

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

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"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'"

Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23

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A Profile of the Board of Directors For the Christian Ethics Today Foundation

- *Pat Anderson* serves as chair of the Board of Directors and is one of two members who served on the previous Center for Christian Ethics Board. A graduate of Furman University (B.A.), Southwestern Seminary (M.Div.), and Florida State School of Criminology (Ph.D.), he is Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Criminology at Florida Southern College, where he has taught since 1986. He previously taught at Louisiana State University and Florida Junior College. Dr. Anderson has a wide range of service in his professional life: directing programs, doing research, delivering papers, and publishing numerous articles and books, including co-authoring *Introduction to Criminal Justice* (6th Edition, 1998). He has given expert testimony regarding legalized gambling before seven state legislatures. Currently Pat is Coordinator of the CBF of Florida and formerly was Moderator of the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Carolyn and Pat have three grown children.
- *Tony Campolo* is a professor of Sociology at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, and is the founder and President of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, a collection of ministries that serve at-risk youth in urban America. The author of twenty-six books, his Ph.D. is from Temple University. He is also an ordained minister in the American Baptist Convention and serves as associate pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in West Philadelphia. He and his wife Peggy have two adult children and four grandchildren. When speaking in chapel at a Southern Baptist Seminary in 1995, Campolo said, “The Southern Baptist convention drives one nuts because everybody in it seems to be vying for position.” Everyone applauded except one faculty member on the front row—he became president.
- *Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler* is to missionary education and mission support what Lottie Moon is to mission service. From 1974 until 1989 she served as the fifth executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman’s Missionary Union, a missions organization of 1.2 million women, girls, and preschoolers. Educated at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (MRE) and Florida State (AB), she has also ministered as a youth director and as a state GA, YWA, and WMU director. From 1993-1996 she served as a founding member of Global Missions Ministry Group of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Her honors, board memberships, and denominational activities are too numerous to list. In 1989 she married James Crumpler, Sr., pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist in Cincinnati, Ohio, for thirty years before retiring in 1992. An author of many articles and books, her best stories however, come from her childhood experiences in Frostbite, Florida. Ask her for one, and enjoy the moment.
- *Carolyn Dipboye* is unique in many ways. After graduation from Mercer University (B.A.), she completed a B.D. and Ph.D. at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. She did her graduate studies under Henlee Barnette and Glenn Stassen, becoming one of very few SBC females to hold a doctorate in Christian Ethics. Her dissertation subject: “Ecclesiastical Structures of Power in the Political Struggle for Human Rights”—hmmm! Also she has taught at Southern Seminary, Bellarmine College, and Tennessee Wesleyan College. The author of many publications, she also wrote *Women of Faith* (New Hope Press, 1999). Numerous civic and ecumenical activities occupy her life including workshop leader, volunteer at the Oak Ridge Y Shelter, and Habitat for Humanity to name a few. She and Larry, who is pastor of FBC of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, have two adult children.
- *Fisher Humphreys* is Professor of Divinity at the Beeson School of Divinity of Sanford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Although he has pastored three churches in Alabama, Illinois, and Mississippi, Dr. Humphreys’ main ministry has been as a theologian and teacher. He received a B.A. from Mississippi College, an M.A. from Loyola University, the Master of Letters from Oxford University, and the B.D. and Th.D. from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also taught theology for

Editor: Joe E. Trull

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many years. A prolific writer, Fisher has authored eight books, as well as being editor and co-author of three other works. He and Caroline have two children. At New Orleans in the 1980s he was known as a champion PacMan player at the donut shop on Gentilly.

- *Darold H. Morgan* is well known to *Christian Ethics Today* readers through his insightful book reviews. Now President Emeritus of the Annuity Board of the SBC, he served as CEO of the Board from 1972 until 1990. He has pastored several churches in Alabama and Texas, including Cliff Temple BC of Dallas 1966-1971. Dr. Morgan has served as a distinguished professor at Beeson Divinity School and Dallas Baptist University. He received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (from whom he received his Th.M. and Th.D. degrees) and from Hardin Simmons University (from whom he received B.A. and Doctor of Laws degrees). He and his wife Elizabeth have three children and are members of First Baptist of Richardson, Texas. When a pastor in Sherman, Texas, he once commended a seminary student from Tioga, Texas—the affirmation was never forgotten.
- *David Sapp* is pastor of the Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta and was a member of the previous Board. After completing his M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he became Director of Organization at the Christian Life Commission of the SBC from 1976-1981. From 1981-1999 he served First Baptist of Chamblee, Georgia, and Derbyshire Baptist of Richmond, Virginia. He has also been an Adjunctive Professor at Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, McAfee School of Theology at Mercer, and Candler School of Theology at Emory. He and his wife Linda have twin sons, Benjamin and Matthew. Rumors that David and Linda's trip to Cuba after the CBF assembly in Orlando was to meet with Fidel are unfounded; they were in Cuba to attend the Baptist World Alliance in which David is a member of the Ethics Commission. ■

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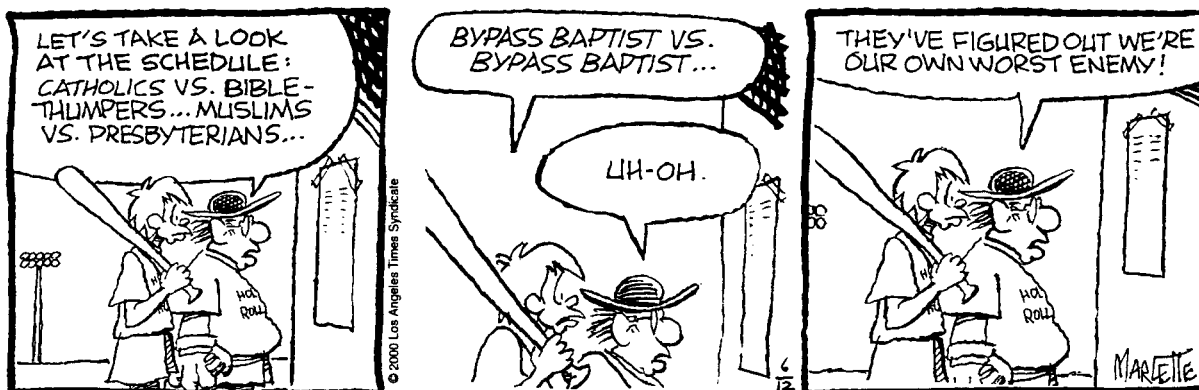
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Ethix

By Joe E. Trull

“ETHIX,” muttered the stranger on the parking lot. He was reading my license plate. “You work for an oil company,” he asked? “No,” I explained, “the word actually stands for Christian Ethics—the subject I teach. The “X” is a symbol for Christ.” “Oh, we need more of that,” he concluded.

I was in Richmond studying at Union Theological Seminary during my first sabbatical. Since I had to get Virginia plates for my car, I decided to try personalized tags that year—I’ve kept “ETHIX” on my car plates ever since.

I have always enjoyed reading other car plates, trying to decide what the numbers and letters meant. Was it the driver’s name or a message? Was it a puzzle or a paradox? Long before my year in Richmond I had decided on my own license plate identity—ETHIX!

The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard wrote in one of his early journals, “I want a truth for which I can live and die.” He was asking the ultimate ethical question, “What is worth living for?” Jesus came to answer that question.

Like many of you, the study of Christian ethics (especially under the tutelage of T. B. Maston) changed my life for the better. I came to Southwestern Seminary as a fairly new Christian and a truly fledgling “preacher-boy” from Oklahoma. Although the “seasoned” youth evangelists at O.B.U. had explained my job was “to save souls and get folks ready for heaven,” I often wondered what we were to do in the meantime.

My first year at Southwestern, I enrolled in Maston’s four-hour course, “Introduction to Christian Ethics.” The Christian faith, I learned, is not simply a highway to heaven, but primarily it is a way to walk on earth. The apostle John urged the first Christians to “walk just as he [Jesus] walked” (1 Jn. 2:6). It is no accident that the first disciples of Jesus were called followers of “the Way” (Acts 9:2).

For the first time I understood the relevance of the Christian faith to the real world in which I lived. This realization, along with the personal influence of T. B. Maston, led me to do graduate studies in Christian ethics during Maston’s last years of teaching (I was privileged to be his graduate assistant).

As my world of Christian ethics expanded, I discovered to my delight a host of persons dedicated to the cause of Christian ethics—people like Henlee Barnette, Jimmy Allen, and of course, Foy Valentine. Two years in the classroom at Carson-Newman College teaching sociology was followed by twenty years in pastoral ministry, where I tried to demonstrate that evangelism and ethics, belief and behavior, must be united if the church is to reflect God’s kingdom on earth.

For fifteen years I taught Christian ethics at New Orleans seminary. As the only ethics teacher, I got two “shots” at every

student. The opportunity to help hundreds of students make the discovery I made years before reinforced my deep commitment to the cause of Christian ethics. Thus the reason for my license plate—Christian ethics has been my life.

My “early retirement” from teaching at New Orleans (you’ve heard similar stories many times) during my second sabbatical at first seemed diabolical—now I view it as providential. God always has double-agendas at work, even when humans intervene. When Plan A was destroyed, God downloaded Plan B.

So here I am. The car tag in the driveway reads “ETHIX.” During the last year I’ve taught three ethics courses for two different seminaries, written several articles for publication, assisted the Texas CLC in Clergy Sexual Abuse materials, assumed a small pastorate, and continued research for a text on gender equality. What more could I want?

You know the answer. Here I sit, finishing my first editorial for *Christian Ethics Today*, as the new editor of a premier Journal of Christian Ethics. Thank you, President Kelley, for arranging my early retirement two years ago. ETHIX is still my passion.

The Past is Prologue

In 1995 Foy Valentine dreamed a dream. A Center for Christian Ethics that would champion ethical values, address public policy issues, sponsor symposiums, distribute materials, offer counsel, and produce a Christian ethics publication. First-born among these goals was the Journal, *Christian Ethics Today*. Since 1995, despite Foy’s veiled threat (as he grinned) that it would be published “spasmodically, as funding and energy permit,” the Journal has appeared as regular as rain (though not a good analogy in Texas) every two months—28 issues thus far!

This year the final dream became reality—the Center for Christian Ethics was fully established at Baylor, directed by Dr. Robert Kruschwitz. As you learned in the last issue, the Center will edit and publish a new quarterly journal beginning in the Fall of 2001.

However, over the past five years, *Christian Ethics Today* has developed a life of its own—it would not succumb to a premature death. The Trustees and many of almost 2500 readers affirmed the value of the Journal and asked for its continuance. A new editor was found, a new Board was enlisted, transitions were begun, and support for the remaining three issues in 2000 was provided.

The purposes for the Journal remain the same—they are described in detail on the back cover. The dream of Foy

Valentine to produce a publication that clarifies, communicates, cultivates, and champions basic ethical values remains the mission of *Christian Ethics Today*. Our Journal occupies a unique role: as well as a clear voice supporting the cause of Christian ethics, it is also an independent voice, beholden to no power structures or vested interests. Such freedom allows us to be truly prophetic. We also want to be encouragers and builders of community.

Now I am not naïve, and I have read Reinhold Niebuhr's rejoinder—sin is pervasive and evil infiltrates all social institutions. The Journal claims no infallibility (or inerrancy if you prefer). Certainly there are many fine similar publications, Baptist and otherwise, which we affirm and support. Let that be clear.

However, our Journal is unique. But that uniqueness does carry with it liabilities, the greatest of which is financial. From the beginning, the Journal has been provided to anyone who requested it, free of charge. That's the way Foy wanted it, and I concur. We do not plan to charge for subscriptions, to assess dues, or to solicit advertising. As before, we depend solely on your belief in this Journal and your financial gifts, as you are able.

Through the decisions of the previous Board of Trustees, enough support has been provided for the next three issues. In past years we have received a few large gifts of several thousand dollars, which have made the difference. We pray that some of these may continue. But for now, we are "on our own." More than ever before, your contributions are "greatly needed, urgently solicited, and genuinely appreciated" (as Foy expressed it). If you are unable to send a gift, please do not let that keep you from receiving the Journal—our mission is to share the message of Christian ethics.

The Future is Hope and Promise

Dag Hammarsjold, former Secretary General of the United Nations, wrote in his journal, "For all that has been, Thanks! For all that will be, Yes!" For the first five years of the Journal, I am very, very grateful. For the years ahead, I shout YES!

In light of present conditions in our world and present conflicts among Christians (especially those called Southern Baptists), has the need for a clear voice about Christian ethics ever been more urgent? Ours is a great and wonderful opportunity to make a difference. God's truth and grace revealed and personified in Jesus Christ overcomes human barriers, transforms social institutions, and restores broken lives.

What does the future hold for *Christian Ethics Today*? The adage is true, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Most with whom I have talked have said, "Don't change anything—keep it just as it is." That is our plan. To keep producing the same high-quality Journal that has developed such a large and loyal following in just a few years, which includes:

- A regular *vignette* from Foy Valentine, like those he has done for five years. (This month we reprint Foy's first article from Issue No. 1, a classic!)

- Hal Haralson's delightful and whimsical *stories* that always carry a deeper truth not soon forgotten. (All of his stories will soon be available in a book.)
- KUDZU is everyone's favorite—Rev. Will Dunn will keep us laughing.
- *Book Reviews*, one or more in each issue, which keep us aware of the latest and best Christian ethics books available.
- *Ethical Sermons* will be published in each issue, both for edification and to encourage ministers to preach ethical sermons in their church.
- *Articles of substance* concerning moral values and Christian ethical issues will form the core of each issue, usually an original article, a lecture or speech, or the reprinting of a classical statement from the past.
- Journal articles that explore *biblical and ethical foundations* for moral and ethical questions also will appear on a regular basis.
- Occasional *poetry, quotable quotes, and letters to the editor* will continue.

Anything new just ahead? Yes, we plan to add a few new features that we hope will strengthen and improve the Journal. A series of short statements from Christian ethics leaders about "The Most Influential Christian Ethics Book I've Read" will begin soon. Practical articles that aid churches and ministers to apply Christian ethics to their own community may also appear, perhaps gleaned from Christian ethics conferences past and present. An INDEX of all articles and authors of Issues 1-31 is scheduled for December.

Your suggestions are welcomed. Please submit articles to the editor, keeping in mind the Christian ethics focus of the Journal. Spread the word about our publication. We have added almost 100 new subscribers in June and July—our goal is 5000 readers by 2005.

After 17 years of teaching and 20 years in the pastorate, I am acutely aware of the controversial nature of Christian ethics. Sooner or later, some article may ring your bell the wrong way. My greatest fear, however, is not your reaction. It is rather the view expressed in Abelard's criticism of Anselm: "If anyone went to him in uncertainty, he returned more uncertain still. He was wonderful to hear, but at once failed if you questioned him. He kindled a fire, not to give light, but to fill the house with smoke."

My hope for *Christian Ethics Today* is light, not smoke—that Christian ethics will be better understood, or at least, as Kirkegaard once said of his own writing, "to be more passionately misunderstood." ■

—JET

Crying in the Wilderness; Streaking in Jerusalem: The Prophethood of All Believers

By Foy Valentine

[As the lead article in the first issue of *Christian Ethics Today* in April 1995, this thematic commentary on the importance of Christian ethics by the founding editor seems an appropriate word for readers to reconsider in this transitional issue. This message was first delivered to the T.B. Maston Trustees and guests on the occasion of their presentation to Foy Valentine of the first T.B. Maston Christian Ethics Award.]

Mark 1:3 says that John the Baptist was “a voice crying in the wilderness”; and of this prophet who Jesus called “more than a prophet” (Luke 7:26) our Lord said, “Among those born of women none is greater than John” (Luke 7:28).

Isaiah 20:1-6 (RSV) says, “In the year that the commander-in-chief, who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it—at that time the Lord had spoken by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, ‘Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take off your shoes from your feet,’ and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot—the Lord said, ‘As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians captives and the Ethiopians exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. Then they shall be ashamed and confounded because of Ethiopia their hope and of Egypt their boast. And the inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day, “Behold, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?””

Numbers 11:27-29 (RSV) says, “And a young man ran and told Moses, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.’ And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, ‘My lord Moses, forbid them.’ But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!’”

Joel 2:28 has the prophet Joel speaking for God and Acts 1:17-21 has the Apostle Peter, quoting Joel, to say, “In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy... And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Activating Our Christian Prophethood

The concept of the prophethood of all believers is quite old, traceable at least to Moses (See Numbers 11:29). The term itself has been around for at least a hundred years; but I am personally indebted to James Luther Adams, whom I knew, for having jogged me into hot-eyed excitement about the idea through a piece that he wrote in 1947 and which George Beach both included, and at Adam’s suggestion, used as the title for a volume of compiled addresses and articles by Adams published by Beacon Press in 1986.

According to the papers, a leading Methodist bishop, former President of the Methodist Council of Bishops, and former tall-steeple church pastor, who after fifty years of intense homosexual activity recently died of AIDS, built his stunningly successful professional career on a ruthlessly pursued program of rigid “conservatism” and aggressive initiatives for full-speed-ahead-damn-the-torpedoes “evangelism and church growth.” Prophethood was not his cup of tea.

An exceptionally successful, much lionized Southern Baptist pastor told a young protégé (whom I know) when he was just starting out in the ministry, “Just preach salvation; and don’t make waves.” Prophethood has never been his bag.

A very safe, scrupulously middle-of-the-road, extremely well-paid and highly successful pastor of a big city church recently sought to placate an agitated rich member deeply concerned about the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention by Fundamentalist extremists by counseling, “Just be patient; don’t rock the boat; don’t talk this around; don’t designate your money; this thing is going to turn around; the pendulum will swing.” Prophethood is not for him.

Some time ago a pastor of a large Southern Baptist church recounted this chilling tale: A Southern Baptist mega-church pastor had been invited to his city to hold a city-wide evangelistic crusade. The mega-church visiting evangelist looked up this pastor of the biggest church in the city and said, “Look, I’m in desperate circumstances: I’ve got to have a good love offering.” The pastor said, “You’re greedy.” “No, I’ve got these huge payments to make on my house.” “No. You’re unconscionably greedy. You’re several times a millionaire.” “How did you know?” “Elementary, my dear Watson.” Nevertheless, the “evangelist” pressed his case with other preachers in the city until he was able to walk away with his \$25,000. He had his reward. Prophethood is not his vocation.

At the 1985 Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas, there

were 36,270 seats in all three auditoriums; there were 45,049 messengers registered; and there were 44,248 ballots allegedly cast (with 98.2% of the registered messengers allegedly present and allegedly voting) in the presidential race between Charles Stanley and Winfred Moore; the denominational news services and the editors of state Baptist papers chose not to report those curious statistics. Let-the-chips-fall-where-they-may, tell-it-like-it-is prophethood did not ring their journalistic bells.

Most of the Southern Baptist Convention's real bishops, during most of the last decade and a half of unprecedented crisis, while the Fundamentalists have gone for the Southern Baptist Convention's jugular with precinct political organization and bussed-into-the-Tuesday-afternoon-Presidential-election votes, have been tongue-tied in words and hamstrung in deeds, waiting for the storm to blow over, hoping for others to rise up and fight the Philistines, watching for that pendulum to swing, straddling the fence from underneath, hunkered down in paralyzed ambiguity, reeds "shaken with the wind" of Fundamentalism, men "clothed in soft raiment" (Matthew 11:7, 8); Gamalielized. Prophethood has not been their long suit.

When I was enrolled at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, it was the rule rather than the exception for the teachers to fail to get to the latter sections of Paul's epistles, to perambulate around the prophetic, to denigrate the prophetic demands of the Christian calling, and, like a yo-yo stalled on hesitation at the bottom of the swing until its energy is spent, left ethics till the last and then left it out. Prophethood was not their priority.

We do well to remember that Henry IV, who had called his ally, the French soldier of fortune, Louis Crillon, "The bravest of the brave," said to the tardy Crillon after victory had been won in 1587 against a particularly aggressive show of force by the Leaguers in northern France, "Hang yourself, brave Crillon! We fought at Arques and you were not there." (cf James Luther Adams, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, p. 103.)

The prophetic dimensions of revealed religion has everlastingly fallen onto hard times. It has never been the most coveted of callings. There are some obvious reasons for this. Even the Lord's anointed are subject to temptations related to "soft clothing," pleasure, materialism, economic determinism, and love of comfort. When the winnowing and harrowing of Fundamentalism started among Southern Baptists, Baptists were not lean and mean, ready for the war, but soft and satisfied, flabby and floppy.

The craving for adulation has also had its effects. Earl Guinn has spoken of this malady when he said that the churches, instead of hearing God's prophets in the pulpits sounding the trumpet in thrilling, clarion tones, have heard instead "inoffensive little men tooting piccolos and then running to the door to grin like Cheshire cats at those whose compliments are demanded by their itching ears" ("The Prophetic Ministry," *Southern Baptist Preaching*, ed. H.C. Brown, Jr. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959, p. 91). Perhaps the most chilling reason of all for our resistance to prophethood has been idolatry. For decades now we Baptists have been bragging that our programs,

our missions, our evangelism have made us great, that our institutions, our brick buildings, our budgets have made our God (or god) look good to the heathen. When the death of Northern, essentially German, Fundamentalist rationalism was slipped into the pot of Baptist like, we said that these wonderful things, which we made with our own hands, have always saved us, and that they would surely save us now. It has been an idolatry that a jealous God could never have been expected to cotton to with any real enthusiasm. And it is turning out to be as "one in a certain place has said" (Hebrews 2:6) that it is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Prophecy has to do with visions and with visionaries, with seeing and with seers, with justice and with judgment, with righteousness and with retribution, and with sometimes striking an uncouth note in the world of possibility thinking. Our world needs few things more now than prophetic words and prophetic deeds. The churches now need few things more than the prophethood of crying in the wilderness like brave John the Baptist, streaking in Jerusalem like courageous Isaiah. By these words and deeds the demands of God are understood to be not obscure or ambiguous, but understandable and doable, practical and specific, clear and concrete, relevant and redemptive.

Definitions Related to the Prophetic

Prophet is the English transliteration of prophetes, a Greek word used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *Nabi*, probably meaning "one who utters a God-given message." The word originally meant forthteller but came early to encompass the idea of foretelling; and both ideas, forthtelling and foretelling, are properly associated with the term prophet. The great prophets of biblical times were driven by an irresistible constraint to declare the word of the Lord, to obey the word of the Lord, and to act in response to the word of the Lord. The prophet is the priest who is taking the longer look, listening to a different drummer, and feeling the fire in his baptism as it burns to become fire in his belly.

Prophecy is the work of a prophet, the vocation of a prophet, the utterance of a prophet. It may be a courageous, communicative, cathartic prophetic act. It may be a prediction. It may be a discernment and interpretation of "the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3).

Prophetic is an adjective which refers to things, pertaining to the character or function of a prophet or of prophets including both forthtelling, or the proclamatory, and foretelling, or the predictive. The prophetic word in the gospel presses toward the ideal, champions the moral imperative, stands, stands for right.

Prophesy is a verb meaning to speak by divine inspiration, to announce, or to predict. Amos said, "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (3:8)

Prophethood has to do with the word or position or office of the prophet. As we speak of the priesthood of all believers, we may also rightly speak of the prophethood of all believers. There is nothing that would do more to revive authentic

Christianity in our time than for us to find the ways and devise the means to press successfully for the prophethood of all believers.

Biblical Roots of Prophethood

The first mention of a prophet in the Bible is the reference in Genesis 20:7 in which God said to Abimelech, king of Gerar, concerning Abraham, “he is a prophet.” Moses was prophet in a truly classic sense. As men and women of heroic deeds, the Judges of Israel performed prophetic functions representing God and pointing to God. The kings of Israel were frequently compelled to fall in line with the visions and calls of the Lord’s divinely inspired prophets. The great prophets like Elijah and Elisha, Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, Jonah and John the Baptist, and many, many more were people of mighty words; and they were men and women of mighty deeds. Prophetesses like Miriam and Deborah and Huldah and Anna and the four virgin daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:9) prove that God is no respecter of persons at the point of sex, that prophethood has no direct connection to gonads or ovaries, to sex or sexuality. The call of these prophets and prophetesses was a call to ethical monotheism, justice, righteousness, goodness, mercy, kindness, forbearance, truth, love, rectitude, and responsibility. They everlastingly highlighted the worth of the individual.

The Lord Jesus Christ was himself a prophet “mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Matthew 21:11; Luke 24:19; John 4:19; John 7:40); and his most profoundly prophetic witness to the world was his incarnation. The scandal of the cross and his awful nakedness there was preceded by his pitifully provincial nakedness as a newborn human baby sucking at the breast of Mary his mother and then wetting his diapers in the barn of Bethlehem. That incarnational witness of God in Christ puts the streaking of Isaiah in Jerusalem into perspective. Isaiah’s witness was but a pale portent, a mere shadow, of the power of prophecy when presented by the Prophet of prophets, Jesus Christ.

The prophetic tradition in church history has not had a brilliant record; and for this, the church is infinitely poorer; for this, the Kingdom of God is sadly diminished. In the early church, of course, prophets are sometimes mentioned as ranking next to the Apostles (Acts 11:27; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28). The Apostles themselves discharged prophetic responsibilities. Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Peter learned in his vision on the housetop of Joppa that what God had cleansed we may not call common or unclean. Authentic prophecy stumbled on many stones, including the stone of incipient Pentecostalism which fostered excesses of emotionalism, dispensationalism, escapism, and moral nihilism.

The Need for the Prophethood of All Believers

Few biblical insights, concepts, doctrines, or teachings are more sadly neglected, more generally ignored, or more shamelessly rejected than those pertaining to prophets, prophethood, and the prophetic aspect of the Lord’s high calling.

In the Reformation, Christians took a giant step toward recovering the priesthood of the believer. Martin Luther’s nailing of his 95 theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenburg was a prophetic act. The formulation of those 95 theses was a prophetic utterance or statement communicating a divinely inspired insight. The Anabaptists and the whole radical left wing of the Reformation subsequently took some halting steps toward the prophethood of all believers; but the plane has not ever sustained its flight for very long. Institutionalism keeps metastasizing. The priestly keeps squeezing the life out of the prophetic. Comfort keeps conquering courage.

The need now is not just for a prophet, an Abraham, a Moses, a Rahab, an Amos, an Isaiah to take his clothes off and go barefoot for three years as sign, or a John the Baptist with his lone voice crying in the wilderness. The need is for an extension of the Reformation, a commitment to the basic agenda of Baptists in the free church tradition, general acceptance of the prophethood of all believers. With this prophethood in place, we can dream dreams and see visions. We can run and not be weary; we can walk and not faint. We can lay hold of the frequent vision (1 Samuel 3:1, RSV). We can be salt for the earth and light for the world and leaven for the lump.

The prophethood of believers can smash idols. And we can grind them to smithereens and mix them in the water, and bring the world to drink them. This was a sure sign to the Israelites that their false gods had been irretrievably disintegrated, ingloriously ingested, and ignobly excreted. Gentleness and facile optimism sometimes need to be balanced by justice and hard reality.

The prophethood of believers can foster repentance; and repentance, it is to be remembered, is the keynote of the New Testament message. That is, we can encourage the world which God loves and which He came in Christ to save, to change its mind about its sin. We can foster repentance by first getting the world’s attention. Voices crying seize interest; and prophets streaking, naked and barefoot for three years at a time, demand attention. Prophethood, having got the world’s attention, then points people to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Then with repentance affected, purification is brought about, renewal is achieved, integrity is apprehended, salvation is realized, and church takes on meaning.

Oh; there is one other little matter. With the prophethood of all believers recovered and then taken seriously, failure is assured. As surely as sparks fly upward, rejection, loneliness, scandal, stoning, banishment, scorn, hatred, and crucifixion go with prophethood. The prophet’s mantle is made of tow sacks and old cowhides. The prophet’s food may be grasshoppers and wild honey. The prophet’s house may be a cave. The prophet’s servants may be crows. The prophet’s pay may be spit in the face.

But the prophet’s reward is God’s “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21).

As we believe in and practice the priesthood of all believers, so let us believe in and practice the prophethood of all believers.

The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy. ■

Would Jesus Dance Country-Western?

By Hal Haralson,

Attorney in Austin, Texas

The “Broken Spoke” is a famous South-Austin landmark. It is one of the oldest continually operated country-western dance halls in Texas.

This “honky-tonk” boasts a parking lot that isn’t paved, low ceilings and country music — lots of it.

James White, the owner of The Broken Spoke for years, has hosted such country-western notables as Willie Nelson.

What’s this got to do with Christian Ethics? Read on.

The religious leaders of his day criticized Jesus for spending too much time with “sinners.” Cussing fishermen, prostitutes, tax collectors and the like.

They must have felt comfortable around Him. The religious leaders did not. Peter, still cussin’ after three years, would have left otherwise.

I lived next door to Dwayne Adams in a small South Texas town. We played tennis each Sunday afternoon.

Dwayne was good at tennis. I could beat him only on rare occasions.

Dwayne was a rancher. He was married, with two children. He was a good provider. Martha took the children to church every Sunday. Dwayne never went.

We talked about cattle. With my ranching background, it

gave us a mutual interest. When I tried to inject the subject of religion into our conversation, Dwayne became very quiet.

Our tennis match usually ended about 5:00 and Dwayne dropped me off at my house. He knew my wife Judy and I went to church on Sunday evenings.

On this particular Sunday, Dwayne spoke as I opened the door to get out, “Why don’t I go get a six-pack and we can drive down and look at the cattle?”

We did. We looked at cows and calves until nearly dark.

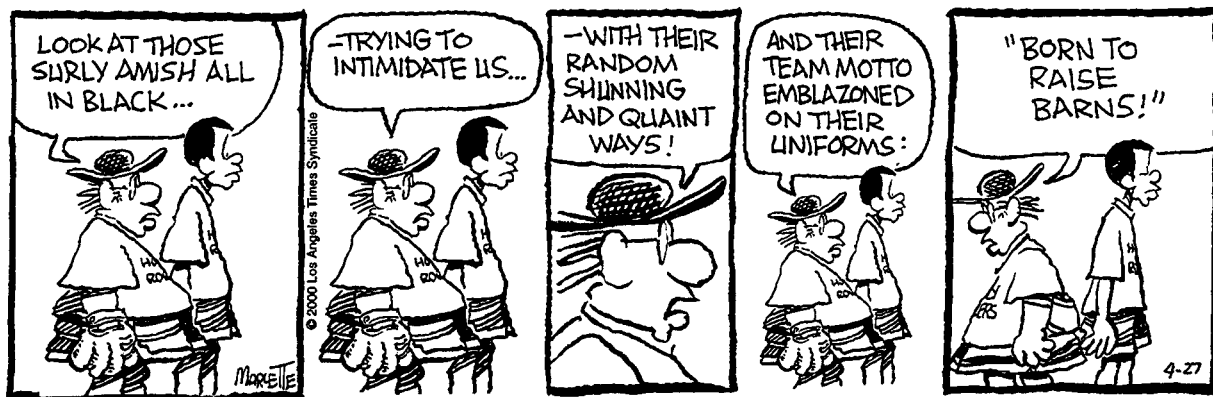
As we entered the driveway to my house, Dwayne began to talk about himself as he had never done. He talked about his relationship to God, his childhood and growing up in the church. The conversation lasted over two hours.

It was as if Dwayne had invited me into his world. When I did not make him feel uncomfortable, he allowed me to know his heart.

Jesus said, “I came to bring sinners, not the righteous, to repentance.”

So He spent His time with sinners...not the righteous.

If Jesus spent the weekend in Austin, would he spend more time at First Baptist Church or at The Broken Spoke? ■



Women and the Southern Baptist Convention

By William E. Hull

Research Professor, Samford University

[The article is an expanded version of a sermon delivered in the Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, on June 18, 2000.]

This sermon was prompted by two converging emphases. First, media reports during the past week have focused on actions taken at the recent meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) declaring “the office of pastor is limited to men.” This follows a 1998 action directing the wife “to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband.” Second, the observance of Father’s Day invites us to reflect on the role of men and women in relation to each other both in the family and in the church. Since the SBC has lifted the model of male headship and female subordination to the level of a core belief in its officially sanctioned statement of “The Baptist Faith and Message” (BFM), it behooves us to consider carefully what this development may mean for our congregation as a cooperating church.

I can already anticipate your negative reaction to a consideration of this agenda. Many in the pew are tired of hearing about another outbreak of that seemingly endless struggle called the SBC Controversy which they interpret primarily as a preacher fight for control and power. To judge from comments heard all week, most of our members are either embarrassed or angry over what has happened and would prefer to hear nothing more in the hope that it will somehow go away. In any case, just as Roman Catholic laity are not willing to let the hierarchy in Rome tell them whether to practice birth control, so Baptist laity are not about to let a few thousand messengers gathered in Orlando determine how they relate to members of the opposite sex. The prevailing response thus far in our congregation seems to be either to complain about, or to joke about, this action and then to hide behind the cherished doctrine of congregational autonomy. I am not convinced that this dismissive attitude represents an adequate response to what the SBC has done.

I. The Implications of SBC Action

First we need to understand that Baptists have long been cautious about adopting any confession of faith at all, since such statements carry the danger of creedalism against which we reacted strongly from the very beginning of our movement nearly four hundred years ago. The SBC had no such statement from its founding in 1845 until 1925 when a bitter controversy over evolution prompted the first such

effort. This document served unchanged until 1963 when another bitter controversy over the interpretation of Genesis triggered its revision. From 1845 to 1998, during the first 153 years of its existence, the SBC managed to need only two statements of faith, each prompted by a severe internal crisis. But now, in just the last two years, we have had two more revisions at a time when the current leadership of the Convention is claiming that things could not be going better.

The mystery of why the SBC needs this sudden rash of revisions deepens when we consider that both changes comment on the role of women in relation to men, first in the family (1998) and now in the church (2000). Not a word on this subject appeared in either of our previous statements of 1925 and 1963 or in any other declarations used earlier by Baptists, such as the New Hampshire Confession of 1853. Nor was this matter addressed in any of the classic creeds of Christendom, such as those of Nicea (324) and Chalcedon (451), which have guided the church for almost 2000 years. Here we have a daring new departure in the construction and content of a confession of faith, ironically being pushed by those who like to style themselves as “conservative!”

The plot thickens when we realize that these novel amendments so recently enacted have long been controversial and even divisive within our Baptist fellowship. Indeed, the framers of these additions, which included two seminary presidents, were well aware that their key contentions regarding the place of women in the Christian faith are vigorously contested, not just by so-called “moderates,” but by those of their own theological persuasion called “inerrantists.”¹ In cases of deep division within the Baptist ranks, the standard practice has long been to exclude such debated points from a statement of faith. For example, we have never agreed on one view of the millennium and so this doctrine has been omitted from all of our confessions, even though for Dispensationalists a pre-millennial view is crucial to their whole understanding of Scripture. By inserting one hotly debated viewpoint into the latest version of its statement of faith, the SBC has changed the very character of the BFM from a unifying to a polarizing document.

But why should the current SBC leadership want to inject a note of controversy into a document intended to strengthen consensus at a time when even its proponents acknowledge

that there is no urgent problem in need of correction? The drafting committee itself released a study which showed that “no more than 35 women are senior pastors in more than 41,000 Southern Baptist churches nationwide,”² scarcely a threat to the status quo of male dominance in the ministry. But while practices have hardly begun to change, the underlying attitudes toward gender relations do differ significantly within our Baptist family. An emphasis upon the complete equality of women to exercise their spiritual gifts within both the home and the church is characteristic of such diverse groups as: the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Alliance of Baptists, the dozen or so seminaries founded recently under Baptist sponsorship, most of the fifty-plus Baptist colleges and universities including Samford and its Beeson Divinity School, the Baptist Center for Ethics, Smyth and Helwys publishers of “Formations” literature, Woman’s Missionary Union national organization and many of its state organizations, the Baptist Joint Committee, and, of course, Baptist Women in Ministry.

It is in an effort to reject this viewpoint, to stifle this dissent, to eliminate these differences that the additions regarding women have been made to the BFM. We may assume that these changes reflect the sincere faith of their supporters but, in choosing this means to express their faith, the architects of BFM 2000 made its adoption an exercise in the politics of exclusion. Rather than both sides studying the issue together and seeking to resolve our differences by patient investigation and friendly dialogue, a decision was made to cut off discussion and settle the matter decisively, not by deeper study of the Biblical evidence or by weighing the merits of divergent viewpoints, but by majority vote of assembled messengers. If that sounds at first like the democratic thing to do, I would observe that, if Baptists could have handled the abolition question that way, we would still have slaves in the South! The plain fact is that equal rights are seldom if ever extended to an excluded group until after they have first been denied again and again by an overwhelming majority of those in power wishing to maintain the status quo.

Faced with the finality of SBC action and the futility of trying to overturn it, some might be tempted to say, “Let’s just ignore what they did and plot our own course for the future.” The freedom to do that very thing is a precious heritage, which continues to be affirmed in BFM 2000 where the church is defined as “an autonomous local congregation...[which] operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes.”³ But the solution is not that simple because the SBC influences the life of its member churches in a number of direct and inescapable ways. Let me offer but three illustrations of how the new SBC position on women will impact Mountain Brook Baptist Church in the days ahead.

(1) We as a congregation could decide to stay with BFM 1963, as our largest state convention in Texas has already done, but every professional employee of SBC agencies will be required to subscribe to BFM 2000 as a condition of employment. This means that future pastors or ministerial staff who

come to us from SBC seminaries will have been taught by faculty unanimously in support of these changes, that missionaries who visit to commend the Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong offerings will henceforth be expected to endorse these changes, that Sunday School literature ordered from LifeWay Resources will be prepared by writers who accept these changes. There are upward of 15,000 employees in SBC agencies whose job it is to support and extend the work of our 40,000-plus churches. Now that they have gotten their marching orders in Orlando, we should not be surprised if changes to the BFM soon become a pervasive influence in much of Baptist life.

(2) In our polity, not only are local churches autonomous but regional, state, national, and international bodies are autonomous as well, which means that the SBC has no authority to superimpose its confessional views at other levels of our denominational life. This might encourage those who are unhappy with the SBC action to channel their cooperative efforts through the Birmingham Baptist Association, the Alabama Baptist State Convention, and the Baptist World Alliance, none of which has adopted the SBC position on women.⁴ But pressure will be applied on these bodies by SBC supporters to adopt BFM 2000, at least in principle, partly because the SBC is so much larger than any of these other bodies and also because they are all closely linked to the SBC through complex funding mechanisms. Even if such pressures are resisted, the effort itself will be disruptive, introducing needless dissension into our ranks, distracting us from our central mission, and giving the media another field day to ridicule the whole controversy.

(3) Perhaps the hardest problem for those who would advocate a strategy of avoidance is the fact that Mountain Brook Baptist Church has long contributed generously through the Cooperative Program to the support of every SBC agency. But because our church has ordained women to the ministry and to the diaconate, practices that are not expressly forbidden by BFM 2000, none of our members are considered for positions of service on the board of any SBC agency. Solely on the basis of granting to women an equal rather than a subordinate role in the life of our church, we are denied any voice in the policy-making councils of those agencies that have been prime beneficiaries of our mission giving for decades. MBBC probably has more members than any other church in Alabama with the requisite experience to oversee the large business operations of SBC agencies, as has long been demonstrated by their service on the Samford Board of Trustees, yet not only are we boycotted from having any representation but so is every other church that shares our attitude toward women in church leadership.

So: if we cannot simply ignore this issue because of our deep denominational ties, then what should we do about it? I believe that we could make any one of at least three mistakes in formulating a strategy for responding to this problem.

(1) We could wait patiently for the government to solve

our problem. After all, time is on our side. Women are entering fully into all of the other major professions, such as law, medicine, and education. They now sit on the Supreme Court, are members of Congress, and aggressively campaign for the Presidency in both parties. In case you missed it, equal opportunity for women is now the law of the land, making discrimination by reason of gender illegal. Our seminaries are sending out a stream of talented women who have earned both standard and advanced degrees in pastoral ministry (M. Div., D. Min.). Churches will find it increasingly risky to ignore candidates for ministry positions simply because they are female, especially if they are most highly qualified applicants. My guess is that the courts will be slow to enforce equal opportunity rights for women seeking pastoral employment. Rather, the greater pressure will come from public outrage, as when George W. Bush's recent visit to Bob Jones University resulted in a firestorm of criticism that prompted the institution to rescind its discrimination policy against interracial dating that the government had long sought to overturn by revoking its tax-exempt status.

(2) We men could punt and wait for women to solve the problem that we created. After all, women constitute a clear majority of church members. Moreover, they are rapidly gaining leadership skills and financial clout in the workplace. At least some of them have learned hard-nosed negotiating skills from the feminist movement that they could adapt to the Byzantine world of denominational politics. But I do not look for women to unite in reversing the SBC action for a seldom-recognized reason. Many women are so afraid that their men will neglect family responsibilities—either because of intense business pressures to succeed, or because of addiction to football and fishing, or because our sexually permissive culture encourages them to dump the wife for a plaything half her age—that they will gladly let them be “head” and submit to them “graciously” if only this will apply enough religious pressure to keep them faithful and encourage them to help raise the kids.

(3) We could complain about BFM 2000 and criticize those who engineered its changes in the hope that if we protest the problem long enough it might be corrected by a groundswell of opposition. There are two defects in this strategy. First, such constant carping makes us crabby, negative, and defensive. Nobody is attracted to a movement that is forever whining about what somebody else did. Second, we are not about to overturn this change by political action, whether it is negative or positive. Of the 11,800 messengers gathered in Orlando, “only a few dozen cast dissenting votes.”⁵ The supporters of the new orthodoxy are solidly united and well disciplined, convinced that they are courageously following the literal dictates of Scripture while their detractors are bending to the trendy winds of modern culture. Of course, that is exactly what Southern preachers said 150 years ago when defending slavery, but all such arguments fall on deaf ears because the other side is not paying any attention to us. By their own admission, they would be happy if churches like ours would just leave the SBC so that they would no longer

have to contend with our contrarian witness. There can be little doubt that the recent revisions of the BFM were undertaken partly in an effort to encourage just such a separation.

II. The Imperatives of the Biblical Witness⁶

In a situation such as this, we cannot take refuge in congregational autonomy, in Baptist tradition, or in political superiority. Therefore we are driven of necessity to state everything on our best understanding of the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture. Fortunately, this is the one point on which all sides agree. As Gardendale pastor Steve Gaines is reported to have said, “The burden of proof is on them to find it [i.e. gender equality which would permit women pastors] in the Scripture,”⁷ a challenge which we should gladly accept. If we can hammer out a clearer, wiser interpretation of the Bible than those who endorsed the views now found in BFM 2000, those Scriptural convictions will trump a majority vote every time. Instead of assuming that the issue is now settled, let us diligently search the Word and boldly proclaim the fullness of its truth in the confidence that God will vindicate our efforts in his own good time, just as he did for the opponents of slavery who urged its abolition against an overwhelming majority.

The Bible does not paint a pretty picture of the place which woman occupied in the ancient world. We need not be squeamish, however, about acknowledging her low estate even within Scripture, such as concubinage and polygamy. The issue for us is not how much progress was actually achieved during the millennium covered by Biblical literature, but whether God chose that often deplorable situation in which to disclose his ultimate intention for woman. In the Bible we find actual rather than ideal social conditions, in some respects better but in other respects worse than those which obtained elsewhere. What this means is that God did not necessarily pick out the most advanced society in which to work, but that he was willing to deal with a sometimes progressive and a sometimes regressive situation as he found it. Such a realization offers the hope that our wayward world may yet have a chance for divine help even in those cultures where women are still brutally exploited.

How may we determine the distinctive contours of Biblical faith and the center around which that faith coheres? The focal point is clearly Christ and all that He means for the life of humanity. Jesus himself recognized that without a Christocentric hermeneutic the unity of Scripture would be destroyed (Matthew 5:17-18). But the reality of Christ may be fully understood only if set in the context of a redemptive drama stretching from the creation to the consummation. These three realities, taken together, are constitutive for Biblical faith because, in them as nowhere else, divine truth from beyond history most clearly impinges upon the whole of God's redemptive history. It is from this threefold perspective that woman may be viewed both in the light of the painful realities of this world and in the light of the perfected realities of the world to come.

Woman and Creation. The oldest and in many ways the

most comprehensive Biblical witness to the place of woman as defined by creation is found in Genesis 2:4b-25. There we meet the male in his solitude as an incomplete creation: it was “*not good* that he should be alone” (2:18a). When no other living creature could be found to fill that void (2:19-20), God fashioned woman to be a companion “corresponding” to him (literally: “a helper according to what is in front of him;” that is, a kind of mirror image of his humanity). When man was presented with his “opposite number,” he immediately rejoiced to discover that in her he now had both otherness (i.e. community) and sameness (i.e. “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” 2:23), a relationship which he could never sustain with the animals. So necessary was each to the other that their attachment was to transcend every other loyalty, even the blood tie between parent and child (2:24). Just as a piece of paper, by its nature, has two sides, so humanity, by its created nature, has two sexes. Neither the male nor the female alone, but only the two of them together as “one flesh,” constitute and complete what it means generically to be human.

Because this account depicts woman as having been created *after* man, *from* man, and *for* man, some have seen in its concept of complementary companionship a theology of female subordination of which there is no hint in the text. Any doubt is dispelled by the creation account given pride of place in Genesis 1:26-31. There, “God created man in his own image” creating “male and female” concurrently (1:27). Gender differentiation was inherent in God’s design for humanity from the outset: the female was not an accident, an afterthought, or an expedient. A paradoxical singularity and plurality of being (“God created *him*; male and female created *he them*,” 1:27) corresponded to or “imaged” a similar reciprocity in God’s being (“Let *us* make man...*he* created him/*them*,” 1:26-27). We, like God, were meant to be a fellowship within ourselves though, unlike God, our internal duality is defined by gender.

But that essential partnership of male and female was shattered by the impulse of the two genders to achieve their destiny separately (Genesis 3). At first there was no shame in their nakedness (2:25) because they saw each other in their solidarity but, once the serpent had exploited their pride to drive the wedge of alienation, they began to see each other in terms of their differences (3:11-13) and so covered their nakedness (3:7). As punishment for her effort to redefine the ultimate meaning of life in terms of what she could get rather than what she could give, woman exchanged a possible Paradise for the pain of childbirth, the burdens of raising a large family, and the domination of her husband (3:16).

So much has been made of these afflictions imposed on woman that they deserve further comment, especially the final one on subjection to the husband (“he shall rule over you”). Note the following: (a) The husband’s rule was not arbitrarily imposed like that of a conquering despot but functioned in the context of her continuing “desire” for him (3:16b). (b) The punishment was not sexually discriminatory since man was given an equal share of problems. (3:17-19). Just as fertility for the woman was found in the womb where she would

toil in pain to produce, so fertility for the man was found in the soil where he likewise would toil “in the sweat of his face” to produce. (c) The terms of the sentence described conditions as they actually existed for both women and men in the ancient world; that is, the story helped to account for the darker side of human existence by attributing it to judgment for sin. The point cannot be stressed too strongly that these consequences of human folly were not divine ordinances decreed for all time; rather, “these are evils which the author feels to be contrary to the ideal of human nature, and to the intention of a good God.”⁸

This insight is crucial to an interpretation of the place of woman in the Biblical doctrine of creation. The whole structure of the account in 2:4b-3:24 was designed to magnify the contrast between the ideal intention for woman created by God (2:18-25) and the tragic alternative which she and her mate created for themselves by flaunting the divine order. But this means, further, that it was precisely her sexual plight—because it rooted in sin rather than in God—which the whole history of salvation is working to redeem. The Bible never understood divine punishment as an eternal curse. Rather, tragedies permitted by God as the price of humanity’s freedom to fail were transformed by Him at infinite cost as a result of the divine determination to succeed. Male dominance and female subjection were very real. They belonged to the Old Age of fallen humanity that had not yet passed away. But they did not belong to God’s good creation. They were not a part of the way things were meant to be.

Jesus, of course, was the supreme interpreter of creation theology within the Bible (Matthew 19:3-9/Mark 10:2-12). In response to a question regarding the rights of a man to divorce his wife, he identified the Mosaic legislation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as an effort to deal with “hardness of heart” but, over against that, set the “beginning of creation” (Mark 10:6) when “it was not so” (Matthew 19:8). It is significant that Jesus attributed to sin the male dominance seen so clearly in the unfair divorce laws of his day. By contrast, he based his positive understanding of gender differences on a fusion of the key elements in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, thereby acknowledging both the unity and the primacy of these passages. For him, God had “joined together” two equal partners as “one,” thereby ruling out not only the male prerogative of divorce by any other form of unfaithfulness by either partner which would weaken the marriage bond (Mark 10:11-12).

Unlike Jesus, Paul did have occasion to refer to the subordination of woman rooted in Genesis 3:16 (cf. I Corinthians 11:3-9; 14:34; Ephesians 5:22-24; I Timothy 2:11-15). In so doing, however, he was careful to maintain the unity and equality of the sexes in the creative purpose of God (I Corinthians 11:11-12; Ephesians 5:28-33; and, by implication, I Corinthians 6:16). The clue to this apparent dichotomy of status is to be found in Paul’s understanding of God’s unfolding salvation. As Romans 5-8 makes clear, he saw Christians living where the Old Age and the New Age impinged or “overlapped” (I Corinthians 10-11). Insofar as they still lived “in the world,” in a fallen creation subjected to

futility and bondage (Romans 8:20-21), male dominance and female subjection were ever-present realities which could not be ignored lest social chaos erupt and Christianity be branded as a libertine escapist movement. But insofar as they now lived “in the Lord,” in a creation destined to “obtain the glorious liberty” which already belonged to the children of God (Romans 8:21), these cultural restrictions were already transcended. In the eyes of the world, women at worship could be completely misunderstood if they did not keep silent (I Corinthians 14:34; I Timothy 2:11), whereas the eyes of faith these same women were free to pray and prophesy or even to teach (I Corinthians 11:5; Titus 2:3).

Woman and Christ. For the Bible, the meaning of the Christ was uniquely incarnated in the historical ministry of Jesus. It is striking that his message nowhere included references to circumcision, that distinctively male rite of initiation from which Jewish women and female proselytes were excluded. In place of this ancient practice that had assumed such importance in first century Judaism (Ephesians 2:11), Jesus focused on faith as the basis of one’s standing before God. This immediately put women, as well as foreigners, on equal footing with Jewish males (Mark 5:34; Matthew 8:10). Moreover, he demanded that women make their own personal commitment to him even if it shattered the solidarity of the family (Matthew 10:34-36; Luke 12:51-53). In response, women formed a special band that accompanied him from Galilee, several of whom were so prominent that their names have become a part of the gospel record (Luke 8:2-3). “The fact that women followed Jesus is without precedent in contemporary Judaism.”⁹

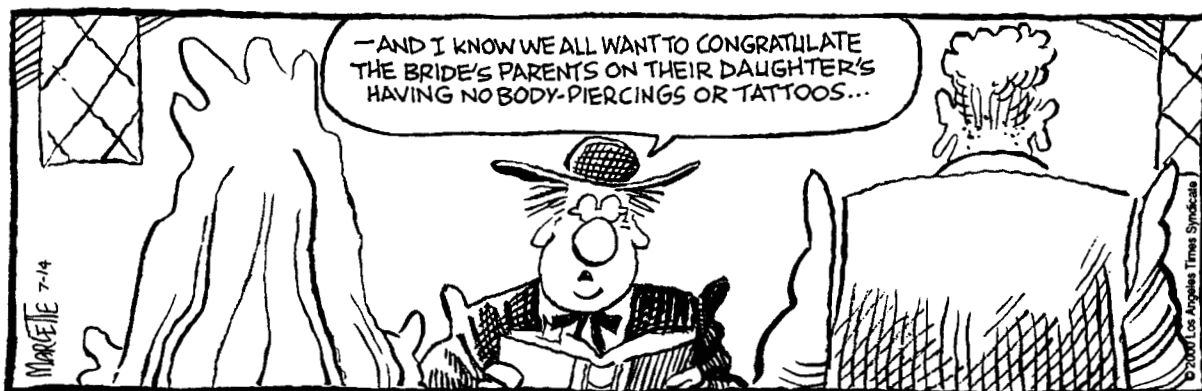
Examples might be multiplied of the ways in which women became an integral part of Jesus’ ministry. In contrast to Jewish parallels, both his parables and his miracles often dealt tenderly with women. He talked to them in public (John 4:27) and made friends of them in the home (Luke 10:38-42). No wonder they were the last at the cross in courage (Matthew 27:55-56), the first at the tomb in compassion (Mark 16:1). The important point to grasp here is the theological reality underlying this remarkable pattern. Albrecht Oepke provides a clue: “Jesus is not the radical reformer who proclaims laws and seeks to enforce a transformation of relationships. He is the Savior who gives Himself especially to the lowly and oppressed and calls all without distinction to the freedom of the

Kingdom of God.”¹⁰

That is why the Apostle Paul could affirm, in the clearest expression of his Christocentric faith: “there is no ‘male and female’; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Viewed historically, behind that claim lay the important role of women in the founding of the church (Acts 1:14; 2:17; 12:12), in the spread of the missionary movement (Acts 16:13-15; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:18, 26), and in positions of leadership and service (Romans 16:1, 3, 6, 12, 15). But viewed theologically, here is not merely the claim that in Christ the “male and female” duality of creation has been redeemed from its corruption by sin, but also that in the life of the Body of Christ (3:27) it has actually been transcended. The children of God who live by a faith (3:26) which expresses itself in baptism (3:27a), have thereby been “clothed” with a Christ-identity (3:27b) that supersedes racial, social, and sexual identities.

Woman and the Consummation. Both Jewish and Christian thought distinguished between the Messianic Age on earth and the Age to Come in the world beyond. The basic difference was that, for Judaism, these two epochs lay beyond the final period of human history and so were sharply discontinuous with the old dispensation, whereas, for Christianity, Jesus brought the Messianic Age into the midst of history thereby fulfilling the Old Age and foreshadowing the Age to Come at the end of history. Let us see how this distinctive outlook affected the Biblical theology of woman.

During the ministry of Jesus, the Sadducees sought to snare him with a particularly offensive illustration of levirate marriage to seven successive brothers (Matthew 22:23-33/Mark 12:18-27/Luke 20:27-40) on which basis they asked, “In the resurrection whose wife will she be?” (Mark 12:23), hoping thereby to justify their rejection of the future life by ridiculing its premises. In his response, “when they rise from the dead they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25), Jesus exposed a basic fallacy: his opponents had not reckoned with “the power of God” to fashion an order so completely different from earth that it need not perpetuate any of its ambiguities. Since the angels were in the heavenly court prior to creation, they must be non-fleshy creatures and therefore without gender. When the husbands and wives of earth exchange their physical bodies for spiritual bodies (I Corinthians 15:44), they obviously leave the earthly institution of marriage behind. Oepke traces the impli-



cations of this vision for Jesus' hearers: "In holding out the prospect of sexless being like that of the angels in the consummated kingdom of God, He indirectly lifts from woman the curse of her sex and sets her at the side of man as equally a child of God."¹¹

Paul entertained a similar view which helps to explain one of the most puzzling passages in his epistles: "The appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none....For the form of this world is passing away" (I Corinthians 7:29-31). The Apostle was aware that, sooner than most realize, the whole order to which marriage belongs would terminate—whether at the end of world history through the return of Christ or at the end of each individual's personal history through death—and therefore now was the time to prepare for that impending heavenly existence. This could be done neither by divorce (7:27) nor by separation or sexual restraint (7:3-5), but by practicing an "undivided devotion to the Lord" (7:35). The intensity of Paul's commitment to the world beyond was remarkable indeed: so clearly did the Age to Come loom on his spiritual horizon that he was ready for it to reshape the most intimate relationships of earthly life.

When we put all of the relevant passages together they coalesce into a coherent perspective that sets human sexuality into a "saving history" framework. Both Jesus and Paul recognized three distinct "ages" or stages in the relationship of male and female: (1) The Old Age, in which "hardness of heart" led to male dominance, female subjection, unfaithfulness and exploitation. (2) The Messianic Age, in which Christ makes possible a realization of the original intention for man and woman in the created order, namely an equality of reciprocal loyalty, fidelity, and support. (3) The Age to Come, in which our earthly relationships will be transcended and our unity-in-reciprocity will be fulfilled, not by oneness with opposite sex, but by a perfect oneness with God-in-Christ.

This biblical way of stating its perspective on woman may be applied most relevantly in two respects. Historically, we may ask where the church in our generation wishes to be located on this salvation timetable. Shall we revert once more to the Old Age, as if woman had not been punished enough, and seek new ways to keep her in subjection? Or shall we take seriously the fact that Christ has come and liberated both male and female from their age-long strife to new possibilities of mutual respect and caring? Indeed, dare we push our spirits to the boundary where time itself shall be no more in order to go beyond a careful equality and mutuality of the sexes to a realm of pure spiritual adventure in Christ where gender matters not at all? These same questions may also be asked personally as I decide just how far I am willing to recapitulate in my own experience the age-long quest to regain Paradise Lost and see woman as she was meant to be, the indispensable "otherness" without whom my humanity is incomplete, and by truly finding her to discover beyond us both that essential humanity which lives both now and forevermore with "undivided devotion to the Lord."

III. Gender Equality in the Life of the Church

The Biblical convictions which we have just surveyed can be as much of a liberating force in the twenty-first century church as they were in the first century church. All over the world, Christians are finding new vitality by offering unlimited spiritual fulfillment to both halves of the human race. Interesting enough, much of this activity is found on the conservative side of the theological spectrum where the SBC claims to be positioning itself. Gary Parker has cited three examples: (1) Promise Keepers has opened its clergy meetings to women because, as founder Bill McCartney explained, "We have learned that thirteen percent of our churches are pastored by ladies." (2) Willow Creek Church, known internationally for its "seeker services," does not, according to pastor Bill Hybels, "restrict any office or position in the church on the basis of gender." (3) Billy Graham, when asked by David Frost about women's ordination, said: "Women preach all over the world. It doesn't bother me at all from my study of the Scriptures."¹²

At bottom, it really does not matter if we are "for" gender equality in our church unless it makes a difference in the effectiveness with which we minister. Let us prove by the health of our congregation that we can do God's work better when we utilize the contribution of male and female alike without restriction. There is not opportunity here even to list, much less to discuss, the many ways that the life of our congregation can be enriched by encouraging the full participation of women on the same basis as men. Let me select three areas to illustrate how men and women can work together in a partnership of equals as servants of Christ.

The Initiative of God. Baptists have always based the authorization for ministry, not on apostolic succession, but on the call of God. Therefore it is only logical that some who support BFM 2000 would claim that God does not call women to be pastors. The theology behind this assumption is not unlike that of an early Christian group called Judaizers who insisted that one must follow their ancient traditions—that is, embrace circumcision, Sabbath observance, and Temple sacrifice—in order to become a Christian. But God kept running ahead of this restrictive theology and saving Gentiles *before* they embraced these Jewish practices. When, for example, Peter was criticized for baptizing the uncircumcised Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48), his defense was that God had validated the centurion's conversion by filling him with the Holy Spirit quite apart from meeting any of the conditions imposed by the Judaizers (Acts 11:1-18).

Note carefully the key principle that Peter learned from this experience: "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17). Here is a situation in which theology was being challenged to catch up with experience. For centuries, pious Jews had believed that Scripture was telling them to circumcise every convert, a practice which became urgently important to them in the first century when they felt threatened with extinction through

cultural assimilation. But now a new day had dawned when their understanding of what God had *said* was being reinterpreted by what God had actually *done*! This explains why circumcision, a dominant practice throughout the Old Testament, was dropped almost immediately in the New Testament, never again to become a restriction limiting Gentile participation in the Christian movement.

Baptists today face the same situation in regard to women as Peter did in regard to Gentiles. For generations we were rooted in the soil on farms or as laborers and shopkeepers in the cities. In that social system, men did the “public” work while women stayed at home, thus it was only natural for men to exercise leadership in the churches. But now all of that has changed. Most of our Baptist women are in the workplace where equal employment opportunities are taken for granted. Years ago, very few women indeed heard God’s call to minister, except perhaps in a very different culture on some foreign field. After all, back then they could not even gain admission to an SBC seminary to receive the training needed for such service. Today, when all of the educational opportunities available to men are also open to women, when women are assuming leadership roles in every other vocation, when there is a chronic shortage of qualified male candidates for ministry, is it any wonder that many more women are hearing and heeding God’s call to ministry?

Baptists place a high priority on personal religious experience. If a young man steps forward and declares with clarity and conviction that God has called him to the ministry, we are almost certain to ordain him after examination by a council of mature church leaders. How, then, can we do otherwise if a young woman steps forward, if her testimony is radiant with an impelling sense of God’s call, if her understanding of Baptist faith and practice is sound and sensible, if she is willing to prove the sincerity of her dedication through years of sacrificial preparation, if her abilities are equal or superior to those of many male ministers? With Peter we must ask, Who are we to hinder the freedom of God to call whom he will? Dare we limit his grace by our inherited traditions? Let us learn to rejoice rather than to resist when God is ready to do a new thing in our midst.

A Representative Ministry. Turning now from the divine to the human side of the equation, Baptists began as a lay movement and that of necessity because ordination was controlled by the state church. For this reason we emphasize the priesthood of every believer rather than viewing the ministry as some “official” group with a special status denied to other members. We take seriously the promise of Acts 2:17-18 that God’s Spirit is now available to all, whether they be male or female, young or old, master or servant. It is in the power of the Spirit that every Christian ministers, whether it be to prophesy, to see visions, or to dream dreams. As the entire Book of Acts makes clear, it is not by ordination but by spiritual empowerment that God’s work is done in our world.

Then why do Baptists set apart ministers and deacons by ordination? Clearly they are meant to be leaders who are representative of the entire ministering membership rather than to

be what BFM 2000 calls “scriptural officers” of the church. The requirements of the democratic process demand some such arrangement. Obviously a congregation of several thousand members, as was the case from the beginning at Pentecost, cannot conduct its business as a committee of the whole. And so manageable groups, such as the Twelve and the Seven, soon began to function on behalf of the larger body (Acts 6:1-6). In the first century, it was customary for such leadership groups to be exclusively male, since women had virtually no legal rights or public role in society, being cared for by their fathers if single, by their husbands if married, or by their eldest son if widowed. But it may be noted that female leadership groups did emerge with qualifications comparable to those for bishops and deacons (I Timothy 3:1, 8, 11), possibly to care for the large number of widows who had no immediate family to provide support (I Timothy 5:3-16).

Today, however, the situation is totally different. Not only are women totally enfranchised in society but many of them function as heads of household. For years the argument was made that women could have influence in a male-led church through their husbands, but this assumption ignores not only the rising number of women who have no husband because they are single, divorced, or widowed, but also those women whose husbands are either not Christian, inactive, or in another church. Let us be both honest and practical: is there an all-male clergy or diaconate anywhere that can claim to understand and minister to the deepest needs of half or more of the members who are female? Of equal seriousness: what does it say about *all* Christians being a priesthood of believers if there are no women serving as priests in the leadership of the church?

It is neither candid nor consistent for Baptists to give women utterly crucial spiritual responsibilities on the one hand but deny them any status and recognition on the other hand. For example, women have long done more than their share of Bible teaching in the Sunday School, have supported our vast missionary enterprise with almost no help from the men, and have provided virtually all of the leadership for our children and youth during the most formative years of their spiritual development. Functionally, women have been performing many of the most important ministries of the church while, formally, most of the status implied by ordination has been handed out to men. To refuse to correct this imbalance is to perpetuate a “put down,” as if women were somehow inferior to men, and to risk making the “glass ceiling” more cramped in the church than it is in the world.

The Sharing of Gifts. In addition to our emphasis on grace, by which we affirm our willingness to let God give what he will even before we are ready to receive it, Baptists have placed equal stress on the importance of faith, by which we mean that our response is also a crucial component in the divine-human encounter. The sovereign grace of God does not leave us passive but rather frees us to participate gladly in the new thing that God is doing. To limit or exclude women from leadership roles in the church or in the home strike at the heart of this understanding of faith. For we do not decide whether to be

male or female; rather, we find ourselves fashioned into one or the other by the reproductive process which God has established for human procreation. The ultimate danger here is to assign a negative value to something that God has done in which we have no choice. Even if we could by scientific means control the gender of our offspring, would we wish to tamper with the approximately equal distribution of males and females?

In place of arbitrary restrictions that would deny women some opportunity for service simply because of their gender, let us magnify the freedom of each person to share fully such spiritual gifts as he or she has been given. Women obviously have a special sensitivity to the needs of other women, particularly in such areas of pregnancy, child-care, and homemaking. What male, whether he be minister or deacon, could possibly be as effective as a female in helping women deal with such intimate crises as infertility, miscarriage, or menopause? Women also need a spiritual sisterhood to see them through such traumas as divorce or widowhood or their own approaching death. But this ministry of women is not limited to other women. Precisely because of their gender, women have their own distinctive expectations of worship, ways of witnessing, theological agenda, ethical concerns, and styles of leadership. Their approaches are not necessarily better than those more typical of men. But they are different because of their rootage in feminine experience and thereby likely to be both relevant to the female half of the church and broadening to the male half of the church.

As the twenty-first century dawns, Christianity finds itself facing awesome challenges which will require the most courageous and creative leadership of which we are capable. To put it plainly, we are going to need all of the help we can get, whether from clergy or laity. If so, then why respond with one hand tied behind our back by limiting women with spiritual gifts from serving in any leadership position? If, in Christ and in his body, there really is “neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28), can we not work toward the kind of church in which each of us would just as soon be a man or a woman in terms of the potential which that gender offers for spiritual fulfillment?

Such a goal will not be easy to attain simply because Baptists have accepted gender restrictions for centuries. The dilemma is that when we change the way things have been done for hundreds of years our detractors can accuse us of being “liberal” when in actuality we are bring “conservative” to champion realities that have been true for two thousand years. Traditions die hard in the Deep South, none more so that stereotypes regarding the role of women. But remember that women such as Lydia and Priscilla and Phoebe came into their own and furnished crucial leadership to the early church in ways that would have been impossible in the Jewish, Greek, or Roman religions of that day. How ironic! The first century church, despite all of the *limitations* placed on women by its culture, was *ahead* of its time whereas the twenty-first century church, despite all of the *opportunities* offered to women by its culture, is in danger of falling *behind* its time. Let us resolve to change provincial Southern traditions at least as much as the

early church changed provincial Palestinian traditions in the spirit of the Christ who offers spiritual freedom and equality to all who follow him. ■

¹ See, for example, the statement on “Men, Women and Biblical Equality” issued by Christians for Biblical Equality which is appended to this sermon. A typical book is Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995). Several inerrantists who affirm women in church leadership are listed in Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

² Greg Garrison, *The Birmingham News*, June 15, 2000, p 2-A.

³ Article VI, “The Church.”

⁴ When the Alabama Baptist State Convention met on November 17, 1998, a resolution was offered “in support of the Southern Baptist Convention’s amendment to the Baptist Faith and Message related to the family” which had been adopted by the SBC in Salt Lake City on June 9, 1998. But the State Board of Missions, not the Resolutions Committee, offered instead “A Position Statement on the Family” which omitted entirely the notions of headship and submission in the marital relationship. This splendid statement was duly adopted by the messengers. See the *1998 Annual: Alabama Baptist State Convention*, pp. 71, 105-6. When asked about the omission of SBC language, Convention President Leon Ballard replied, “It was a conscious effort to be sensitive. It’s the role of the husband and wife to be individuals. They each bring their individuality to the marriage.” Commenting that the word “submit” has been misunderstood and misused, Ballard continued: “I would be careful with that word. Some men have used that against their wives.” Greg Garrison, *The Birmingham News*, November 18, 1998, p. 1-A

⁵ Greg Garrison, *The Birmingham News*, June 15, 2000, p. 1-A.

⁶ This entire treatment in Part II is abridged from a longer study, “Woman in Her Place,” *Review & Expositor*, vol. 72, no. 1, Winter, 1975, pp. 5-17.

⁷ Cited by Greg Garrison, *The Birmingham News*, June 18, 2000, p. 17-A.

⁸ John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), p. 95 (cf. p. 83).

⁹ Werner Foerster, *Palestinian Judaism in New Testament Times* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), p. 127.

¹⁰ Albrecht Oepke, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), vol. 1, 784.

¹¹ Oepke, 1, 785.

¹² Gary E. Parker, “Women in the Pulpit?,” *Religious Herald*, June 15, 2000, pp. 8-9. Our Gardendale friend, Steve Gaines, allowed himself to claim that this view of gender equality is “not in the New Testament, it’s in feminist thought,” but McCartney, Hybels, and Graham are as far from what Gaines means by “feminist thought” as one could imagine. *The Birmingham News*, June 18, 2000, p. 17-A.

“Men, Women, and Biblical Equality”

By

Christians for Biblical Equality

[In the preceding article, author William Hull indicated in footnote 1 the addition of an addendum—a statement by Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). In 1989 a group of evangelicals who hold a high view of biblical authority (many identify themselves as ‘biblical inerrantists’) framed this document supporting female equality. Opposition arose to this evangelical egalitarian organization—the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) was formed to support a traditional hierarchical view. In light of many gender heresies now promoted by SBC leaders (e.g. Adrian and Joyce Rogers and Chuck and Rhonda Kelly belong to CBMW), this position statement of CBE is presented to our readers as a biblical and theological antidote. (CBE endorsers include Tony Campolo, Lewis Smedes, Ron Sider, and ousted SWBTS professor Dan Kent, a CBE Board Member). *The Editor*, also a member of CBE.]

The Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in Creation and in Redemption (Gen 1:26-28, 2:23, 5:1-2; 1 Cor. 11:11-12; Gal. 3:13, 28, 5:1).

The Bible teaches that God has revealed Himself in the totality of Scripture, the authoritative Word of God (Matt. 5:18; John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We believe that Scripture is to be interpreted holistically and thematically. We also recognize the necessity of making a distinction between inspiration and interpretation: inspiration relates to the divine impulse and control whereby the whole canonical Scripture is the Word of God; interpretation relates to the human activity whereby we seek to apprehend revealed truth in harmony with the totality of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To be truly biblical, Christians must continually examine their faith and practice under the searchlight of Scripture.

Biblical Truths

Creation

1. The Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God’s image, had a direct relationship with God, and shared jointly the responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen. 1:26-28).
2. The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word “helper” (*ezer*), used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18, refers to God in most instances of Old Testament usage (e.g. I Sam. 7:12; Ps 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.
3. The Bible teaches that the forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings (Gen. 2:21-23). In Genesis 2:18, 20 the word “suitable” (*kenegdo*) denotes equality and adequacy.
4. The Bible teaches that man and woman were co-par-

participants in the Fall: Adam was no less culpable than Eve (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22).

5. The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God’s ideal order.

Redemption

6. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to redeem women as well as men. Through faith in Christ we become children of God, one in Christ, and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctives (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal 3:26-28).

Community

7. The Bible teaches that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit indwells women and men, and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference as to gender (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11,14:31).
8. The Bible teaches that both women and men are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under His authority (Acts 1:14, 18:26, 21:9; Rom. 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:15; see also Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-7; Luke 8:1-3; John 20:17-18; compare also Old Testament examples: Judges 4:4-14, 5:7; 2 Chron. 34:22-28; Prov. 31:30-31; Micah 6:4).
9. The Bible teaches that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rev. 1:6, 5:10). Therefore, the few isolated texts that appear to restrict the full redemptive freedom women must not be interpreted

simplistically and in contradiction to the rest of Scripture, but their interpretation must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their total context (1 Cor. 11:2-16, 14:33-36; 1 Tim. 2:9-15).

10. The Bible defines the function of leadership as the empowerment of others for service rather than as the exercise of power over them (Matt. 20:25-28, 23:8; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17; Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

Family

11. The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life. And that they are bound together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility (1 Cor. 7:3-5; Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Gen. 21:12). The husband's function as "head" (*kephale*) is to be understood as self-giving love and service within this relationship of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7).
12. The Bible teaches that both mothers and fathers are to exercise leadership in the nurture, training, discipline, and teaching of their children (Exod. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 6:6-9, 21:18-21, 27:16; Prov. 1-8, 6:20; Eph 6:1-4; Col. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:5; see also Luke 2:51).

Application

Community

1. In the church, spiritual gifts of women and men are to be recognized, developed and used in serving and teaching ministries at all levels of involvement; as small group leaders, counselors, facilitators, administrators, ushers, communion servers, and board members, and in pastoral care, teaching, preaching, and worship.
In so doing, the church will honor God as the source of spiritual gifts. The church will also fulfill God's mandate of stewardship without the appalling loss to God's kingdom that results when half of the church's members are excluded from positions of responsibility.

2. In the church, public recognition is to be given to both women and men who exercise ministries of service and leadership.

In so doing, the church will model the unity and harmony that should characterize the community of believers. In a world fractured by discrimination and segregation, the church will dissociate itself from worldly or pagan devices designed to make women feel inferior for being female. It will help prevent their departure from the church or their rejection of the Christian faith.

Family

3. In the Christian home, husband and wife are to defer to each other in seeking to fulfill each other's preferences, desires and aspirations. Neither spouse is to seek

to dominate the other but each is to act as servant of the other, in humility considering the other as better than oneself. In case of decisional deadlock they should seek resolution through biblical methods of conflict resolution rather than by one spouse imposing a decision upon the other.

In so doing, husband and wife will help the Christian home stand against improper use of power and authority by spouses and will protect the home from wife and child abuse that sometimes tragically follows a hierarchical interpretation of the husband's "headship."

4. In the Christian home, spouses are to learn to share the responsibilities of leadership on the basis of gifts, expertise, and availability, with due regard for the partner most affected by the decision under consideration.

In so doing, spouses will learn to respect their competencies and their complementarity. This will prevent one spouse from becoming the perennial loser, often forced to practice ingratiating or deceitful manipulation to protect self-esteem. By establishing their marriage on a partnership basis, the couple will protect it from joining the tide of dead or broken marriages resulting from marital inequities.

5. In the Christian home, couples who share a lifestyle characterized by the freedom they find in Christ will do so without experiencing feelings of guilt or resorting to hypocrisy. They are freed to emerge from an unbiblical "traditionalism" and can rejoice in their mutual accountability in Christ. In so doing, they will openly express their obedience to Scripture, will model an example for other couples in quest of freedom in Christ, and will stand against patterns of domination and inequality sometimes imposed upon church and family. ■

We believe that biblical equality as reflected in this document is true to Scripture.

We stand united in our conviction that the Bible, in its totality, is the liberating Word that provides the most effective way for women and men to exercise the gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit and thus to serve God.

**Gilbert Bilezikian
Stanley N. Gundry
Catherine Clark Kroeger
Roger Nicole**

**W. Ward Gasque
Gretchen Gaebelin Hull
Jo Anne Lyon**

Additional information about CBE and about resources for further study may be obtained by contacting CBE at 122 W. Franklin Ave., Suite 218, Minneapolis, MN 55404, or cbe@cbeinternational.org. The organization will hold its International Conference in Dallas, Texas, June 21-24, 2001.

By Grace Alone Through Faith Alone

Ephesians 2:8-10, NRSV

By Ralph C. Wood,

University Professor at Baylor University

“For by grace have you been saved through faith, and this in not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Eph. 2:8-10).

You and I as Christians probably owe our lives in Jesus to these two verses from the letter to the Ephesians. This claim—that we are saved by faith alone—was, in fact, the watchword of the Protestant Reformation. It was never far from the minds and the lips of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Nor did our Baptist ancestors in England and early America ever forget it. For them, also, this was the gospel in its purest essence. In relation to this fundamental declaration, everything else stood or fell. This was the *sine qua non*, that without which everything else is nothing. Luther was referring to his unrelenting defense of precisely this definition of the gospel—as divine redemption through grace alone by faith alone—when he stood before his accusers and stubbornly declared: “*Hier stehe ich; ich kann nicht anders*”—“Here I stand; I can do no other.”

I have come, as a pathetically lesser Luther, to call for a new reformation of the church. This means that I must first report the alarming news that we are again in danger of losing the gospel. As in the early sixteenth century, so in the late twentieth century, the problem lies not chiefly with the world but with the church. The most sinister sin is often committed by Christians rather than pagans—sinister, because we ought to know better and, indeed, because we have been shown our own evils so clearly. If we are faithful Christians, we will know that awareness of sin is what distinguishes us from our pagan counterparts. We need only to look into the mirror of Jesus Christ to see ourselves as we truly are. Our secular friends have no such mirror. They stare back only at themselves.

This is why the cosmetic and physical fitness industries flourish. Pagan America is desperate to find a prettier face, a better body, a finer physique. As Abraham Lincoln said, there comes a time when every man becomes responsible for his own face. We Christians know that, apart from the new face we have been given in Jesus, we are unbearably ugly.

When I call for a reformation of the church, please do not hear me as saying that there is nothing much wrong with the world. I am deeply alarmed about the state of society. Christians have cause to be concerned, as Charles Colson has recently been reminding us, about the state of our pagan culture. Colson has made the stunning claim that the day may soon come when we Christians will have to withdraw our

support from the United States government. For it is a government that seems ever more insistently bent on making demands that many Christians regard not only as unacceptable but as outright damnable, especially concerning such matters as partial-birth abortions, euthanasia, sodomy laws and homosexual marriages

I share Colson’s concern but not his solution. I believe that we need a reformation of the church even more that a reordering of society and the state. Important as these other matters are, we know that even the best governments come and go. The kingdom of God, by contrast, will stand forever. Not even the gates of hell will be able to shut out its coming. It is in God’s kingdom that we have our true home, not only in the world to come, but also in the here and now. As I tell my students, the aim of the gospel is not to get us into heaven so much as to get heaven into us, and thus to get the hell out of us. We will not find out our true place there until we recognize that we are alienated from the kingdom. Though we are meant to be strangers and sojourners in the world, we have become falsely at home in the world and aliens to the kingdom. The reason for this is not hard to find. It is because our churches have largely abandoned the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. On both the left and the right, among both liberals and conservatives, this is the doctrine that many Christians no longer believe. Hence my call for a latter-day reformation of the church: a recovery of the gospel according to Ephesians 2:8-10.

I.

On the left, our churches are being reduced to virtual social service agencies. In these liberal churches, the gospel is equated more or less with doing good, being moral, helping the poor, visiting the sick and lonely and imprisoned, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, sheltering the battered, teaching the illiterate. In this liberal understanding of gospel, being a faithful Christian becomes virtually equivalent to being a faithful Democrat. This is not a bad thing to be, of course, as some of my best friends attest! God knows, and so do we, that services to the needy must be provided, if not by the state, then surely by the church. A society is measured

largely by its care for those who cannot care for themselves—for the poor and defenseless, for the widows and orphans, as the Bible calls them. A church or a nation who neglects such care has the wrath of God on its head. Yet such human caring is not the sum or even the essence of the gospel. The heart and soul of the gospel is salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Such grace and good works must be given their proper order. We Christians are indeed called by God to help the helpless in gratitude for his saving us from our own helplessness. Such acts of charity and gratitude are the glad and necessary consequences of the gospel. But they are not its burdensome and necessary condition. We do not seek to do good in order to earn God's favor. We do good works in sheer gratitude for the favor we could not possibly earn. This is why Paul says that we are God's workmanship rather than our own. Jesus has redeemed us for the good works that will serve as signs of his salvation. This explains why Jesus says that we are to offer a cup of water to the thirsty in his name. Unless that cup of water is a sign of the water that quenches our ultimate thirst, it can be a great deceit. As the Baptist curmudgeon-prophet Warren Carr likes to say, many of our liberal churches are busy building houses for the homeless without ever bothering to tell them where their real home is.

Martin Luther believed that such false good works serve as a roadblock on the path of salvation. "Works righteousness" is what Luther called this false notion that we can merit the mercy of God by our own good deeds. It is indeed a deadly doctrine. If we think God owes us anything, then we do not know the God of the gospel. We are not saved by boastful works, says Paul, but by utterly unboastful grace. Only in Christ do we boast, the apostle declares elsewhere, by pointing away from ourselves to the Savior who hangs from the cross.

The German religious painter Mathias Grunewald's masterpiece *Isenheim Altarpiece* gets the order of things right when it shows John the Baptist standing beneath the cross and pointing with his long index finger away from himself to the Man who has been nailed on the cross for our sins. From the mouth of the Baptizer issues these words: "May he increase that I decrease." Without the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, we get the order backwards—Christ decreased in order that we may increase.

Permit me two examples of liberal works-righteousness. The first comes from an eminent Baptist religionist who likes to say that the word *Christian* should serve as an adjective more than a noun. He means by this claim that the ethical and spiritual quality of our lives is what makes us Christians—how well or how ill we imitate the moral example that Jesus gives us in the Gospels, especially the commands set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. We should not be surprised to hear that this same religionist has little use for Paul. In this man's understanding of the gospel, Jesus is not the one name "under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, KJV). He is more or less like every other great moral hero, from Buddha and Mohammed to Gandhi and Martin Luther King. What this liberal religionist fails to see is

that God first makes Christians into nouns in order that we might become adjectives. Jesus makes us substantives capable of modifying the world in his name. The word *substantive* means literally "to stand under." It is not our good deeds that give us the substantial status of being Christian. Jesus has made us substantives by standing in our place on the cross and thus giving us a place to stand before God and man—as forgiven and transformed sinners saved by grace alone through faith alone.

An example of liberal works-righteousness comes from a liberal Baptist minister friend. He reported only last week how he had sought to answer a fellow preacher who felt that his own church had existed for fifty years without making any discernible difference to the city where it is located. "Why, of course you have made a difference," my liberal friend sought to console his downcast fellow preacher. "Look at the soup kitchen you built, the homeless shelter you erected, the school lunch program you instituted, the counseling hotline you set up."

My friend is partially right. Any church should be rightly proud of such accomplishments. Yet my friend was listing such social services as the chief purpose of this Christian church, the proof that it had "made a difference" in its city. Not once did this Baptist preacher mention that for fifty years this church had taught people to live the life of prayer, that it had enabled blacks and whites to be reconciled to each other because they are brothers and sisters in Christ, that it had liberated women not by feminist equality but by gospel equality. Nor did he declare that it had proclaimed forgiveness of sins and newness of life and therefore that its members had been reconciled not only to each other but to the God who had wrought their salvation in Jesus Christ by grace alone through faith alone.

II.

Let us think that all evils lie on the left, let me make clear that our conservative churches are in no less need of reformation. They are no less guilty of abandoning the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. But here, instead of ethical works serving as the substitute, a sentimental personal piety is often made to replace the hard social realism of our redemption. I can make my case by citing a sign I saw in the offices of two evangelical ministers. It read: "Christianity is a relationship." What this sign means, so far as I can tell, is that we are Christians by virtue of our having made a personal decision to enter a private intimacy with someone whom we call Jesus. It's a metaphor that implies two separate and autonomous creatures—Jesus and the solitary self—entering into a cozy and cuddly relationship, a warm and fuzzy affair that more appropriately belongs to the old TV show *The Dating Game*.

Certainly the gospel is relational through and through. It rightly relates us to God and to other humans and the world. But its relationality is not essentially private. The gospel is socially embodied in the people called the church. We, its

members, are incorporated and engrafted into the body of Christ by our baptism, by our receiving the Lord's Supper, by our hearing and doing of his word—not by a chatty and sentimental private relationship with our divine Buddy.

The first casualty of such reduction of the gospel to sentimental piety is the bedrock Reformation doctrine of election. Whereas the Christ of the gospel makes all the decisions that matter, choosing us to be included in this work called the kingdom, the new conservative gospel leaves the essential decision to us. No longer is it God who elects us, but we who elect God. Instead of God choosing us from the foundation of the world, as Paul says in Ephesians (1:4), it is we who choose him. I heard one Christian preacher put the matter in this grossly heretical manner: "God has cast his vote for you. The devil has cast his vote against you. And now you must break the tie." Our Baptist forebears would have hooted in contempt at this decisionistic idea of Christian faith.

Such an I-and-me centered gospel is also reflected in the bumper sticker that reads: "I found it." What would Abraham or Isaac or Jacob, Amos or Jeremiah or Ezekiel, Peter or Stephen or Paul have made of such a slogan? They didn't find the God of the Bible. God, the Hound of Heaven, chased them down. Abraham was tending sheep, Jeremiah was lying in his mother's womb, and Paul was persecuting Christians when God called them. The motto of Christians ought therefore to be something akin to this: "God in Christ has found me." God finds us, not by our personal religious decision and our private religious relationship, but by his grace alone.

This Jesus of the religious right is a sentimental savior because he makes no serious demands on us. He is not the Jesus of the Gospels who bids his little flock take up their cross and come die with him. This false Christ is a success-oriented savior who calls Christians to be rich and good-looking and numerous. On the right, therefore, our churches are proclaiming a salvation not of ethical good works but of religious good works. The more we pray and read the Bible and attend church, so this false gospel proclaims, the happier and more prosperous we are guaranteed to become. This explains why the TV evangelists always have their phone number flashing across the bottom of the screen. Send us money and God will send you money. Theirs is indeed a prosperity gospel.

It follows that, just as many liberal Christians turn out to be Democrats, so most conservative Christians turn out to be Republicans. No one has the courage to say that Jesus Christ is neither right nor left, neither Democrat nor Republican, but the radical critic and drastic transformer of every political or economic scheme. As the late Louisiana writer Walker Percy used to say, there isn't a dime's worth of difference between most conservatives and liberal. Yet Percy did spot one distinction between them. In his hilarious novel, *Love in*

the Ruins, he wrote that you could tell Christian liberals from Christian conservatives only because the liberals require their black maids to ride in the front seat when they are taking them home.

Among conservatives, one's faith is measured by the size of one's smile—the more blinding, the better. The Scriptures never record Jesus as having worn a plastered and permanent smile, though they surely record him as having wept over Jerusalem.

The false god of the false gospel of religious good works turns out to be someone rather like Santa Claus. Santa Claus supposedly gives his followers whatever they want, if they make their requests known in a sweetly pious way. I have conservative Christian students who tell me that they pray for God to find them a parking place, and that this God of theirs always comes through. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane prayed that God would lift the bitter cup of absolute suffering and divine abandonment from his lips, but God said no.

I am not ridiculing petitionary prayer. I do indeed believe that God answers prayer. I believe that God gives three answers to our prayers: Yes, No, and Later.

A pious conservative Christian in England, who believes that God always answers "yes and now," once told me that people who don't believe in Jesus are always unhappy and that they always come to "a sticky end." I replied that our Lord himself came to a sticky end.

I don't believe that God much cares whether we are happy, but I believe that he cares enormously whether we are faithful and therefore joyful. Happiness is largely a matter of outward circumstance. We must possess certain things to be happy: health, money, security, success, and power. None of these things is required for joy. True joy lies in knowing that we are saved by God. It is by grace alone through his gift of faith alone. This knowledge brings the peace that surpasses all mere human happiness. We can have this joy and peace no matter how grim our circumstances—even amidst poverty and ill health, despite failure and weakness, and no matter how sinful we are.

III.

Permit me a single illustration of what I understand this true gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone to be and what a work of true and godly righteousness looks like. It is a story so dramatic that I fear it might not seem relevant to us. I hope we will see that it could also be your story or mine. It concerns a Vietnam veteran who suffers the worst effects of what we call postwar syndrome.

This man lives alone. He spends much of his time drinking alcohol in an attempt to drown his memories of what he saw and what he did during the war in Vietnam. He has hor-

*A sentimental
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rible day-visions and terrible nightmares about the children he killed there, wasting their lives with napalm and gunfire. He is convinced that he is going to hell; indeed that he already occupies hell. He is haunted by the verse of Scripture which declares, "You shall reap what you sow."

This past Christmas Eve, the worst night of the year for him, he went to a bar and got himself thoroughly drunk. In the early hours of Christmas morning he came to his host's home not only drunk but also violent. His brother-in-law, a Methodist minister whom I know, sought quietly to talk him down from his drunken fury. At first, he wouldn't listen. In fact, he grabbed his brother-in-law by the throat and told him that he would kill him, that killing is the only thing he knows how to do well, and that the power to kill is what gives him real power over people.

My friend was not afraid of this violent and drunken maniac. He did not cringe and beg for the killer to spare his life. He kept calm, not because he is a supremely brave man—though he is surely one of the bravest men I know—but because he is a faithful man. He knows that he is saved by grace alone through faith alone, because God is getting the hell out of him and getting heaven into him. With this killer's hands clutching his throat, he quietly made his witness:

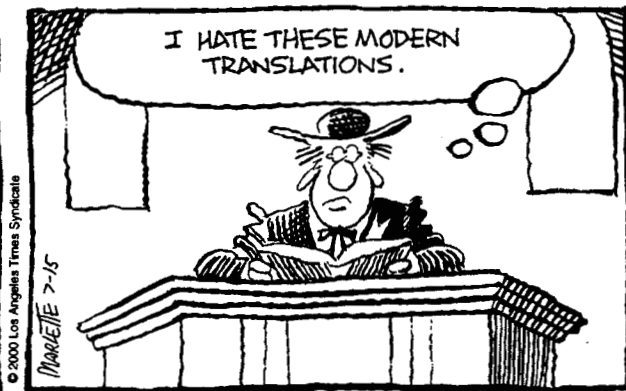
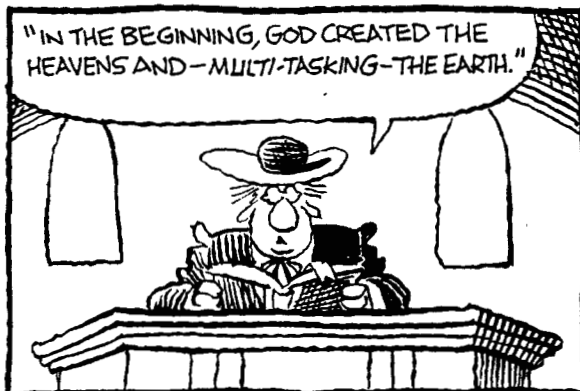
"I am not afraid of you. I am not afraid because I love you. I love you because I know that God loves you. I know that God loves you for the same reason he loves me, because through Jesus Christ he has taken our sins on himself. You will never find peace by trying to find some way of justifying your actions in Vietnam, not by calling it an act of war, not by excusing your deeds as mere obedience to the orders of your superiors. Nor will you ever be able to make up for what you did there. But Jesus has already made up for it. If you go to hell, therefore, it will be for the same reason that I will go to hell, because you and I will have kicked and slapped away the

outstretched arms of the man who has laid hold of us at Calvary. For on his cross he has reaped what you and I have sown. He has saved those children whom you killed, and he can also save you by grace through faith alone."

I cannot report a sudden and complete conversion in this man. Nor can I promise that all will turn out well for him. If he experiences salvation at all, it will be through the long and rocky road that winds down from Golgotha. It is a path that will lead him straight past all liberal do-good religion and past all conservative feel-good religion. Like all of us, this man will experience salvation by being baptized in the slow, red river of Jesus' blood. Just as for each of us, this salvation will be God's work within him from first to last. Like every one of us, he will be called to make his witness to the world among the people of God in the body of Christ called the church. There he will perform works of true righteousness, such as my preacher friend performed when he spoke the word of hope that no psychiatrist and no social worker can speak. There he will find his forgiveness and redemption by grace alone through faith alone.

This, as I understand it, is the reformation that is needed in both our liberal and our conservative churches if they are not to become citadels of unbelief that crucify Christ afresh. This is the gospel according to Jesus Christ as it is summarized in Ephesians 2:8-10. This is the call of the cross to you and to me: "Sinners, come home. Receive God's salvation by grace alone through faith alone." ■

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Guns and the Ten Commandments

By Roger Lovette

Some time ago I watched a *Nightline* debate on television. The people in Jonesboro, Arkansas were talking to the citizens in Littleton, Colorado. It had been almost a year since the killings in the Jonesboro schools. The wounds and grief of Littleton were still fresh. Ted Koppel interviewed parents, school officials, and students about school violence and the grief and pain experienced in both those communities. Shortly after that program aired, violence broke out closer to my home in a high school in Conyers, Georgia. Since then the school systems across the nation have been trying to deal with the complicated problems of how to make schools safe for all those concerned.

Obviously, we ought to keep guns out of the hands of the wrong people. For the first time in years the country is forcefully saying that the casual availability of guns by high school students is terribly wrong. The politician's response to the outcry of the people? They have opted for religion, or at least for the "form of godliness," saying "Let's put the Ten Commandments on the walls of every public classroom in America."

Did I miss something? One minute we are talking about the regulation of handguns, parental concerns, and safe schools, and suddenly the conversation has shifted. We now debate about the advisability of putting the Ten Commandments right up there next to George Washington in every classroom.

In the counseling room, people change the subject when the anxiety gets too high. What has nailing the Ten Commandments to the schoolhouse walls to do with gun control legislation? A lot. If we spend our time arguing about the pros and cons of having the Ten Commandments in schools, gun control can be buried in the shuffle. This debate is not accidental. It is intentional. Much of it is a gun-lobby ploy.

Representative Bob Barr of Georgia has been quoted as saying that if schools had been allowed to display the Ten Commandments before all the school shoot-ups, "We would not have the tragedies that bring us here today." I beg to disagree. There are no easy answers to this problem. We will discover no quick fixes for violence in our schools. Locking up all the guns will not solve our problems, but careful legislation might just be a start.

The Bill recently before the House of Representatives would reduce the time allowed for criminal background checks of buyers at gun shows. The Senate's proposal asked for a three-business-day waiting period. The amended Bill in the House recommended a twenty-four-hour waiting period instead. Gun shows have big turnouts on weekends. There

would be no time for background searches of those buyers with the passage of this bill. By shifting the subject to a discussion of the Ten Commandments we are manipulated to forget guns, waiting periods, and violence. Quibbling about religion is politically safer than dealing with the hard decisions of gun legislation.

Maybe you remember the story of the game hunter who bragged that the first hippo he ever shot had been dead three days. We have a long history in this country of shooting at safe targets. This is, of course, much safer than going after wild, charging monsters.

The Ten Commandments are the steel that holds the structure of our culture together. Yet these Commandments were not given to divert our attention from the hard issues of human existence. A careful look at the Commandments forces us to deal with some serious flaws in our culture, flaws like idolatry and greed and covetousness. Dr. Martin Marty, church historian, has said that his complaint with posting the Ten Commandments in public classrooms is that then we have the law without the gospel. The two primary commandments are that we are to love God and that we are to love our neighbor. In all this talk about Commandments, we ought not to forget the intent of our Judeo-Christian forebears. These Commandments are always to be viewed through the prism of loving God and neighbor. The lessons of Kosovo are too raw and painful to ignore. Religion should never be used to clobber, divide, or divert us from the hard work that we are obligated to do in our time. Loving God and our neighbors includes hammering out effective gun control and a multitude of other concerns, endlessly challenging.

When we aim, let's shoot at live hippos. The gun debate will not go away as long as there is gun violence in our communities and especially gun violence in our schools. Maybe that's why this debate about what goes on our schoolhouse walls is of truly profound importance. Dare we consider hanging pictures, lots of pictures, of dead kids, teenagers with smoking guns, graduations turned into memorial services, and grief-stricken parents. Such painful reminders might just turn our hearts back to our real enemies and the real values inherent in the Ten Commandments. The wonderful dream of God's great prophets was that "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid..." The enemies of that dream are alive and well and have yet to be effectively confronted. ■

Thou Shalt Not Steal

Exodus 20:16

By James C. Denison

[Dr. James C. Denison is Pastor of the Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. He preached this sermon on March 12, 2000.]

For 28 years Bob Barker has hosted *The Price Is Right*, the longest-running game show on television. In fact, Mr. Barker has logged more hours on network television than any person in history.

You know how his game works—contestants guess the prices of items displayed on the stage to win. And how those prices have changed.

In America, apparently no price is too high for the things we want. Who would have dreamed we'd spend \$5 for a cup of coffee, or \$3 billion on bottled water? But we're drinking it.

The price of gasoline hasn't been this high in nine years, and is predicted to rise another 20 to 30 cents soon. But we're still buying gas.

The most recent *Motor Trend* displays upcoming car models. Included is a "priced down" Hummer at only \$58,000, and a new experimental car for \$1.2 million. Someone will buy it. Against all this materialism, we find the eighth commandment. Two words in Hebrew, four in English: "You shall not steal." Let's look at what the commandment means, and how to keep it today.

To help us, we'll lay alongside this commandment Jesus' commentary on it—the best-known story in literature, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

What Is Stealing?

In Jesus' story we find the three basic attitudes toward the eighth commandment. The first: "What is yours is mine and I will take it."

The man in our story is traveling the road from Jerusalem to Jericho when he is attacked by a band of robbers; we'd say he was "mugged." Jesus says, "They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead" (Luke 10:30). What's his is theirs, and they will take it.

Most of us know how he felt. 60% of all Americans have been the victim of crime; of those, 58% have been victimized twice or more. Most of us have been down this road. Unfortunately, this happens on many levels today.

First, we steal, of course, when we *take the possessions of others*.

Our house in Houston was vandalized; a thief broke the window of our van in Atlanta and stole what was inside; our church has lost technical equipment to thieves in recent years. A few months ago, my car wouldn't start, so I had it towed to

a local repair shop. They wanted \$2,000 to replace the head gaskets; I took it to the dealership, who fixed the problem for a fraction of that cost and never had to touch the head gaskets. Stealing is taking the possessions of others.

Second, we steal when we *take advantage of others*.

48% of American workers admit to taking unethical or illegal advantage of their employers in the past year. This includes cheating on an expense account, paying or accepting kickbacks, secretly forging signatures, and breaking legal statutes and codes.

American industry loses \$3 billion per year because of employee's time spent in personal Internet use while at work.

I once knew a staff member in another church who would take friends to lunch; they would pay him, he would put the bill on his credit card, then he would turn in the receipt and get reimbursed by the church.

We steal when we take advantage of the government by cheating on our taxes, money which honest citizens must make up. In short, we steal whenever we take financial advantage of others.

Third, we steal when we *take the ideas of others*.

When I taught at Southwestern Seminary I heard the motto from students: if you steal from one source, it's plagiarism; from two sources, it's research. No, it's not.

My brother-in-law once worked as a custodian at a church while going through seminary. He cleaned the pastor's office, and always knew what sermon they'd hear that Sunday from the open book of sermons on his desk on Friday.

Fourth, we steal when we *take the reputation of others*.

Remember a few years ago when someone accused Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger of sexual abuse? This godly man was completely vindicated, all charges were dropped, and the person making the allegation apologized, but the damage was done to his reputation. That man stole his good name.

Shakespeare said it well: "Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing; 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands. But he that filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him and makes me poor indeed."

Before you say anything negative about any person, ask yourself first, Is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary? To take the reputation of others is to steal.

We have the robbers' philosophy of possessions, "What is yours is mine, and I will take it," when we steal the possession of others, take advantage of others, or take the ideas or the reputation of others. We're just like the robbers in the story.

But, the priest and the Levite who came by next stole from

the man as well. Their attitude was, "What is mine is mine, and I will keep it." They stole from this man the care which they should have given to him, the compassion they should have shown him. They stole from him as well. Passive theft is still theft.

Let's return to meddling. God calls us to give him a minimum of ten percent of all our goods and possessions for his purposes. Not just a tenth of our money, but of our time, talents, and abilities as well. When did you last dedicate to God at least 10% of your week?

How does God feel about those who do not obey him in this area? Listen to him: "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house" (Malachi 3:8-10).

If I say to God, or to you, "What's mine is mine, and I will keep it," I rob from you that which I owe you. My love, compassion, ministry, care. What if God gave to us only that which we deserved? What if God were the priest or the Levite?

How To Keep the Eighth Commandment

So, how do we keep the eighth commandment? To borrow from the Good Samaritan, we adopt this attitude toward life: "What's mine is yours, and I will share it." How do we develop such an approach to things and people?

First, we *see things as God does*.

Material success is not the highest value in life—a relationship with God is. Jesus warned his disciples: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

As God sees things, material success is a means to an end, given for the purpose of serving God with that which he has entrusted to us. If I value God more than possessions, I'll not offend him by stealing from you.

Second, we *acquire things as God directs*. Scripture gives us three ways we are to acquire possessions, a kind of philosophy of economics.

We are to work hard: "He who has been stealing must steal

no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28).

We are to invest wisely. In Jesus' parable of the talents (measures of money), he commends the men who doubled their investments, while criticizing the man who did not (Matthew 25:14-30).

And we are to pray dependently. When our need is greater than our supply, we are to pray and ask God's help. The early Christians gave to the common good of the believing community, and their resources were "distributed to anyone as he had need" (Acts 4:35). As we work hard, invest wisely, and trust God, we acquire things as he directs. Then we will have no need to break the eighth commandment.

Third, we *use things as God leads*.

God has blessed us with material possessions, so that we might use them to help others in his name. He gave the Samaritan a donkey and some money, to give to the man in need. We are to do the same with the donkey and the money he has given to us.

The old song says, "Loving things and using people only leads to misery; using things and loving people, that's the way it ought to be."

If I value you more than your possessions, I'll not steal what is yours. In fact, I'll give to you from what is mine.

It is imperative that we see things, acquire things, and use things as God directs, that we keep the eighth commandment. For our own sakes.

Have you heard the story of the White Knight? It seems that a certain knight, out looking for adventure, came to a village where legend told of a terrible ogre in a pit. Bravely the White Knight took up the challenge. He would do battle with this terrible ogre. In the memory of the people, several courageous men had climbed down into the pit, but none had ever returned.

The White Knight stood looking at the deep, dark hole. The opening was so narrow that he had to take off his armor and unneeded clothing. He took only a long dagger, which he tied around his neck with a leather strap. Slowly he lowered himself down into the hole by a rope, until he felt the cool, smooth floor of the chamber under his feet. When his eyes adjusted to the darkness he saw a mound nearby, the bones of



his predecessors, with their assorted weapons. A little way off he spotted another mound, but wasn't sure what it was.

Suddenly he was surprised by the inhabitant of the pit—surprised because he didn't anticipate that the terrible ogre would be only the size of a rabbit. It waved its arms and screeched with a squeaky voice, trying to appear fierce. The White Knight took his knife and prepared to do battle, but quick as a rat, the ogre ran into a hole near the second mound.

The White Knight followed him to that second mound. There before his eyes stood glittering balls of gold as big as grapefruits and diamonds as big as plums. With only a small part of that treasure, he would be rich for life. The little ogre lost its importance in view of this great wealth.

But the White Knight had a problem. How would he carry this treasure out of the hole? He had no pockets. Who would believe him if he didn't bring back at least one piece?

Then he had an idea. He would take one of the diamonds in his mouth and carry it that way until he had climbed out of the hole. He could always come back later for the rest. Hurriedly he chose one of the larger diamonds. It fit comfortably into his mouth, and he began the arduous climb out of the pit, hand over hand, gripping the rope with his feet. His tongue held the diamond tightly against the roof of his mouth.

Higher and higher he climbed, until the heavy exertion began to make him breathless. He would have to breathe through his mouth to get enough air. As he took in a large gulp of air the diamond slipped and stuck in his throat. The White Knight choked on his treasure, lost consciousness, and fell to his death on the mound of bones below.

The terrible ogre in the pit was not the little troll, was it?

Conclusion

Has someone broken the eighth commandment with you? Forgive them their debts, as God has forgiven your debts. Have you broken the eighth commandment personally? Ask Jesus to forgive you, and to help you make things right. Understand that in God's eyes we are all thieves. And so Jesus died for us all.

*Three men shared death upon a hill,
But only one man truly died.
A thief and God Himself made rendezvous.
Three crosses still
Are borne up Calvary's hill
Where sin still lifts them high
Upon the one hang broken thieves who cursing die;
The other holds the praying thief
And those who, penitent as he,
Still find the Christ beside them on the tree.*

Which thief are you? ■

Prayer Breakfast Politics

By John M. Swomley

Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics,
St. Paul School of Theology

The Congress of the United States acted as if the United States has an official religion when it sponsored or sanctioned the fiftieth National Prayer Breakfast in Washington last February 3rd. That occasion is and has been a gross politicization of religion as it has assumed that certain forms of Christianity shall get major attention from members of Congress while others are ignored. While these meetings are officially non-sectarian, the participants consist largely of southern and midwestern members of Protestant denominations.

This year's breakfast was attended not only by many members of Congress, but also by the President and his wife, the Cabinet, the judiciary, diplomats, state and local politicians, and various denominational leaders. Why would a group of elected and appointed public figures meet once a year to celebrate or publicize their participation in a public prayer meeting, when the United States is officially a secular state? The only mention of religion in the Constitution, written by the Constitutional Convention and accepted by the Congress, is in Article VI which states that "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." That is clearly the basis for secular government in the United States.

The mere fact of an essentially Christian National Prayer Breakfast raises many important questions. The United States is composed of millions of people who are Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, humanists, and those who profess no religion. Such a breakfast is therefore exclusionary and sets a very bad precedent for the future.

When government leaders sponsor and publicize a prayer event, it is not simply a political matter. There is biblical authority for prayer, which determines why many Christians and Jews oppose politically organized prayer services. Jesus apparently opposed public prayer. He said, "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others... But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret;" (Matt. 6:5-6). Prayer, in Jesus' terms, is deeply personal communication with God rather than public ritual or public witness.

Republican Senator John Danforth in addressing the U.S. Senate in 1984 said,

A major theme of the Old Testament prophets goes much

further than dismissing certain prayers as inadequate. The prophets believed that prayer in a vacuum divorced from social justice is an abomination. Repeatedly the prophets of Israel condemned public display of religious piety which masked injustice to the poor and the disadvantaged.

One of the examples he cited was Isaiah 1:13-17:

Bringing offerings is futile; ...I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. ...even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves...learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Prayer is perverted if it is used as a political issue to mask the real agenda of extreme right-wing politicians. By publicly championing prayer, some politicians believe they can thereby support a hate-oriented foreign policy, high military budgets (at the expense of low-income taxpayers), or special economic interests. If there is no connection between their religion and improving the well-being of the poor or minorities, or the peace of the world, they can use prayer as a means of seeking the "church vote."

Prayer breakfasts are not the only vehicles for using religion to promote political agendas. The Roman Catholic hierarchy has for many years held an annual "Red Mass" in Washington to which Supreme Court justices and other government officials are invited. The bishops and cardinals who speak at such events usually advance the papal political agenda. Cardinal James A. Hickey did in 1981, when he told Supreme Court justices "we cannot destroy life at any stage of development because Judeo-Christian tradition holds it to be true that human beings have rights from the moment of conception." This is not an accurate depiction of Judeo-Christian tradition, but there is no opportunity for rebuttal at a Red Mass. In 1983, Hickey reiterated the Roman Church's position on abortion and argued "government can never minimize or relinquish the obligation to stand for life." He said that the abortion issue required all citizens to rise to the defense of life as directed by "our Lord Jesus and the teaching of His Church."

Three years later Hickey chastised the modern Supreme Court for allegedly creating "a disharmony of language which often confuses the constitutional proscription of the free exercise of a state religion under the protection of religion in general."

Even at the National Prayer Breakfast in 2000, Pope John Paul II was invited by Republican Senator Connie Mack of Florida to send a message. The Pope's two closely printed pages focused on his political and theological dogma that human life begins at conception. The statement was read by the papal nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo. It should be obvious to even the most naïve advocates of government-sponsored prayer that those with a political agenda will use religious occasions to link their political goals to their religious mission.

The problem for Christian ethics is that prayer has become politicized for many politicians and even accepted as cultural ritual by the general public. Jesus' temptation experiences are helpful at this point. Satan told Jesus he would give him all the kingdoms of this world, or in other words, make him Caesar, if he would accept Satan's lordship and his methods. When Jesus rejected the temptation he also repudiated any idea of being like Caesar (Matt. 4:7-10).

Here are two implications: (1) that achieving political power in or over government necessarily involves substantial compromising with evil; (2) that the goal of political power is the opposite of Jesus' mission "to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

The emphasis on servanthood is a major root of the concept of separation of church and state. The church can only be free to serve if it does not participate in the power that rules.

Journalist John B. Judis has written,

Christianity does not provide a political agenda, but rather an underlying social conscience with which to approach politics. Religion plays its most constructive role precisely when church and state are separate. When the two are fused, however, when organizations acting in the name of Christianity seek political power, then religion becomes subordinate to Politics. It becomes infected with the darker egoism of group and nation; it no longer softens and counters our ungenerous impulses, but clothes them in holy righteousness.

In other words, we must reject efforts by any church or collection of politicians to link genuine religion to a political or military agenda. Political sponsorship of religious activity tends to secularize the activity rather than make politicians more ethical or religious.

Civil religion also must be recognized as an effort by politicians or military leaders to give religious sponsorship to an otherwise anti-religious event. For example, prayer at the dedication of a missile silo does not make the weapon less deadly. And prayer by members of Congress who ignore the poor and provide huge sums to corporations does not justify their political agenda. ■

The Battle for God

By Karen Armstrong

Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2000

A Book Review by Darold Morgan, Richardson, Texas

Not often does this reviewer state bluntly that a new volume must be read, but that is precisely the case with Karen Armstrong's new book on religious fundamentalism. Concentrating on Protestant fundamentalism in the United States, Jewish fundamentalism in Israel, and Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt and Iran, she has crafted a book that is loaded with multiple insights about one of the most provocative and misunderstood movements in the world today. At first glance it appears you have in focus the rich tapestry of the three great monotheistic religions of the world. But the excellent research she has done in the historical backgrounds soon produces a surprising and almost shocking insight into the fundamentalist deviations so common in the religious scene today. Add to that conclusion, one soon senses writing skills which translate into a refreshing readability.

Beginning with the 1492 crisis in Spain (not the departure of Columbus to the New World) when Ferdinand and Isabella drove both the Jews and Moors from their borders, the author deftly brings into startling perspective most of the roots which have ultimately produced this twentieth century phenomenon—massive clashes with modernity brought on by a peculiar religious fear of annihilation. Her writing is replete with innumerable and fascinating vignettes, theological concepts from each of these religious traditions, and cultural asides from these communities that have often been ignored. The result of these clashes is a new expression of the age-old conflict between science and religion, a militant piety popularly known in this generation as “fundamentalism.”

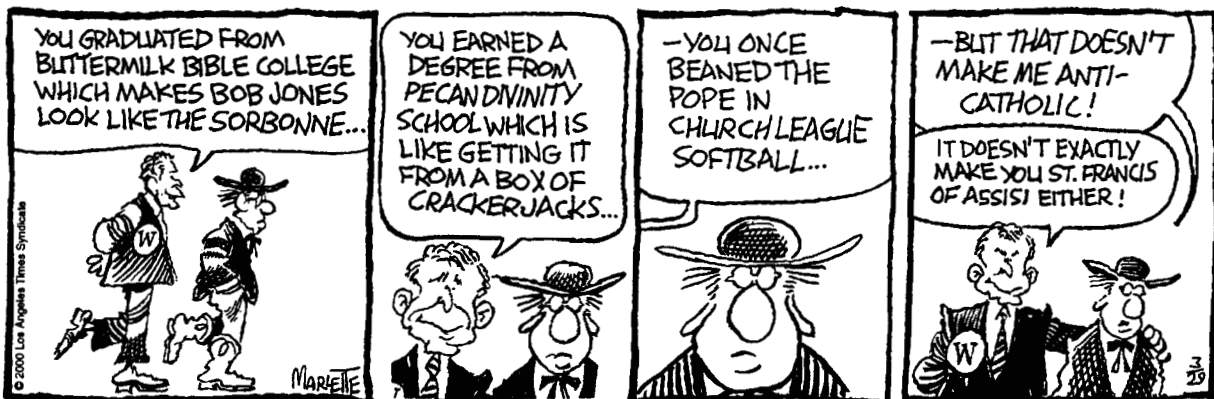
That we are living in a time when scientific and technological breakthroughs are being announced almost daily is a given. A secular modernity seems to be an irreversible trend that gives

credence to the oft-quoted designation, “the Post-Christian Age”. Rocket probes to Mars and Jupiter and beyond, cloning of animals, DNA medical research, organ transplants, the information revolution, globalization of the world's economy are just a few of the developments which are making this current period the most explosive and innovative in history.

For many this secularist hegemony has led to a type of cosmic war between the forces of good and evil. A haunting and strange renaissance of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is taking place now. It is not conventional, and it is not contrived. Major ethical overtones comprise this struggle; violence, mayhem, murder, and political extremism are part of the vicious reaction to our postmodern world. The author states in the introduction, “Fundamentalism in all three faiths has no time for democracy, pluralism, religious toleration, peacekeeping, free speech, or the separation of church and state.” This disturbing premise stems from the author's study of the historic roots of these major faiths.

A word to the fainthearted is necessary. Throughout her book Armstrong makes much of two words: *mythos* and *logos*. *Mythos* is not a myth, and here is where the usual “hang up” takes place. *Mythos* comes from the Greek language and needs immediately to be disassociated from the usual connotation from stories in Greek and Roman mythology. The author uses this word as it relates to mystery and mysticism, rooted ultimately in traditional biblical and Islamic history “which gives meaning to life, but cannot be explained in rational terms.” (p. 376)

The other term is *logos*, a Greek word that refers to rational, logical, or scientific discourse. This use is not the *logos* of the Fourth Gospel, but it is a term that almost becomes a synonym



for the scientific approach to life apart from the *mythos* of religious faith. As one works through this book, these concepts move quickly to center stage as the focal point of conflict between science and faith. The difference becomes a life and death issue in all three faiths.

Many secularists and devotees of a scientific approach to life have been unable to grasp the importance of religion to the faithful. Often there has been an arrogance and condescension that is all but completely insensitive to those who feel that their religious faith was in danger of being obliterated. That these theologies and ideologies may be rooted in fear is apparent, but modern secularism is the culprit, having drained life of its meaning and purpose. As millions of people around the globe struggle with seemingly irreconcilable philosophies of life, the rise of militant fundamentalism is inevitable.

There are major strengths in this book. One is the historical treatment of Jewish mysticism. Significantly, the author documents the strange and tragic history of European Judaism from the days of the Spanish Inquisition to the present. One comes away with some very helpful insights about Jewish Hasidism and the mystical tones of Kabbalah, major terms used for years in Orthodox Judaism. These streams of influence are essential as one endeavors to understand modern Israel and the conflicts in Zionism today.

Another strength of the book is the excellent insight the author gives about Islamic history and theology. Frankly, this is one of the finest reviews of this subject, which to many in the western world is very difficult to grasp. The author concentrates on two Islamic countries, Egypt and Iran, which in turn spotlights the major differences between the Sunni and Shiite divisions in Islam. With the increasing numbers of Muslims in both Europe and America, students of the current religious scene simply must expand their understanding of this vibrant faith. Armstrong's book is a step in the right direction.

Her treatment of Protestant fundamentalism is fair, but not comprehensive. One concludes that she probes more deeply into the Jewish and Islamic areas than the Christian approach. An unexpected strength of her volume emerges in her treatment of millennialism as a major factor in the Christian fundamentalism mind-set.

The major weakness of the book seems to be the lack of a conclusion about the eventual outcome. In a book crammed with brilliant research and analyses, the author comes to the final pages offering only lukewarm appendages which weakly point to the obvious fact that fundamentalism is here to stay. Both the students of religion and science will have to cope with fundamentalism, is her conclusion. The serious reader keeps hoping that Armstrong will provide a third path where those devoted to religious truth and the scientific community can find a respectful and rational compromise. The fact that science and technology will intensify their amoral dominance is obvious. The fact that religious faith is incalculably important, bringing meaning and purpose to life, also is a reality. Thus the book ends! But the book is worth reading, for the challenge it addresses is of tremendous proportions. ■

Capital Punishment Commentary

By Alan Berlow

[Alan Berlow is a Washington, D.C.-based free lance journalist and the author of *Dead Seasons* (Vintage Press) with a major interest in death penalty issues. This Commentary was printed in the Washington Post National Weekly Edition on February 21, 2000.]

How many wrongful death sentences does it take to conclude that a state's criminal justice system is fatally flawed?

For Illinois Gov. George Ryan, the answer is 13. That's the number of people found to be innocent on his state's death row since capital punishment was reinstated there in 1977. (The state executed 12 during that time.) Three weeks ago, Ryan declared an indefinite moratorium on executions, saying: "I cannot support a system, which, in its administration, has proven to be so fraught with error and has come so close to the ultimate nightmare, the state's taking of innocent life."

Illinois has no monopoly on wrongful convictions, so Ryan's declaration has resonance in all 38 states with the death penalty. Nationwide, 85 innocent people have been freed from death rows since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976, including seven in Texas. The call for a moratorium by Ryan, a moderate Republican and death penalty supporter, raises the issue of whether governors of the 37 other death-penalty states are tolerating systems that are as bad or worse.

The question is perhaps most worth asking in Texas, the nation's execution capital, accounting for 206 of the country's 610 executions since 1976. Its death row currently holds 457 people—out of about 3,600 nationwide—second only to California's 563.

Like Illinois's Ryan, Texas Gov. George W. Bush is a long-standing supporter of the death penalty. Also like Ryan, Bush has expressed concern about the possibility of executing an innocent person. In his recently released autobiography, "A Charge to Keep," Bush wrote that "the worst nightmare of a death penalty supporter and of everyone who believes in our criminal justice system is to execute an innocent man."

Unlike Ryan, however, Bush has signed off on 119 executions in his five years as governor and has repeatedly endorsed his state's death penalty machinery—displaying a conviction that is hard to fathom for anyone who has given the Texas criminal justice system even a cursory look.

Lawrence Marshall, the Northwestern University law professor who helped free five wrongly accused men from Illinois's death row, says Texas deserves a reputation far worse than his state's. "Illinois has been a lot more accurate about who it sentences to death than a whole lot of other states," he told me shortly after Ryan announced his moratorium. "Our proce-

dures are a whole lot more careful than, for example, Texas. We give people better lawyers, generally speaking, and more protection at trial....Texas is worse, I'm sure, in convicting innocent people and it's worse in not giving people who are innocent the opportunity to prove it."

The flaws in Texas's system become evident as soon as a defendant is arrested. There's an overwhelming chance that he is poor—nationally, 80 percent of felony defendants are indigent—and Texas is particularly ill-equipped to provide such defendants with competent lawyers. In some counties defendants have waited weeks or months to be assigned a lawyer.

A 1996 U.S. Justice Department study reported that one of the major reasons innocent people end up in prison is that indigent defendants are provided with "inadequate" counsel—lawyers who fail to interview clients and witnesses or fail to conduct even the most cursory investigations. (A bill introduced February 11 by Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont would require national minimum-competency standards for court-appointed lawyers.) Elizabeth Semel, director of the American Bar Association's Death Penalty Representation Project, says capital defendants in Texas in particular are regularly provided with lawyers who are little more than "warm bodies."

"The system in Texas...provides the appearance of representation and not the reality," Semel told me earlier this month, noting that Texas courts have upheld convictions of capital defendants whose attorneys have literally slept through portions of their trials. In the most infamous of those cases, the judge announced that "the Constitution doesn't say the lawyer has to be awake."

In another Texas case, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit ordered death row inmate Federico Martinez-Macias freed in 1993 because of attorney incompetence. Judge Patrick Higginbotham noted that the defendant's attorney had been paid \$11.84 an hour and "the justice system got only what it paid for."

Only three of Texas's 254 counties have full-time public defender offices, which are generally acknowledged to provide better representation than attorneys appointed ad hoc by judges. Last year, the Texas legislature unanimously approved a bill that would have encouraged the creation of more public defender offices. But it was vetoed by Bush, who said he preferred the current system because judges are "better able to assess the quality of legal representation."

But in a 1999 survey conducted for the state bar, more than one-fourth of Texas criminal court judges admitted that court-assigned attorneys don't have the basic resources—investigators, forensics and other experts—they need to defend their clients and 72 percent believe court-assigned counsel are less prepared than retained attorneys. A study done for the Texas Judicial Council in the mid-1980s found that the chances of being convicted of murder were 28 percent higher if a defendant's attorney was court-assigned.

Although there is a widespread perception that convicted murderers can appeal their cases indefinitely, their grounds for appeal are actually narrowed considerably upon conviction.

After sentencing, the condemned prisoner who had an incompetent lawyer is not only presumed guilty (the burden is on him to prove innocence) but is at an enormous disadvantage because issues his lawyer failed to raise at trial may be inadmissible on appeal. In addition, Texas—like a handful of other states, including Virginia—enforces stringent time limits on the introduction of new evidence following conviction.

In 1995, Bush championed and signed legislation designed to limit appeals by death row inmates and to shorten the time between conviction and execution, despite overwhelming national evidence that, over the preceding two decades, a sizable number of people—including several in Texas, one during Bush's first term—would have been wrongly executed had that time been narrowed.

The last hurdle before execution—what Bush has called the "fail-safe"—is the clemency process. Nine states, including Texas, allow a governor to grant a pardon or reprieve only if it has been recommended by a clemency board. Bush has written that he has confidence in the recommendations of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP). But the BPP has proved to be little more than a rubber stamp of death sentences.

Its review process came in for withering criticism in December 1998, when U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks heard a civil action against the BPP brought by two death row inmates. During two days of hearings, Sparks noted that the board—two-thirds of whose 18 members were appointed by Bush—had never held a hearing on a single death row clemency appeal.

"It is incredible testimony to me," Sparks said, "that in 70-plus cases [that had come before the board to that point] in an 18-member board, that no person has ever seen an application for clemency important enough to hold a hearing on or to talk with each other about."

The hearings before Sparks revealed that board members may cast their votes on clemency matters without reviewing case files and without explaining their decisions. "There is nothing, absolutely nothing that the Board of Pardons and Paroles does where any member of the public, including the governor, can find out why they did this," Sparks said. "I find that appalling."

Nevertheless, Bush has okayed 100 percent of the board's recommendations since he took office—all but one denying clemency. He publicly endorses the BPP's operation and has opposed even opening board meetings to public scrutiny. That would be unwise, the governor told the *Austin American-Statesman*, because it would only provide "a chance for people to rant and rail, a chance for people to emotionalize the process beyond the questions they need to be asked."

Bush has always supported the death penalty, and his actions have underscored that support. But Bush has also called his role in the execution process an "awesome responsibility," because of the risk of executing an innocent person. If he really believes that, and wants to support it with action, he should listen more closely to Ryan—who is also his Illinois campaign chairman—and reexamine his own state's dangerously flawed criminal justice system. ■

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

A Journal of Christian Ethics

“We need now to recover the prophethood of all believers, matching our zeal for the priesthood of all believers with a passion for the prophethood of all believers.”

—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

PURPOSES

- Strengthen and support the cause of Christian ethics.
- Champion moral values without which civilization itself could not survive.
- Interpret and apply Christian experience, biblical truth, theological insights, historical perspectives, and current research to contemporary moral issues.
- Maintain an independent prophetic voice for truth and righteousness.
- Address the ethical dimension of public policy issues.
- Utilize the contributions of responsible stewards who designate resources to further the cause of Christian ethics.

Christian Ethics Today was born in the mind and heart of Foy Valentine, as an integral part of his dream for a Center for Christian Ethics. In his words, the purpose of the Journal was “to inform, inspire, and unify a lively company of individuals and organizations interested in working for personal morality and public righteousness.”

During its first five years, the Journal established a life of its own, addressing a variety of subjects relating to Christian social concerns. Creating a rare combination of substantive material, provocative commentary, titillating dialogue, whimsical stories, and reprints of classical expositions, the Journal developed a large and growing list of readers.

When the Center was transferred to Baylor University in June 2000, with the calling of a permanent Director, the disbanding Board voted to continue the publication of *Christian Ethics Today*, appointing a new editor and a new Board.

The Journal will continue to be published six times per year. The purpose envisioned by the founding editor remains: To “clarify, communicate, cultivate, and champion those basic ethical values without which neither the churches or civilization itself could survive: wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, righteousness, peace, faith, hope, love, and freedom.”

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Joe E. Trull, Editor
101 Mount View
Wimberley, TX 78676-5850

Phone: (512) 847-8721
Fax: (512) 847-8171
email: jtrull@wimberley-tx.com

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY
Post Office Box 670784
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