty, economic justice, political theology, the role of women, genocide, and the structural crises of the churches all come into a share of the discussion. Much of this comes in the repeated references to a political theology. The enduring influence of the Confessional Church in Germany where Martin NiemueLLer figured prominently during the Hitler years, the writings of Diedrich Bonhoeffer, the teaching and writings of people like Barth, Radner, Kasemann, Fuchs, Jungel, and others are found on nearly every page. Norbert Greinacher says it well: "I recognized that one cannot preach about freedom, equality, brotherhood and sisterhood, justice and subsidiarity from the pulpit on Sunday without working on Monday for more justice in our political society" (p. 47).

There are frequent reminders of the impact that teachers had on this generation of theologians. Nearly every participant refers to one whose influence is still intact, despite the peculiar silence of the church during the apogee of Nazism. How this came about is another beautiful reminder of how the truth of God will break out.

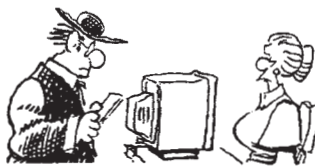
Two women are represented in this symposium, Dorothy Solle and Margaret Moltmann-Wendel. Solle particularly comes across as a strident feminist, with both indicating that the plethora of American feminists have influenced them.

Solle has a most interesting debate on the omnipotence of God as a refuge for male-chauvinism. When one adds to that the debt they seem to owe to liberation theology, concepts stemming from the vast injustices perpetrated against the poor and downtrodden in Latin America, one quickly understands why the issues of peace and ecology in the world are characteristic of their positions. Solle, however, strikes a solid note in her appeal for a return to Christian mysticism as an essential step in the recovery of priorities.

Jorg Zink confirms this in his statement: "Unless Christianity rediscovers its mystical background, then it no longer has anything to say to us. We could also discover the social and political energy which has always stemmed from mysticism" (p. 62).

There is much in this remarkable book which leaves the mainline Christian somewhat perplexed. The inerrantist will read a few pages and then close it with a vicious snap because the overall hermeneutics are far from a typical biblical position. Nevertheless it is obvious that a remarkable group of people who have come from the blood-soaked regions of Europe have discovered for themselves a vibrant Christian faith. Out of that center comes their repeated call for social justice, sensitivity to the poor and neglected in the world, an awareness of the ever present pitfalls of racism, and a prophetic call to reject the abuse of women. The parameters of our Christian faith are vastly expanded when we even barely touch the composite thought of these writers.

Students of theology and Christian ethics ought to be well aware of the extraordinary influence of these Germanic teachers from central Europe. We may disagree (and we do) with many of their strongly-held views (and no group holds them more tenaciously than does a German mind); but we urgently need to be knowledgeable about their conclusions. Read and study them, and then out of your own biblical orientation, select or reject what relates to that view which your own study and experience judges to be valid. One will not disagree with Moltmann whose writings about "The Crucified God" touches us all when he says: "When I wrote that book—and I wrote it with my lifeblood—once again I saw the whole of theology in a focal point. For me the cross of Christ became the foundation and critique of Christian theology" (p. 18). ■



The Parable of the Blue Reflector

By Nancy K. Ferrell

[Dr. Nancy K. Ferrell is Director of Professional Services and Education in Dallas, Texas.]

It was a warm, sunny Saturday morning and Gibson and I were outside playing kick ball. It was one of his favorite activities and playing with him was one of mine. In the middle of an enthusiastic kick Gibson stopped abruptly and said, "Aunt Nancy, look! There is a blue reflector!" I was amazed to discover that there was a blue reflector embedded in the concrete. I had walked by, driven over, and played ball around this spot on the parking lot hundreds of times. I had never seen the blue reflector. Gibson asked, "Where is the fire hydrant?" I still did not make the connection. My young instructor continued, "The blue reflector lets the firefighters know where to look for a fire hydrant. Look, there it is!" And there it was. The fire hydrant on the corner was across from the blue reflector.

For days after this lesson on blue reflectors from my four year old teacher, I saw blue reflectors everywhere. I have driven the streets of Dallas since 1940. I had never noticed the blue reflectors, but there they were marking the locations of fire hydrants day or night. There are at least two lessons to be learned from the Parable of the Blue Reflector¹: one, always be open to learning no matter the age of your teacher (*"The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them."*² Isaiah 11:6) and two, once our awareness is raised, we see blue reflectors where we saw none before (*"For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"* Mark 4:22-23). For now, I want to focus on the second lesson.

For eleven years I worked with the U. S. Department of Justice, Community Relations Service.³ As an Anglo woman I had a lot to learn about the subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways people are excluded from access to resources and participation in the decision making processes of community life. I learned to see the blue reflectors. The signs of exclusion and discrimination were always there, but I had not always had eyes to see and ears to hear. I began to notice times when I arrived for services and was served before others who had been waiting longer but were of an ethnic minority group. I became more aware of times that community leaders spoke disparagingly about minority leaders when they were not present. I became more aware of the times my friends and family members told jokes that dimin-

ished others based on race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Nothing had really changed in my environment, but I had trustworthy guides that were able to point out the blue reflectors of racism and exclusion.

On a more personal note, I became aware of the blue reflectors of gender bias in business, personal, and church life. As a woman in business I have presented myself based on competence and integrity. I have not been willing to be defined by my gender. However, I began to notice when I shared an insight in a group where I was the only woman, the insight was often not heard. Literally, not heard. When one of the men shared the same insight it was responded to and discussed. I learned to compensate for this by stating and restating information until it was heard.

I am not trying to diminish the integrity of the men with whom I have worked. I don't think they were any more aware of the exclusive nature of their environment than I was of the blue reflectors on the streets of Dallas. My goal is to point the way to signs of racism and exclusion that are often not seen by those not affected by them.

The subject of inclusive and exclusive language in church literature and music will always start a lively discussion. The main argument for the continuing use of exclusive language is we know that "he" means "he and she" and that "father" includes "mother" and that "brother" refers to "brother and sister." I remember thinking the same thing until the blue reflectors of gender bias were pointed out to me. Language has power and when one gender is excluded through language it is easier to overlook exclusion in behaviors and attitudes.

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America declares that "all men are created equal." This did not mean women. Women did not have the right to vote or own property or pursue their independent happiness. African Americans, male or female, were considered property, so they were not included in the language of the Declaration of Independence as being created equal. As a society, we have come to believe that all people are created equal and have a right to pursue their independent happiness. Our language needs to be consistent with our beliefs.

Evidence that our society does not accept the disclaimer that "he" means "he and she" is in our public language. Policeman does not represent the reality that men and women serve and protect our

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communities in the role of Police Officers. Fireman is no longer adequate to represent the women and men who protect our homes and lives from the devastation of fire in the role of Fire Fighters. Even the Department of Transportation realizes that "Watch for Flagger Ahead" represents the reality that there are men and women using flags to direct traffic.

I notice the blue reflectors now, and when the church sings, "Good Christian Men Rejoice," that does not mean me. When the brothers are asked to join in prayer, I am excluded from the family circle of prayer. When inclusive language is used appropriately and consistently it need not offend anyone. Those not aware of the gender bias of exclusive language are seldom bothered by gender inclusive language. Those who are aware of the blue reflectors of gender bias know immediately they are with people who value male and female equally when inclusive language is used.

Be open to learning. Be willing to seek trusted guides who are able to point out the blue reflectors of racism, bias, and exclusion that you may have been unaware of in your world. Follow the model of Jesus who included the marginalized people of his society: women, children, Samaritans. Listen to the counsel of Paul whose vision often transcended his practice. *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:27-28.* Be one who communicates through word and deed that the circle of God's grace is ever expanding and ever inclusive. ■

Endnotes

¹© 2000 Nancy K. Ferrell, Professional Services & Education

²Scripture references from The New Revised Standard Version Bible, 1989.

³The Community Relations Service was established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide assistance to communities and persons in resolving disputes relating to discriminatory practices based on race, color, or national origin.

Priest and Prophet: The Challenge of Ministry

By Jimmy R. Allen

[Dr. Jimmy Allen is Chaplain at the Big Canoe resort community in the Georgia mountains north of Atlanta. This is his Commencement address given to the spring graduates of Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta.]

I was pleased at the response when I inquired about the basic mission of the James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University. I was told that from the beginning the focus has been on equipping students to be ministers in local congregations. It is a worthy mission and greatly needed in our confused ecclesiastical world. The role of minister has been so ill-defined and so over-defined that ministers today are in danger of missing the essence of our call from God. We neglect the fact that following the family, as God's first institution, the fellowship of believers is God's primary institutional means of accomplishing his work on earth.

In our day of job descriptions, mission statements, and management manuals, it is frustrating to some that a minister's task is still quite difficult to define. Ministers have to be able to live without a sense of closure much of the time. Some of us, however, find the very nature of the task liberating. We can set a pace, which fits us, and find the freedom to be what our gifts permit us to become. What we must not do, however, is to miss the essentials of our task. I want to define that task as being both Priest and Prophet.

The scriptures today come from two embattled veterans of God's service in the final stages of their journeys. They lived centuries apart, but stand like towering peaks on the horizons of God's Revelation. One is John, the Apostle of Love. He discovered that path out of a high-strung personality and quick temper that had earned him the nickname of a Son of Thunder. The transformation wrought by the touch of Christ in his life is reflected in his epistles of love. He is heart-broken by his separation by the Sea from his people in Ephesus during his lonely exile on the Isle of Patmos. He is Priest talking to God about men and to men about God, and he is Prophet in writing a book of Prophecy describing in picture language the message of God's judgment. In his Doxology at the beginning of Revelation (1:5-6) he says:

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins
in his own blood,
And hath made us kings and priests unto God and
his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever
and ever. Amen.

The other passage describes Moses, the Liberator and Lawgiver, who has come away from his burning bush encounter with God as the first human being to know the name of God. Deuteronomy 34: 10 says, "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." Moses was not only a prophet. He was also an intercessor, a priest. In Exodus 32: 31-32 Moses says to God: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet, now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou has written." The time came when word was brought to him that others were prophesying. His reaction is told in Numbers 11:27-29:

And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the: camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

The Priestly Privilege of the Minister

I remember the day I discovered the high calling involved in speaking about God to others. I was a preacher's kid. We were in a mission church, meeting in a house in the inner city of Dallas. We also lived in that house. I was never really ashamed of my Dad, but I wasn't very proud of him either. It was surely more a burden than a privilege to be his son in that neighborhood. He took me with him to a Pastor's Conference meeting in Ft. Worth. I was sitting in the balcony. The speaker was George W. Truett, a man who was selected in a recent Texas Baptist Poll as far and away the most influential Baptist of the Twentieth Century. White haired, black bushy eyebrows, deep voice, he rose to speak as a hush fell. I was captivated. In the middle of his message he said, "I would not step down from the pulpit to the position of President of the United States." My Dad grew ten feet tall in my eyes! I can tell you that I have tested that treasure numerous times over these years. It is not counterfeit. There is a privilege in the sense of the call of God, in the sense of instrumentality as God flows through you, which is beyond description.

The Priestly Responsibility of the Minister

With privilege there goes responsibility. Your presence in this Seminary says that you are aware of that. We need to give God the sharpest instruments we can become to be his communicators. Loving God with our minds is a part of that command. Spending time becoming saturated with his Word so that we can be discerners able rightly to divide the Word of Truth is a lifelong challenge. We live in a world that is filled

with resources for pastoral care. We have learned to map the roads of grief and pain, to delve into the interactions of human personality in relationships, to discover methods of group support for persons plagued with addictions, and to refer to experts those beyond our limitations.

However there is no way to bottle "RESPONSE-ABILITY". Our ability to respond with authenticity is both a gift of God and a product of our own attitude. The danger is that in that kind of professionalism in which persons become prospects, clients, and units, ministry becomes duty to be fulfilled. And we can tell—those of us who have walked with pain, been rejected out of fear, and devastated by life—we can tell when you are just doing your job of performing your priestly functions or are communicating God's presence.

In one of the many hospitalizations that have plagued our family, Wanda, my wife, said as the minister left the room, "Well, I have just become a statistic." "What?" "I could almost hear the pocket counter go off as he clicked off visit number 5 and I became a statistic."

There is a virus moving through the body of ministers called Careerism. It infects us almost unconsciously. It can be rationalized easily as a desire to serve God more effectively in a place of greater influence. It shows up in our natural competitiveness as we compare our work and ourselves with our peers. It is devastating to effectiveness in our true priestly function. My own most dramatic moment of struggle with it came at the time I was faced with the challenge of accepting the leadership of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Controversy and career success did not seem compatible as I grappled with that virus. To my surprise and ultimate delight, when I decided that a CAUSE was more important than a CAREER, God gave me both. I wish that moment were the only encounter in my life with this deadly virus. But alas it was not.

We are priests with the responsibility to explain God and God's Word to a world of biblically illiterate people. We are challenged in a brief-attention-span world to translate that Word in understandable ways. It is a challenge "par excellence!" We are helped by the fact that this is a day of spirituality with a thirst and a widespread urge to fill the aching void of empty lives. It is a time intrigued by the mystical. In short, it is your day! Seize it. Strive to achieve the excellence of translating spiritual truths while the time is ripe.

A vital part of the priestly function is to heal the broken hearted. We live in a world of profound grief and great loss. It is a world of pain and suffering. It is a world of bewildering want in the middle of plenty. It is a time when words-only communication is inadequate. It is also a world wrapped up in images, but image-only communication is also inadequate, and it is unreal. Body language, however, is loud and clear. Actions of compassion, concern, and assistance not only communicate God's love, but they also create God-listeners.

The Prophetic Responsibility of the Minister

As challenging as it is to fulfill our priestly calling, the chal-

lenge to fulfill our prophetic calling is more daunting. We are to be spokespersons who apply the ethical principles of God to life both personal and social. We are to perceive the damage done by injustice, racism, greed, sexual misbehavior, misuse of power. Evil is entrenched in a society with an appetite for consumption reminiscent of ancient Rome. The times cry for an answer to the question voiced by King Zedekiah to the prophet Jeremiah during the siege of Jerusalem, "Is there any word from the Lord?"

Alas, the answers have been inadequate or non-existent. In an attempt to avoid controversies with powerful people with vested interests who people our pews, there has been an ominous sound of silence from the pulpit. I am reminded of Franklin Littell's story of the German Christian visiting America for the first time shortly after World War II. He was amazed by the fact that our churches had cushions in their pews. He said, "I have noticed that your sermons have cushions in them also."

Over fifty years ago that masterful scholar James Adams reminded us that the Priesthood of Believers, which is so dear to Baptist insights and so threatened in our day needs to be matched by the Prophethood of the Believers. He calls for thinking in terms of where these patterns are leading us or what he terms as "epochal thinking."

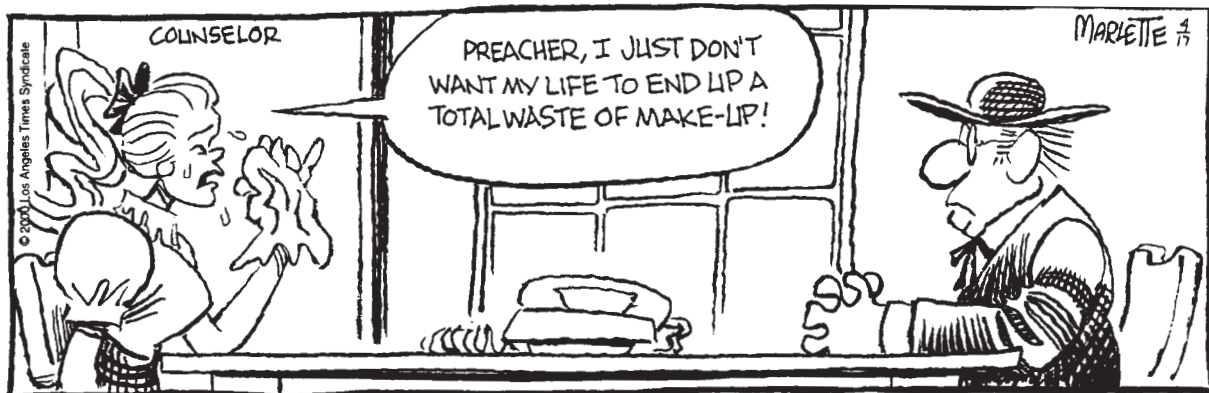
We have long held to the idea of the priesthood of all believers, the idea that all believers have direct access to the ultimate resources of the religious life and that every believer has the responsibility of achieving an explicit faith for free persons. As an element of this radical laicism we need also a firm belief in the prophethood of all believers...in which persons think and work together to interpret the signs of the times in the light of their faith....Only through the prophethood of all believers can we together foresee doom and mend our common ways.

We need to remember, however, that prophets cannot remain prophetic when they turn themselves into politicians. The so-called Religious Right has deeply damaged the role of the prophet by creating a "Christian" label for just another political group jockeying for position and political power. Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, part of the original team setting up Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, have chosen an apt name for their recent mea culpa book. It is called *Blinded By Might*. In it they say,

Religious conservatives have heard sermons that man's ways are not God's ways (Isaiah 55:8). In politics they have fused the two, causing damage to both church and state. The damage to church is caused by those who appear to the 'unchurched' to be interested in ushering in the kingdom of God by force. The damage to the state is that at the precise moment when government needs the moral principles the church can offer, too many in both conservative and liberal wings of the church have deserted their primary territory and gone lusting after temporal power associated with the kingdom of this world (p 188-189).

I close with the reminder that the tension between being priestly or prophetic must not be allowed to paralyze us. Remember John's Patmos cry which says God has already made us kings as well as priests. Kings take charge of something. We are to be God's instrument to forward his reign within our own lives and with everything we touch. It is a joyous and exciting journey.

And as the man said when he jumped into the pool of crocodiles, "Come on in. One thing about it, you'll never die of boredom." ■



The New Dualism: Public vs. Private Life

By Kevin J. Schriver

[Dr. Kevin J. Schriver is Chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri.]

Within the American mind-set, there are few privileges more greatly esteemed than the “right to privacy.” As set forth in our Bill of Rights, the right to privacy is the guarantee for all Americans guaranteeing that government will not intrude unduly in an individual’s private life. While technically the Fourth Amendment centers on search and seizure, it also encompasses a vast domain of privacy issues, including the behavior of the individual. It is at this point that morality and legal issues become entangled, thus issuing in the debate about public life and behavior and private life and behavior.

Consider the matter of people trying to separate their private lives from their public lives. Star athletes state that they do not want to be somebody else’s role model and celebrities note that what they do on their own private time is their own business, thus demonstrating their views about their right to privacy. Yet, the question is raised time and again, and especially in politics, does the record of one’s private life have any bearing on the public life one is to lead? That is to say, can public life and private life be kept separate so that the only thing by which one is measured is by what public good is done? It is this separation that appears as the “New Dualism.”

Historically, dualism referred to the belief or philosophy that two types of energies existed; one in a physical/material form and one in a more mental/spiritual form. It was this sort of dualism, for example, that the Apostle Paul sought to refute when dealing with first century converts. The Greek and Roman worlds were filled with this understanding of dualism so that the personal affairs of men and of the gods always made for good stories. So much was this so that early believers, coming from that culture, sometimes continued visiting the temple prostitutes for sex. And since this was only “physical” and as long as they kept their minds/spirits in tune to God, they seem to be have assumed that their souls would still be pure.

Well, Paul would not and could not stand for this and argued for a total integration of their faith with who they were and what they did. This integration is quite evident in the Scriptures, everywhere from the early Jewish beliefs in the Pentateuch to Paul’s writings to the Romans, the Galatians, the Colossians, and the Ephesians, and in James’ epistle. Christianity certainly emphasizes the unity of the person and that this unity flies in the face of the contemporary American mindset on privacy and the current embrace of dualism.

The Christian ethic must indeed include this integration,

as supporting a harmony between a person’s public and private life. Inconsistencies ought not to exist. Yet, when they do, the typical response is “my private behavior is not harming anyone.” The Christian response to this necessarily points out the congruency that must be exhibited in both areas of life.

This is the challenge that is set before us, for as the old dualism of mind and body had to be fought, so too must the New Dualism of private and public life.

Why is this crucial? It can be found in God’s command for us to be perfect even as He is perfect. Something perfect is consistent throughout. Something perfect is not marred by inconsistencies. Something perfect has purity through and through. This may cause some to fear, because demonstrably we cannot attain this perfection in this life. We are nevertheless mandated to be everlastingly striving for it. Making our lives consistent is a component of this divinely ordered perfection. But the New Dualism attempts to call for making distinctions between public and our private lives. Some may argue that they are doing well in their own public affairs, as long as they are doing good and helping others. At the same time however, they may be letting their private lives be marked by frustration, hurt, and sexual immorality. This New Dualism excuses taking eyes off of our very purpose in life.

Addressing this New Dualism requires continued reflection on the Christian ethic and making it applicable in public affairs. Striving for integration of our hearts, souls, and minds, is the unification and completion of our humanity that God requires. This is foreign to the world’s system of belief and is also becoming more foreign to the American way of life. The private vs. public debate still allow someone to feel good about accomplishments for the benefit of humanity, but then hide in the shadows of privacy where personal failures and downfalls are not on display for others to see.

The Christian ethic, however, brings God into the picture; and God, by His very nature makes things light so that the private parts will be revealed. Trying to hide behind the privacy issue does not negate the fact that in God’s providence all that is hidden will ultimately be uncovered. Our Christian responsibility is to be persons of integrity, combining personal morality with social or public righteousness, and to assisting others in developing this unity of heart, soul, and mind.

The question is “How?” We seek to understand the process of how we come to know more about the world, how we know more about ourselves, and how we know more about God. This is where we must start if we are going to counter this New Dualism.

We come to know the world through our experiences. Our direct interaction with the environment and the phenom-

ena of sensation and perception is the basis for this type of knowledge. Philosophers, long ago, addressed the nature of knowledge and this led to what came to be perceived as a mind-body problem. Dualism was the issue, and the attempts to reconcile how the mind and the body interacted became the focus. These early thinkers did not have the technology we have today. Since their early reasoning, much as been learned about the basic nervous system and how we experience the world around us.

But, as good as our technology is, it only addresses one piece of the puzzle. That is, how we respond to the stimuli of the environment. Psychology in its behavioral form locked into this reflexive explanation, and much of our American mind-set can be seen from the philosophy of such figures as John Watson, Ivan Pavlov, and B.F. Skinner. The medical model deals only with the underlying mechanisms of biology and biochemistry in this process of responding. To say that we are merely reacting to things in the world is correct, but only to a point. We certainly react to the things around us but then must come the next part, that of our minds.

Again, the ancients used their concept of dualism to explain the separation of the physical world and the nonphysical world. In the nonphysical world, the mind and its processes then became a focal point. The study of consciousness was then taken up as a philosophical issue. It is when the combination of the physical nature of sensation and the non-physical nature of perception became the subject that psychology was born. Searching for the mind-body connection was the basis for the theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and other psychoanalysts, even though their focus was on the unconscious mind. Other pioneers of psychology searched for

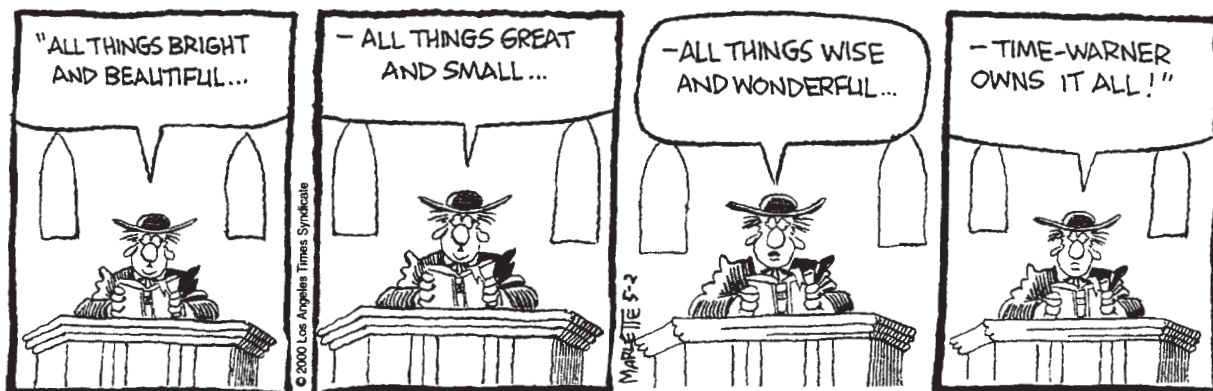
*As the old dualism of
mind and body had
to be fought, so too
must the New
Dualism of private
and public life.*

the mind and body connection, and a current trend in psychology is to unearth the principles by which the mind and body operate.

How do we seek to know more about God. From the Judeo-Christian perspective, we seek to know more about God through prayer, the reading of the Bible, and through our personal experiences that we can then interpret as revelations of God in our lives. But, the more one seeks, the more one finds the emphasis on integration in even these matters. For the Scriptures tell us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, which gives the basis

for what our goal of integration should be. Integration is concerned about the whole package and not just the separate parts. In order for us to get to know more about God, we actually need to get to know Him better in all of the areas of our world and ourselves.

It would be appropriate for sermons to be developed on this theme so as continually to remind us that believers need to be Christians, every day of the week, not just on Sunday. We need to be Christians in our private lives as well as in our public lives. There is a lot of energy wasted in our trying to hide our private side because it is so inconsistent with our public side. We should focus that energy in the direction for which it was initially intended. Focus it towards knowing God, loving God, and walking with God and in loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. It is only with this focus that we can victoriously confront this New Dualism, which is leaving multitudes fragmented and scattered, in the name of privacy and freedom. When Christians experience this focus, we can be integrally at peace and abundantly fulfilled with ourselves, with our world, and with God. ■



A Plea for Orthodoxy in Action

By Ralph Lynn

[Dr. Ralph Lynn is retired professor of history at Baylor University.]

At the moment, it seems that we are living through still another of our periodic “returns to religion.”

From history and from seventy years of adult observation, I must say that they all have something in common. They emphasize evangelism and promote the growth of church membership but they demand no change in the philosophy, or understanding of the promoters nor, in any basic way, in our society.

Just after World War II we lived through one of these religious spasms. Tens of thousands of military people were returning to civilian life, all desiring to savor once more their fond memories. All of us felt profound gratitude for the safe return of loved ones and for the defeat of Fascist barbarism.

No doubt many individuals and their families began—and continued—new lives devoted to traditional religious and family values. These developments must be respected.

Similarly, our current return to religion will leave permanent values for many. But, once more, no really basic changes are envisaged either for the promoters of this return nor for the world about us.

Between World War II and our present religious binge, we had a return to religion in the mid-fifties. At that time, in response to a request from my university’s student newspaper, I wrote an editorial in which I called for the basic changes which seem to be missing from our periodic returns—all the way back through our history.

Here are some quotations from that 1955 editorial:

“Perhaps the idea of looking backward for models of religion is not altogether good. Unquestionably, we should return to the philosophy of Jesus. But probably we should move forward to some new, more adequate and more accurate interpretation of that philosophy for guidance in our cruelly complicated world.

“It seems to me that the crux of the problems presented by the current (mid-fifties) return to religion is the relationship between religion, on the one hand, and the social, economic, and political order on the other. The state always wants religion to be its servant; religion is always tempted, on the most favorable terms obtainable, to submit to this pressure.”

(Here, some connecting remarks are omitted—then):

“Roger W. Babson, major prophet of the integration of the spiritual and the strictly business world, measures the spiritual growth in this return to religion by the increasing church budgets. In the *Amarillo Daily News* of December 17, 1954, he argues that these modern fundraisers can, with their disciples, the church budget canvassers, be the guarantors of continued business prosperity; they may even—he argues—bring about a new Spiritual Renaissance.

“This, obviously is the crassest sort of nonsense. Perhaps true Christianity is and must be not only dynamic but permanently revolutionary. What shape would a more adequate and accurate interpretation of the philosophy of Jesus take for our time?”

“Barbara Ward, one of the most thoughtful analysts of our current problems, put it well in the *New York Times* of December 19, 1954. After rejecting the current revival as ill-conceived, superficial, and useless, she offers the following:

“But a religious revival which sent Western material plenty to relieve want in the world at large, which restored charity and trust among citizens, which taught the nations to place the building of a common human society above the pretensions of absolute sovereignty—such a religious revival would, before long, leave the pressure of Communism as no more than a fading memory in the mind of man.”

Just now in the new century, with pressure upon South Carolinians to remove the Confederate flag from their Capitol and with pressure upon all of us to bring order and efficiency out of our health care chaos, such a religious revival might do much more.

It might enable the churches to make more converts and increase church membership. ■

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