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Impeachment, Partisanship, and Subversion: A Moral Postscript and Prescript

By James A. Nash

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The impeachment and trial of President Clinton produced more seemingly impossible things daily than even the Queen in Alice's Wonderland could imagine before and after breakfast.

But perhaps the most astonishing feature of these events was the breadth and depth of Republican partisanship (and "-ism" is the sensible suffix here, since I doubt that this phenomenon can be soundly interpreted except as a doctrinal obsession). The Republican leadership in the House and Senate and the bulk of the party faithful throughout the nation made the legislative removal of the President from office the test of party loyalty and the means to party unity, imposed by party discipline under the threat of party punishments. Conservative advocates, in fact, promised to provide potential Republican dissenters with Right-minded primary opponents. The Hard Right ruled, and even most of the "moderates" buckled. Rebels were few in both the House and Senate. Party loyalists, proud of their participation in a righteous cause, now describe themselves as "the party of principle."

Many citizens, including many Republicans, were properly appalled by this kind and degree of partisan behavior. Frequently the reasons for this feeling have been unclear, more intuited than formulated and developed. But one fundamental reason that many of us have felt deeply merits sharp and bold notice: Partisanship in the efforts to remove an elected officeholder of an opposing party is an attack on the moral foundations of democracy. It is a genuinely subversive act!

This partisan subversion of democracy, not the much-hyped legally unpunished lies and lusts of the President, is the far more destructive precedent and the far more difficult remedial task in this tragic (even when frequently comic) political drama. The trial of the President is long over, but beware: the tribulation of the nation will long continue, particularly as we seek to constrain the vengeful furies, arising on

both sides, and to repair the battered infrastructure of our democracy.

That is why we cannot simply bury the agonizing and antagonizing impeachment controversy as a dead issue, and why we need to continue—taking advantage now of some distance in time—to search for the moral lessons in these events. Thus, I offer a postscript, from a political ethics perspective, on part of the significance of what happened, and a prescript suggesting what amendments of our political ways we need now to make.

Those self-styled people of principle are certainly right on one point: Whatever else impeachment may be, it is a major moral matter, involving questions of fairness and honesty in the quest of truth and the commonweal. But they are myopically mistaken on another important point: The irresponsible and stupid conduct of the President was not the only moral consideration in this impeachment and trial. The conduct of the majority party in the Congress (not to mention the special prosecutor with a very partisan history) also counted, and often that conduct was infamously dishonest and unfair. It represented the most fearsome of unions: the arrogance of power wedded to the arrogance of righteousness.

In the guise of defending the "rule of law" against a presumed morally corrupt President, House Republican leaders and managers themselves violated many of the ethical elements of that rule, including due process, respect for all the civil rights of the accused, elementary standards of fairness, and the rubrics of sound reasoning. With numbers on their side, the majorities in the judiciary Committee, the House as a whole, and often even the Senate choreographed a model of imperialistic partisanship.

The case against the President turned out to be surprisingly weak and incoherent. Leaving aside the very debatable questions about the gravity of the alleged offenses, lying under oath and concealing evidence (or perhaps more accurately, giving misleading answers to malicious questions that ought never to have been asked, from politically conservative interrogators with the apparent intent to "trap" or "set up" the leader of the opposition), the evidence was anything but clear and compelling. It was cloudy, confusing, and sometimes contradictory. Connecting the dots in a supposed pattern of obstruction required great leaps of faith, or the revelatory assurances apparently given to some House managers. The charges did not seem to satisfy any ethically defensible standard of proof, no matter what our feelings or

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suspensions may be, and I for one had plenty of suspicions and angry feelings about a mess of presidential improprieties. Nevertheless, given a legal system wherein the prosecutors must prove guilt, and given the immense difficulty of showing the legally necessary intent to lie and obstruct justice, the President had a right to the full benefit of the doubt.

The House managers abused not only the rule of law but also the rules of reason. From ambiguous events with two or more plausible interpretations, impeachment managers often presented manufactured “facts” and “incontrovertible proofs.” Their arguments featured selective use of evidence, severely stretched inferences, hearsay treated as corroboration, speculative conclusions, and a variety of textbook logical fallacies, from begging the question to post hoc ergo propter hoc. Suspensions were translated into certainties. Wild imaginings worthy of the best conspiratorial theorists were commonplace, especially from the House Judiciary Committee’s most creative fantasizer, Rep. Lindsey Graham.

The managers’ arguments, moreover, were buttressed by the banal and rigid moralisms that make ethicists shudder. They ignored the importance of proportionality in weighing and balancing goods and bads, offenses and redresses, claims and consequences. Indeed, the whole impeachment process was a monument to disproportionality. It was a story of extravagant overreaction to acts of over-rated relevance. The Clinton impeachment probably will be remembered as the partisan construction of a traumatic affair of state out of the taints and trinkets from a tacky affair of the heart.

These abuses of rights and reason should not be understood as ordinary advocacy by typical prosecutors. That would be politically and culturally naive. The evident hostility to, even contempt for, the President from most of his accusers points to a deeper problem. One dares not forget that the bulk of House and Senate Republicans, as well as probably all of the House managers and virtually all of the non-governmental organizations advocating impeachment, are staunch ideological foes of the President and his policies. They are “true believers” in a political philosophy that stresses: a minimal role for the state as an instrument of social policy; a moral atomism that gives excessive preference to individual autonomy over social responsibility; and a set of supposedly “traditional” values that are too often truncated and exclusive. They have opposed the President on most of the major controversies of the time, including abortion rights, gun control, gay rights, health care reform, environmental protections, affirmative action, tax policy, and defense plans. And they have often raged in frustration over the President’s initiatives and his counter-thrusts to their initiatives. For this crowd, Bill Clinton has been a loathsome symbol of evil. Indeed, the symbolic nature of the impeachment struggle must be highlighted in any adequate interpretation, because, as many of us understood almost intuitively and as the national media rarely sensed, much of the anti-Clinton fervor reflected the religious and moral conflicts in a cultural history.

The ideological zeal of these accusers and judges obstructed justice for the President. It belied even the possibility of an impartial judgment, and twisted impeachment into a partisan weapon. From a right angle, impeachment was simply politics by other means. The struggle to evict Clinton was the biggest and best battle yet, but not the last, in the ongoing “cultural wars.”

Yet, even if the impeachment process and arguments had been flawlessly fair, partisanism alone, impeaching in the name of party solidarity for a party cause, calls into question the credibility, the integrity, and the legitimacy of that cause. Indeed, the absence of authentic bipartisanship is a *prima facie* invalidation of that cause, a strong indicator that the cause is ideologically contaminated and thus unjust. Contrary, however, to the misinterpretations of bipartisanship by Chairman Hyde, almost-Speaker Livingston, and Majority Leader Lott, as well as some Democrats, bipartisanship in an impeachment and trial must be much more than civility or the absence of mutual recriminations and inter-party feuds. It also demands inter-party cooperation and compromise in a common cause or, negatively, at least the absence of voting blocs imposed by party discipline. Rendering impartial justice is never fully possible for finite and faulty humans, but it is rendered utterly impossible under such party impositions. Party solidarity to remove an elected officeholder of an opposing party is, on its face, alien to and destructive of democratic government. Again, we need to be reminded that what is legal and constitutional is not necessarily just and prudent.

The legislative impeachment and removal of an elected officeholder are such severe assaults on the core of democracy, respect for the results of free and fair elections, that they cannot be justified in our contemporary democracy without both conclusive evidence of a grievous fault and substantial bipartisan support.

I suggest, as a rule of thumb, a one-fourth threshold: at least one-fourth of the party of the accused must favor ouster, and, in situations where the evidence is reasonably debatable, perhaps at least one-fourth of the opposition party to the accused must also oppose it, in order to overcome suspicions of partisan motivations and manipulations.

Such a threshold seems invaluable as a moral check on the human inclinations of the advantaged to grasp more than their due and to deprive others of their due, and to do so under the self-deception of transcendent impartiality. Otherwise, we may succumb to a majoritarian tyranny, in which the overthrow of the President of an opposing party is accomplished under the camouflage of the rule of law. That is truly a dangerous precedent but one that we almost established.

Some will argue, of course, that both sides were plagued by partisanism. That is not formally true in this case. The efforts to preserve the President in office by Democrats in the Congress and those to remove him by most Republicans do not have the same moral standing. In a democracy; the integrity and stability of the system require a strong pre-

sumption for the continuance of a duly elected officeholder until the expiration of his/her term. Some substantial measure of bipartisanship seems to be one essential criterion for rebutting this presumption. Thus, only the attempt to oust the President entails a heavy burden of proof, which is cast in at least grave doubt when the process is as obviously partisan as the recent crusade. For this reason, the stances of the conflicting parties in the Congress cannot be reduced to ethically equivalent partisanship.

More contemporary Republican legislators would have done well to follow the historic example of Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, one of the seven Republican Senators who broke party ranks in 1868 in the trial of President Andrew Johnson. Trumbull found Johnson's policies to be "distasteful" and calamitous. In fact, he described the President as unfit for that office. Still, contrary to party policy, he courageously admitted that the evidence was not sufficient to show that the President was guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors. Despite the political bloodlust in his party, he voted not to convict Andrew Johnson. The issue was not a "party question," he insisted, and thus he refused to "heed the clamor of intemperate zealots who demand the conviction of Andrew Johnson as a test of party faith." Of course, he was shunned and punished by partisans thereafter.

Regrettably, some of those few Republican Representatives and Senators who did likewise can probably anticipate a fate similar to Trumbull's. Yet, in admiring their decisions or sympathizing with their dilemmas, we must not overlook the important lesson that Trumbull taught: For the sake of our democracy, impeachment must never again be a "party question." Indeed, I add, partisanship, "the clamor of intemperate zealots", is itself a corruptive force that must be constrained.

Democracy is a precious but delicate and demanding form of government. It does not happen necessarily or automatically in some political version of the Invisible Hand. It can be damaged or destroyed, even here, without careful and persistent nurture. Democracy thrives only under certain conditions. These conditions include especially the moral commitments of a people to honor licit elections and to contain partisan means and ends within some bearable bounds.

Fortunately for the health of the body politic, William Jefferson Clinton was not ousted from office. Thanks partly to the constitutional mandate of consent from two-thirds of the Senate, and thus thanks indirectly to the founders' realistic understanding of what James Madison called the "mischief of faction" (Federalist, No. 10), we were spared the

grave constitutional crisis and severe forms of civil discord resulting from the partisan displacement of a President against the public will.

Still, considerable damage occurred. The deep and pervasive distrust of and disillusionment with government received a big boost. The Republican legislative majority, spurred by the party righteous, went far beyond the bounds of ordinary and inevitable political rivalries. They thus escalated the hostilities and lowered the standards on permissible weapons in our nation's political disputations.

At our most primal level, virtually all of us who are candid and who were offended by the impeachment and trial want, and many will seek, revenge. It's "pay back time," a common means of maintaining political accountability. We can expect, despite pious denials from some politicians, that President Clinton and other Democrats will retaliate against their tormentors, so long as it doesn't interfere unduly with their other political goals. Frankly, to some limited degree, this vindictive urge is politically valuable: It will serve as a counter-force and deterrent to a Right ironically reinvigorated by its fury over its failure to remove the President.

Yet, a history of reciprocal reprisals is part of what brought us to this painful point. We are in the midst of a degenerative spiraling of partisan enmity. We need to reverse the politics of mutual and total exclusion to avoid a free fall into a Machiavellian free-for-all.

The Clinton impeachment can be read ethically as a political challenge to the nation. A major issue for the future is not whether or how the nation can forgive President Clinton for his misdeeds, as some theologians suggested. That surely is a minor matter, given our rich religious resources. Instead, the issue is whether and how the parties and factions of this nation can forgive one another for our mutual trespasses, real and imagined, and learn to live together in tolerable fairness and peace.

What are the political vices that corrupt the common good? Thus, conversely, what are the political virtues that should be cultivated in our citizens and demanded of our politicians? How can we shift our political discourse from mutual vilification and demagogic manipulation to something that at least resembles rationality and honesty? How shall we as a people define and respect legitimate partisanship and its limits? These are among the critical questions we are forced to face by the impeachment and other events. To answer these questions, we may need to borrow from the South African experience and create some American-style truth and reconciliation commissions. ■

Law and Love: Doing the Ethical Dance

By Charles Wellborn

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

Years ago my friend, Dr. Herbert Bromberg, a Jewish rabbi, told me a fascinating story out of his people's history. Some medieval Jewish congregations in Eastern Europe once practiced an unusual form of worship. At one point in the service the rabbi would lift the Torah, the symbol of the sacred Law, from its resting place and, holding it high above his head, would dance. His movements were traditional and strictly prescribed. The dance was always performed in exactly the same way. When the rabbi had finished this section of the service, he would replace the Torah. Moving to another lower section of the synagogue, he would again begin to dance. This time, however, the dance was different. No longer prescribed or planned, it was a spontaneous, improvised series of movements—a dance of freedom.

As I reflect on this story, I am reminded of certain features of modern popular music and dance. As a university administrator for many years, part of my responsibility has involved attendance on student dances and discos. As I have listened to the music and watched the couples on the dance floor, I have often been visited by a wave of nostalgia—a symptom, no doubt, of age. I long for the music of my youth: big bands, tuneful melodies, and the sentimental rhyming lyrics of "Stardust" and "Deep Purple." Today's popular music often seems to have no discernible melodic line, and the words are frequently crude, banal, and repetitive. What matters almost exclusively is "beat," a rhythmic pulsation that dominates the music. I have sometimes been kept awake late at night by the excessively loud music played by my student next-door neighbors. What penetrated the walls of my bedroom was not a melody or a lyric but a pounding "beat."

Modern dance displays similar characteristics. The popular dances of my younger days were waltzes, fox trots, two-steps. A prescribed pattern dictated the movements in each dance. I seem to remember that the once ubiquitous Arthur Murray dance studios had footprints painted on the floor designed to aid beginners in making the exact steps. In today's dancing, by contrast few if any of the movements are prescribed. The dancers rarely touch each other. Each person dances individually, freely, spontaneously, improvising as he or she goes. One restriction remains. The dancers must conform to the "beat," the underlying rhythm of the song being played.

In using these illustrations I am not ascribing undue significance to the dance. How young people dance may have some importance in understanding culture, but that is not my concern. Rather, I want to use these observations as metaphors for the Christian's obligation to act responsibly in demanding moral situations. In making moral choices, all of us are frequently faced with the difficult task of balancing two essential standards—Law and Love. We are not free to ignore either of these standards. Our proper response in such situations is what I want to call "the ethical dance."

I have pointed out the dominant role of the "beat" in today's popular dance music. In my metaphor the "beat" represents the role of the moral Law. I do not refer here to statutory or governmental law. That is human law, and human law is constantly being changed, amended, or repealed. The divine Law is always there, unchanging and implacable, etched, in Old Testament terms, in "tablets of stone." Thus, Jesus, as a legitimate bearer of the Divine Word and an incarnation of a new moral dispensation, never denied or ignored the Law. Instead, he went beyond the Law; he "fulfilled" it. His revolutionary moral stance involved a drastic reinterpretation of what it means to be



“good,” and, therefore, a radical reshaping of the Law itself. He taught that the Law must everywhere and always be seen and understood in the light of a new and far more demanding ethical standard, that of Love. This is not to say that there was no love in the Hebrew scriptures or in the Jewish handling of the Law. But Jesus placed a special kind of Love—what we have come to call *agape*, a totally unselfish and unmerited Love—at the apex of the moral pyramid, overshadowing all else. In honestly facing the moral requirements of the Law, as redefined by Love, those who are committed to the Christ are called to “dance”—to work out in concrete real-life situations the often difficult moral equation involving the “beat” of the Law and the free spontaneity of Love.

The essence of the Law is most clearly spelled out for us in the Old Testament Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. The Commandments are a terse distillation of the fundamental moral perimeters of a humane and godly society. God gave the Commandments to Israel so that by adherence to them, his people might be a “holy nation,” operating as a continuing moral example to the world around them. But the Commandments cannot have been conceived as a comprehensive or detailed guide for every moral action. They mark out areas of transgression and moral obligation, but they do not address the intricacies, which arise in actual human conduct. They prohibit murder but do not attempt to spell out exactly what murder is. They condemn “false witness,” but give us no detailed explanation of such witness. God left his people with the responsibility of interpreting the detailed implications of his fundamental moral commands. Israel’s attempt to fulfill that responsibility resulted in the meticulous complexity of the Old Testament ceremonial and legal system. Indeed, the Old Testament delineation of the Law essayed a finally impossible task—to anticipate every possible moral situation and provide a clear and unarguable legal provision, leaving no room for human confusion or deviation.

The essence of the Commandments is as important for today’s world as it was for Israel. Those injunctions still define the moral limits of a functioning humane and godly society, and any individual, community, or nation choosing to ignore those limits chooses risk and ruin. Throw away the underlying structure of the Law and the result will be not just moral anarchy, but a total cultural collapse. I am no Chicken Little, trumpeting, on flimsy evidence, the news that the sky is falling, but I must admit to a serious concern and disquiet about the well-being of our American society when I see on television the devastating scenes of the Littleton, Colorado, school horror. A parade of experts bemoans the event and asks over and over again, “Why?” No one seems to have an

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answer, but a forthright and honest look at how far our society has drifted away from the moorings of the moral Law might offer some clues.

Be that as it may, it is important to remember that, basic as the Commandments are, they are not God’s final word in the moral realm. When Jesus was asked, “What is the great commandment of the Law?” He responded without hesitation, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your soul.” But He did not stop there. He turned that commandment over like a coin and read the reverse side. “And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

With those words Jesus clearly set out a new moral standard based on the ultimate

supremacy of Love. Moral obligation involves two dimensions of Love—God-love and neighbor-love. The two loves are inseparable. In the final analysis, while we must listen to the “beat” of the Law, the moral quality of any act or decision is measured by the dimensions of Love. Thus, to live the good life requires the constant balancing of Love and Law. Such balancing calls for a careful interpretation of the meaning of the Law in the light of Love. It requires that the interpreter be constantly open to the freedom and spontaneity which must characterize *agape* as it is applied in real-life—not theoretical—situations. Such responses constitute the “ethical dance.”

In a recent issue of this journal (vol.5, no.2, April, 1999, pp. 16-21) Gilbert C. Meilander, Jr. offered a persuasive argument against the Kantian concept that, for an act to be considered moral, it must stand the test of universalization; that is, a conception of what would happen if every person in a similar situation made precisely the same decision. He called attention to a complex range of personal decisions, such as, for example, the choice of vocation, that do not lend themselves to that test. While making this point effectively, Professor Meilander also concedes that there are certain moral duties “which bind all of us and which we are free to omit only at our moral peril.” He goes on to give as an example of such inescapable duties as those enjoined in the Decalogue.

Meilander’s contribution is valuable in shedding light on the important differences that exist among various types of moral decisions and the consequent differences in how various decisions ought to be made. I do wish to raise a caveat, perhaps unfairly, since Meilander does not really address this particular issue. Like him, I have argued for the universal and unchanging nature of the basic moral Law. But to acknowledge this is not in any sense to diminish or limit the individual’s responsibility to give even those fundamental commandments a thorough bath in Love. In making a deci-

sion in any concrete situation, which involves these basic injunctions, the decision-maker faces two different responsibilities. He or she must say “yes” or “no” to the moral absolute of the commandment. But he or she must then go further. It is necessary to decide upon the precise human actions, which are compatible with that preliminary “yes.” It is at this point, I believe, that Love enters into the process. “In the light of my ‘yes’ to the commandment, what is my appropriate and loving action?” So far as Meilander is concerned, I think I would argue more strongly than he that *agape*—God-love and neighbor-love—must be brought to bear as the primary element in every moral decision, even those personal ones involving such things as vocational choice.

Perhaps an example will clarify what I am trying to say. The sixth Commandment clearly establishes the sanctity and value of each human life. It categorically forbids murder. I believe that every sincere Christian must say “yes” to that command. But the affirmation of the Commandment as a moral absolute does not solve many important moral problems. The Christian decision-maker is left with the responsibility of working out through the use of reason within the spiritual environment of the Christian community, which human acts constitutes “murder” and thus are forbidden by the commandment. Is, for instance, capital punishment “murder”? There is no prepackaged or universally agreed on Christian answer to that question. The believer must find a personal answer.

A particularly painful example of this process is the vexing question of the morality of abortion. Is every abortion “murder” and therefore unequivocally forbidden by the sixth commandment? Some Christians take the position that inviolate life and personhood begins at the moment of conception. This is essentially, though not exclusively, the official Roman Catholic position. If one believes this, and further believes that the preservation of the life of the fetus at any stage of its development takes moral precedence over all other considerations, it follows naturally that any abortion is “murder.” That is a fairly simple solution of a moral problem.

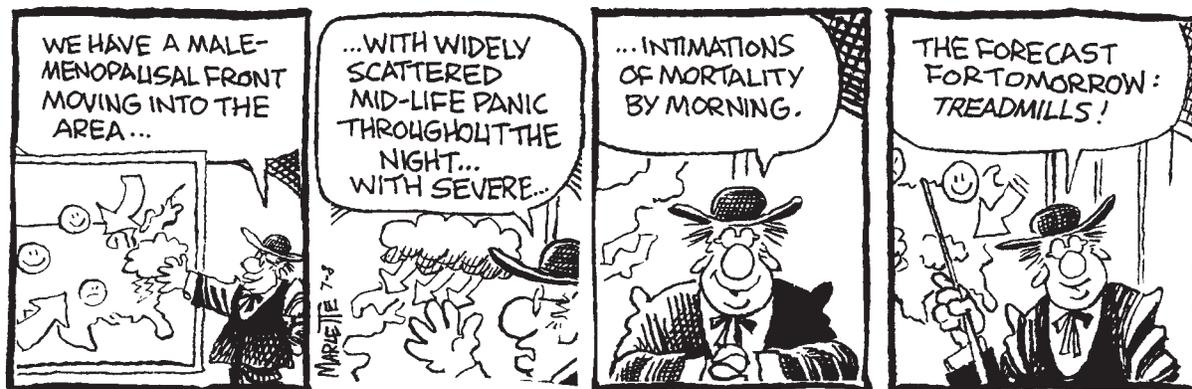
The fact is, however, that many sincere Christians quite emphatically do not agree with that interpretation. For one

thing, they see the current state of scientific knowledge, so far as it relates to the personhood of the fetus, as a “mixed bag.” For another, they view the fetus in terms of the development of personhood, rather than simply biologically. And for a third thing, they want to factor into any abortion decision what they consider to be other important concerns, such as the freedom of a woman to control her own body and the future well-being of a child brought into the world when an abortion is not performed.

I am not here concerned to take sides in this thorny issue. I am rather trying to illustrate two things: first, the moral responsibility of any Christian is not completed simply by saying “yes” to a moral absolute, and second, the implications of that “yes” must be carefully worked out in a process undergirded by the primary role of God-love and neighbor-love.

In setting out this position I do not think I am departing from the teaching of the Scriptures. To do the “ethical dance” is an essential part of our human-ness, a state of being that derives directly from our belief that we are created “in the image of God.” The reflected God-image in humanity is a spiritual one, and a basic component of that image is the ability to make free moral choices. If we have no such freedom, we are less than human—part of the lower non-human echelons of creation. Without moral freedom there can be no such thing as Love, in the New Testament sense of the word, only instinctive feelings or simple lust. In the Genesis story Adam and Eve used their moral freedom to disobey God. Though God was saddened by that decision, he did not override it. He allowed the built-in consequences of that disobedience to operate. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. Innocence was replaced by guilt. The consequences of sin or wrong moral choice are written into the fabric of the disobedient act. But unless there is the genuine possibility of wrong choice, there is no moral freedom and, therefore, no “human-ness.”

“Human-ness” involves much more than the free power to choose. God did not leave his human creatures without resources for making right choices. Our moral decisions are not simple “stabs in the dark.” For one thing, God has given us the Law, fulfilling the functions set out above. A second gift from God is the human ability to reason, Christians believe that the universe is one of order, a planned entity.



Such a conviction is not the simple-minded conviction that, at any moment, this is the best of all possible worlds. God's order is constantly being upset by man's disobedience, but we believe that the patterns of the Divine Mind are reflected, albeit in a limited way, in the mind-patterns of human beings. The human power to reason is a gift of God and, therefore, a valuable resource for the making of proper moral decisions. If our logic and reason do not somehow reflect an ultimate reality, all human life is nothing more than a series of unrelated or accidental incidents, linked loosely by secondary causal factors but without any final meaning. Thus, "life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Of course, there are many people who deny any ultimate meaning to the universe, but it is paradoxical that these thinkers, in reaching that conclusion, are employing the method of reason. In other words, they are using human reason to deny any final universal reason, a logically flawed position.

Human reason, employed in the making of moral decisions, provides a tool by which we can attempt to measure the consequences of any action and include in the decision-making process as many relevant factors as possible. Reason also helps us to be aware of the limitations of our freedom. We are not free to do anything we want in a real-life decision-making situation. There are always circumstances which limit our available choices. "Politics," said Reinhold Niebuhr, "is the art of the possible." So, too, is moral decision making. To some degree our scope of moral action is always limited by the circumstances. Reason aids us in discerning those limits.

Reason alone, however, does not complete the picture of humanity created in the image of God. God has made us not only reasoning beings, but spiritual ones with the capacity to relate to the Creator and to draw guidance from that source. It is this spiritual capacity which allows us to realize that, in the area of moral choice, human reason is not sufficient. Pure reason can often lead to inhuman and unloving moral decisions. Even so carefully worked out a logical concept as Immanuel Kant's "categorical imperatives" can lead to choices that are profoundly destructive. The Jesus-standard of Love, brought to bear on the ethical process, will not permit, however "reasonable" the decision may appear to be, an action which is not coherent with the loving purpose of God.

The use of reason alone, separated from the overriding standard of Love, is the basic constituent of legalism in the

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worst sense of the word. Unless it is bathed in Love, legalism by its very nature tends to degenerate into a set of impersonal abstractions. It is not difficult to see why legalism has always exercised a seductive appeal for many Christians. We hunger for a "simple" moral system—one that removes all doubt as to the "rightness" of our decisions and relieves us of the responsibility of wrestling with complex and ambiguous situations. But we must realize that this approach is a kind of ethical "cop-out." To surrender the Love-motivated freedom and spontaneity of moral decision-making is to give up an essential element of that which makes us fully human. Consistently applied legalism can reduce us to moral automatons, left only with the minimal ability to say a simple "yes" or "no" to a lifeless, loveless verbalism.

The continuing difficulty of balancing Law and Love—doing the "ethical dance"—has dogged the Christian community from its beginnings. In the formative stages of the New Testament church a crisis arose when the Apostle Paul was led to extend his preaching to the Gentile world. Paul understood the Gospel to be of universal significance, speaking to the basic problems of every human being, whether "Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free." His vision was crucial for the emergence of Christianity as a truly universal religion. Without that vision the Christian faith seemed destined to be only one among many Jewish sects. The decision of the early church is recorded in the 15th chapter of the Book of Acts. James and the other leaders of the church at Jerusalem had previously insisted that a Gentile who became a Christian must also become a Jew, subject to the ritual of circumcision and the full requirements of the Old Testament law. Paul argued for the Christian faith as a radically new relationship between man and God, based not on ritual or moral legalism, but on loving grace. Paul's understanding prevailed and, as a result, the Gospel was set free from a legalistic straitjacket.

No sooner, however, had this basic problem been solved than an opposite corruption of the Gospel arose. Some Christians seized upon their freedom from legalism—the "curse" of the Law, to posit and practice an alternative "easy" way out of the difficulty of making moral decisions, the heresy of antinomianism. If believers are no longer bound by the Law and if grace is sufficient for the forgiveness of every sin, why should they not disregard entirely the moral admonitions of the Law? If where "sin abounds, grace does much more abound," why should Christians worry about sin at all?

Why should the believer have to struggle with the complex dimensions of moral freedom?

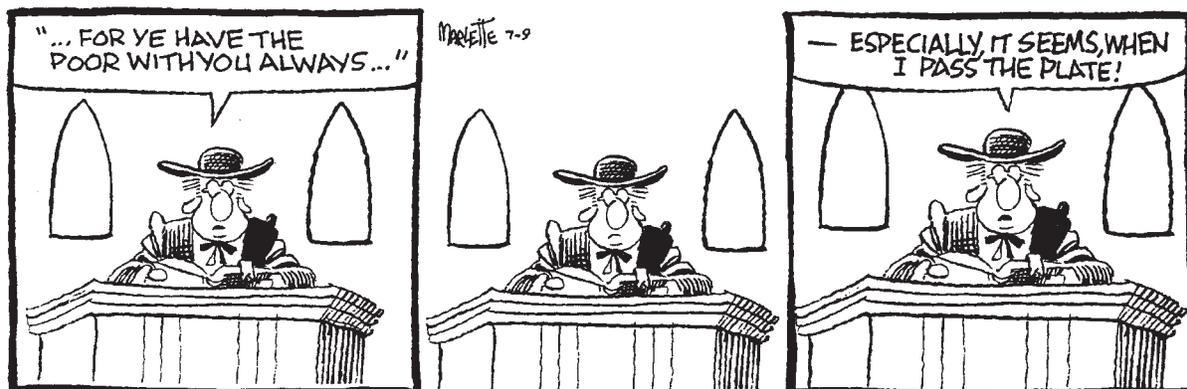
The Apostle Paul saw antinomianism as a problem equally as serious as legalism. He responded by emphasizing the legitimate moral function of Law. The Law, he argued, is primarily valuable to us because it reveals the true dimensions of sin, including wrong moral choice. Aware of those dimensions, the Christian must apply to his or her life the more stringent moral requirements of Love. The believer does not live in an amoral world. Against the indispensable background of the Law—the “beat”—he or she must do the “ethical dance.” Paul insisted that there was no easy way to be “good.” Goodness arises neither out of robot-like obedience to the letter of the Law nor out of reckless, unprincipled disregard of that Law. Moral decision making is a difficult, even sometimes dangerous, endeavor, arising out of the spirit-led struggle of reasonable, yet fallible, human beings to act in Love. The decisions made will not always be totally right; indeed, all decisions made by sinful humanity will be partial and flawed. This realization imposes on us the virtue of humility and the necessity for open-mindedness. To paraphrase Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the World War II German theologian and martyr, “The Christian must strive, while fully aware of the demands of both Law and Love, to discover and do what appears to be right in any situation. Then, as the believer acts, he or she must pray, ‘Lord, I am doing what I honestly believe to be right. Forgive me where I am wrong.’”

For the Christian this is an inescapable responsibility. Seeking to live the God-loving and neighbor-loving life is an essential part of the process of Christian growth—the way in which we progress toward becoming the kind of human beings God purposes us to be. “Therefore, be mature, even as your Father in heaven is mature,” Paul counsels us in the Philippian letter. Becoming mature—perfect—is God’s ultimate goal for His creation.

My own judgment—open to legitimate argument—is that there are few honest Christians today who seriously

adopt an antinomian position, at least in theory. Obviously, there are many people who live an antinomian life-style without trying to justify it with formal theology. But for many people who sincerely want to be “good,” legalism retains its allurements. At this point it is salutary to recall that some of the harshest words of Jesus in the New Testament are reserved, not for blatant sinners like Zaccheus or the woman taken in adultery, but for those staunch defenders of adherence to every jot and tittle of the law, the Pharisees. These zealous law-keepers were Jesus’ prime example of self-righteousness. Indeed, there is something endemic in legalism, which pushes individuals toward self-righteousness. Checking off all the instances in which one has obeyed the law is conducive to spiritual pride and an exaggerated estimate of one’s own goodness. It is often the self-righteous legalist who ignores the admonition of Jesus to “judge not, lest ye be judged.” The Pharisees exemplified the working out of that admonition. Their proud assumption that they were qualified to serve as moral judges automatically put them on the receiving end of judgment.

In summary, what I have tried to say is that, for a Christian to become what God intends us to be—mature human beings, made in his image—the moral struggle is not an elective but a requirement. If we seek to shun that struggle or to find an “easy” way out of it, we are guilty of moral cowardice. It is often our fear of making the wrong decision or our unwillingness to tackle difficult and complex decisions which paralyzes our capacity to love and blocks our progress toward Christian maturity. We possess the God-given freedom to choose among the available alternatives of action in any ethical situation, but with that freedom comes the responsibility to employ every means at our disposal to make the most loving decision. If we will listen with honesty and humility to the “beat” of the Law while never forgetting the overriding supremacy of Love, I believe we can do the dance of responsible moral freedom. In short, no one can live a Christian ethical life-style without learning this dance. ■



Under the Mulberry Trees

By Hal Haralson

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

He pushed back the canvas flaps that served as a door to the dugout. Dawn was beginning to break and he heard coyotes on the prairie telling each other it was time to go home.

The land they had homesteaded, 160 acres near Hobbs, New Mexico was covered with brush and it was soon to be theirs. The law required them to be on the land for 6 months out of the year for 5 years.

Oscar and Bertha Barber had made the 3-week trip from Colorado City, Texas to Monument, New Mexico 2 times each year.

It was 1900. This land, after nearly 5 years, was almost theirs. Oscar left his wife and 6 small children in the dugout and knelt to pray near the mulberry trees they had planted on their first trip.

He was a cowboy turned preacher. He left his family for over a month at a time and rode horseback out to the ranches of New Mexico and preached the Gospel.

He had been a cowboy on the Swan Ranch in Mitchell County, Texas. Colorado City was the County Seat. C.P. Conaway was a wealthy rancher near Westbrook. He had 7 daughters. Oscar Barber fell in love with Bertha, one of the older daughters, and Mr. Conaway approved of this match.

Oscar was tall and dark with chiseled features that came from his mother Rachel, a full-blooded Indian.

He had become ill shortly after his marriage to Bertha Conaway and he lay in bed near death for nearly a year. During this time, he prayed and promised God that he would be a preacher if God would let him live.

When he recovered, he took Bertha and moved to Abilene where he entered Simmons College to study for the ministry. The studying was rather boring for this cowboy turned preacher, however, and when he heard there was land to be homesteaded in New Mexico, he took Bertha and the children by covered wagon to the prairie west of Monument, New Mexico where he claimed 160 acres, a quarter of a section of land, that is still in the family 100 years later.

They dug a well and lived in the dugout. They planted 3 small mulberry trees that had been protected during the trip by covered wagon. Today, these trees rise 50 feet above the prairie, as sentinels giving testimony to the dedication and sacrifice, the courage and commitment of this young couple 100 years ago.

Four of their 7 children were born there without the benefit of a doctor. Six months out of the year they went back to Colorado City, a 3-week trip, where the older children and

their parents worked in the fields to make money for the groceries that would be needed when they returned to the homestead in New Mexico. Bertha cared for the children all by herself when Oscar went on his preaching missions out on the prairie.

On one of these long, hard trips, Oscar took pneumonia and died. He left Bertha with 6 children under 12 years of age and pregnant with the seventh. There were 5 boys and 2 girls.

One of the older boys, Dell, told of hearing his mother praying under the mulberry trees asking God to help her to be able to keep her children together and educate them. Some of the older children had to drop out of school and work in the fields to help with expenses, but the family stayed together.

After the homestead was perfected, Bertha took her family to Abilene, Texas, where she lived near the Hardin-Simmons University campus for nearly 50 years until her death in 1955. She succeeded in providing an education for her children. Four of the 5 sons became lawyers and the daughters were both teachers with master's degrees.

She was grandmother Barber to me, a large woman with her hair in a bun. She wore large, black shoes and she nearly always wore an apron. There was a limp in her walk and she customarily carried a cane in one hand and the Bible in the other. She always kept chickens and a milk cow. I can remember receiving gifts from her in the mail. I especially remember the colorful shirts she made for my brother and me from the sacks that held the feed for her chickens. My mother was her daughter, Adah. My mother's sister, Myrtle, was the mother of Browning, Weston, Broadman, and Connie Ware.

Dell Barber was one of Bertha's boys who quit school in the second grade to help provide for his younger brothers and sisters. At age 22, however, he went back to school in Winters, Texas, where he lived with his sister, my aunt Myrtle Barber, who was teaching school.

Something of a scandal was created when Dell eloped with his Spanish teacher. By the time he was 30, Dell had a law degree from the University of Texas and returned to Colorado City, where he practiced law for over 50 years.

My uncle Dell and his wife Laura were divorced after 10 years of marriage and 2 children. He married Mary and they had 3 sons. This marriage lasted 35 years. When he was 65, a 15-year-old Hispanic girl was brought from Mexico to "live in" and keep house. After about a year, the maid became pregnant. The baby was adopted by Dell and Mary and the maid stayed on helping to care for the baby. (Sounds like an Old Testament Bible story)

The next year, Dell and Mary divorced and she took the

child and moved to Big Spring. Sixty-seven year-old Dell then married 17-year-old Neka and they proceeded to have 2 more children with the youngest being born when Dell was 73 years of age.

The town gave him a birthday party when he was 75 years old. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. The cake was in the boardroom at the bank and nearly everyone in town was there. Everyone that is except Dell Barber. One of his sons grabbed me and we got in the pickup to look for him. We found him on one of his ranches. He was by himself in the hot sun castrating bull calves. He said he thought there would be so many people there at the birthday party that no one would miss him.

He had his own 18-wheeler cattle truck and would drive to his ranch in Colorado with a load of cattle, turn around, and drive back to court the next day and try a law suit.

When he was 80 years old, a friend sent me a copy of the Colorado City Record. It had banner headlines stating Dell Barber Thrown in Jail. There was a 3-column picture of Dell coming out of the Mitchell County jail. He had on his boots and Levis and his trademark cowboy hat. His white beard hung majestically from his face giving him a "Gabby Hays" look.

The article told about a big trial that was hotly contested. In final argument, the other lawyer called Dell Barber a liar. Now this is an area of West Texas where a man's honesty is not taken lightly. Dell came out of his chair like a wild bull, hit the other lawyer with a powerful blow to the mouth, and knocked

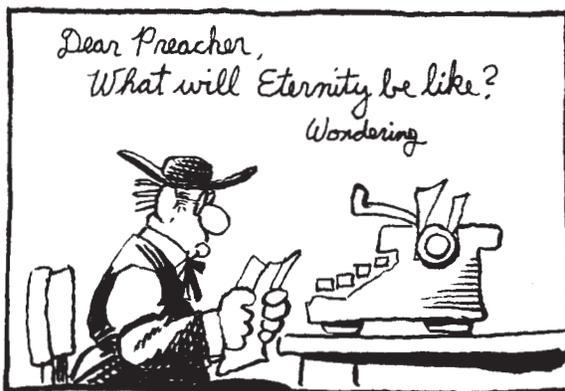
the offending barrister clear under the judge's bench. The judge held Dell in contempt and put him in jail.

At age 84, he went to sleep one night after being in court all day. He did not wake up. His funeral was held in the First Baptist Church of Colorado City by a Negro preacher, and my cousin and his nephew, Browning Ware. The church was filled with Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. The Black minister told us that, 30 years before, Dell Barber had taken on the whole town when he succeeded in getting the local Kiwanis Club to admit it's first Black member.

I went to Uncle Dell many times through the years to tell him of a young Black student who was college material but could not go without some money. His only question was, "How much do you need?" Then he wrote out a check. My instructions were that I was not to tell anyone where the money came from. You are the first to know.

He was buried in a pine box—his instructions—with his old hat and boots on top of the coffin. The funeral wreath was made of tumbleweeds, cat claws, and flowers from the prairie. He was an authentic West Texas Character if there ever was one.

Dell Barber was the last of Bertha and Oscar's children to die. My mother and the others had been long gone. Bertha and Oscar Barber's grandchildren number over 21, with an almost equal number in the ministry and practicing law. The commitment of these two hardy pioneers has affected my life and the lives of many like me. Those prayers under the mulberry trees have been answered. ■



Just a Picture in a Magazine

By Roger Lovette

[Dr. Roger Lovette is Pastor of the Baptist Church of the Covenant, Birmingham, AL.]

It was just a picture in a magazine. I keep it close because it says a great deal to me about health in an unhealthy time. Preachers especially need reminders of wholeness in these strange times. The picture is a black and white photograph of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin. He sits in his robe in some sanctuary getting ready to preach or say the Mass. He is dying. He has only a few months to live. The burden of his condition seems to weigh heavily on him. His shoulders slump. His head is bowed in prayer. His hands are folded. Above him, on the wall, is a huge crucifix. The nailed-down Jesus has his arms outstretched. It is a powerful scene. I keep looking at the picture again and again. Why? I do not know. Except, like the dying Cardinal, we are all kept. And though the weight of the too-muchness makes all of us slouch from time to time, there is a power and strength that comes from outside us and that is enough to sustain.

Cardinal Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago has written of his burdens and his faith in a memoir called *The Gift of Peace*. In a sense, it is his last will and testament. Thirteen days after finishing this book he died on November 1, 1996.

The book concerns three major events in his life. The first was the false accusation in 1993 of sexual misconduct. The second event was the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer in 1995 and a surgery that rendered him cancer free for fifteen months. The third event was a recurrence of that cancer in August of 1996 and his decision to discontinue chemotherapy.

This is a book for everyone. If we live long enough, we will all come to hard places in our lives. We lose jobs. Our children do not turn out as we wish. Marriages take wrong turns. Places like Littleton break loose close by. We are all victims of injustice and wrong.

The Archbishop helps me because of the way he moved through the crises of his life with dignity and grace. There is no bitterness or whining in this book. The Cardinal found the strength to rise to the occasion of the hard things he had to endure. He was not defeated by his pain, indeed he was ennobled by his difficult experiences.

He writes of being falsely accused of sexual abuse by a young man in his thirties who was very ill with AIDS. The man claimed that Bernardin had forced him into a sexual relationship in 1975 when he was a student in the Seminary. Later the Archbishop would learn that this charge was a set-up by people in the church to destroy his effectiveness as a leader in the church. In three months the charges were dropped and the

young man had apologized. But not before enormous damage had been done to the Cardinal's reputation. He dealt with the case by going public, by praying intensely, and by refusing to hate.

After the charges were dropped, Cardinal Bernardin decided to meet the man who had given him such grief. In that encounter the man apologized. The Cardinal told him he had prayed for him every day. The Archbishop offered to say Mass for this man who had tried to destroy him. The man shook his head. He said he was not good enough. The Archbishop took a hundred-year-old chalice out of his case. He explained to the young man it was a gift from someone who asked him to use it for Mass on a special occasion. He asked the young man a second time if they could say Mass and use the old chalice. The young man tearfully agreed. It was a moment of reconciliation and forgiveness. Months later, the young man died forgiven and fully reconciled with the church.

But the Archbishop's harder battle was yet to come. On the heels of this experience where he was falsely charged, he discovered that he had pancreatic cancer. Like the sexual abuse charge, he went public with his problem. He asked for prayers as he made this new journey. He reached out to others who were battling cancer. They shared their stories. They helped one another. As part of the fellowship of the suffering, he discovered a whole new ministry. His decision to go public with his cancer sent a message to others that when we are sick we do not need isolation but the support of others.

He talked in the book about the importance of prayer. His prayers for healing were not answered. The Archbishop, would die of cancer. But he leaves us something profound to ponder before leaving. He said that he learned that death is part of life. And there comes a time when death is a friend and not the enemy. He ended the book by saying: "Today, while there is still breath in me, I offer you myself in faith, hope, and love as well as in suffering, dying, and peace." We have few teachers who take us all the way to the end of the road. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin has left us powerful lessons. Love is stronger than hate. The power of God is present even in times of great stress and difficulty. Faith can carry us all the way to the finish line.

I keep the picture on my wall. A little sick priest with his shoulders weighed down. His head is bowed in prayer—waiting to say the Mass. Above him hangs the nailed-down Jesus with the outstretched arms. As I talk to the troubled, I often gaze at this picture. As the phone rings, I remember this good man, Archbishop Bernardin. The picture helps keep me honest. I am reminded again of what truly matters. ■

Theological Moorings for Ethics

By Henlee Barnette

[Dr. Henlee H. Barnette is former professor of Christian Ethics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.]

Schopenhauer, the philosopher, who understood compassion to be the basis of ethics, declared that “to preach morality is easy; to find a foundation for it is hard.” In our time, the ground of ethics appears to be anthropocentric. In our post-modern world, *homo mensura* or “man is the measure of all things” is the prevailing philosophy. In our multi-cultural society, individuals tend to set their own moral standards; each does that which is right in his own eyes. As a result, we have become the people described by Isaiah, the prophet:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and
shrewd in their own sight (Isa. 5:20-21).

Here were a people who had lost the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong because they had become loosed from their theological moorings.

To meet the complex moral issues of life we must form solid and sound basic theological convictions as supports for Christian decision making and action.

1. The Reality of God

First of all, there is the need to recover a sense of reality of God, the living God, in contrast to a domesticated deity who can be manipulated to serve our own selfish ends. This is a God both transcendent and immanent, a God beyond us and yet with us from whom we derive our moral sense of obligation, compassion, judgment, and norms. This God is holy; and because he is holy, we are to be holy (Lev. 19:2). What does this God require of us? The answer is in a noble passage from the Hebrew prophet Micah: “Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Jesus Christ is the revelation of the living God: “who in his great mercy has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Peter 1:3). Jesus is the Word, the Logos, the crown and criterion of all biblical revelation. He is the canon within the canon, and he is the criterion of the canon. He is the key for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures by which we can distinguish between the Word and the words of Scripture. Jesus is the answer to our understanding of the errors, cruelties, and mysteries in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament. Jesus Christianized

and democratized the understanding of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus is Alpha and Omega; he is Lord; and he is Lord of the Christian’s life.

God is Holy Spirit and Holy Spirit is love. (And love without justice is mere sentimentality). Today, for many, Spirit has become “spirituality,” an ambiguous, vaporous term minus ethical content, ethical dimension, and ethical action. Holy Spirit is a Power-Personality dwelling within the Christian and so empowering moral action.

Fruit of the Spirit is ethical. To be filled with the fruit of the Spirit is to express joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5: 22-23). Here every fruit of the Spirit is ethical. To be filled with the Spirit is to be morally responsible in interpersonal and social relations.

2. The Cross

The reality of the cross and resurrection are strong generators of Christian conduct. In seminary we learned various theories as to how atonement was thought to be accomplished by the death of Jesus. But the Apostle Paul’s view is that “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). In his death believers receive reconciliation. Paul never speaks of God being reconciled to us. He died for us not because we were Greek, Hebrew, Persians, or Americans, but because we were “sinners.” God proved his saving love for us on the cross. Much more we shall be “saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10) or in his life for “he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Of course we cannot fathom the pain of Jesus death as the old hymn declares:

We may not know,
We can not tell
What pains he had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

The Christian ethic is grounded in the cross which is not only a doctrine but a discipline. Jesus said: “Take up your cross [not his] and follow me.” What does this mean for the people of God today? In my view it means for us to bear the cross of redemption and righteousness though it may lead to our suffering and death like many Christian martyrs today.

Clarence Jordan, founder of Koinonia Farm and cofounder of Habitat for Humanity, told me once that Koinonia Farm had some legal problems. Clarence approached his brother, a lawyer, for help. Due to his political ambition the brother declined. (He later became a senator and Chief Justice of the

Supreme Court of the state of Georgia.) Clarence reminded him that when they both joined the church, the preacher asked the same question: "Do you accept Jesus as Savior and Lord? I answered 'Yes'. What did you say? His brother responded: "Clarence, I follow Jesus up to a point." Clarence asked, "Could that be the cross?" "That is right" said his brother, "I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I'm not going to get myself crucified." The authentic Christian is called to take on the cross of discipleship and death.

3. Last Things

Millennium fever has stricken us. Lurid predictions are preached that the end of the world is fast approaching. Armageddon is said to be just around the corner. Y2K and other alleged crises are proclaimed by some ministers to motivate hearers "to keep those cards and letters coming in."

Authentic eschatology, as opposed to millennium speculation, is ethical. Indeed there is no theological doctrine in the Bible that does not have ethical implications. Theology without ethics is a torso. Take the coming of Christ at the endtime described in 2 Peter 3. Here is a scenario of impending global crisis in which the earth shall be consumed by fire. In an old spiritual this crisis is vividly described:

God gave Noah the rainbow sign;
No more water the fire next time.

This vision of the author of 2 Peter which is echoed in the old hymn has become a scientific possibility. When the day of the Lord comes, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise" (a "rush and a roar," a "crackling roar," 2 Peter 3:10). As Paul Tillich observed: "This is no longer vision; it has become physics" (*The Shaking of the Foundations*, p.3). It has become the hydrogen bomb.

Now since this crisis will come, the writer of 2 Peter asks: "What manner of people should we be?" He answers: Christians are (1) to be characterized by holiness and godliness, (2) we are to be persons of vision looking for the new heavens and a new earth; (3) we are to be persons of peace, (4) we are to beware of being led astray by Scripture twisters; (5) we are to be steadfast, (6) and we are to be persons growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Such are the ways Christians are to live in the light of the coming of Christ at the end time.

Then there is hell, another last thing. Half a century ago the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, since the heresy hunters were after the faculty, suggested that some members of the faculty produce doctrinal articles to show how orthodox we really were. I drew the topic, "Why I believe in Hell." I developed three points and threw in a poem. First, Jesus taught it; second it is logical. People who give other people hell ought to get some somewhere; and third I've been

there. The poem was from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam:

I sent my soul through the invisible,
Some letter of that after-life to spell:
And by and by my Soul returned to me
And answered "I myself am heaven and hell."

Needless to say there was an enormous fallout from that article. The project was terminated as the protest mail rolled in. At that time I was courting my beloved Helen, a student in my Christian ethics class. Someone placed my article on the seminary bulletin board and modified the title from "Why I believe in Hell" to "Why I Believe in Helen."

Then there is heaven which I believe in but not the traditional one of literal pearly gates, solid gold streets, and perpetual praising of God. Such a heaven might get very boring. When my oldest son was a small boy he confided in his devout mother that he really didn't want to go to heaven. She was shocked and asked why. His reply: "They don't play baseball up there."

Recently I read an article entitled "Why I want to go to heaven" by a pastor of a mega church. There were nine reasons: delicious food, refreshing water, incredible beauty, new beginnings, meaningful service, loving relationships, sinless perfection, and uninhibited worship. However, there was nothing mentioned about increased knowledge.

I think heaven will be a place where we will go on learning. We will certainly know more than we do here where "we see through a glass darkly" (I Cor. 13). A student asked Dr. John Richard Sampey, former president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, if we would know each other in heaven. His response: "Do you think we will be bigger fools up there?"

I often think of those children with whom I worked in a cotton mill in the South. Some were as young as eleven. I was thirteen. We worked 10 hours a day, five and a half days per week for 18 cents an hour in 1925. There were no benefits of any kind regardless of age and you could be fired for any cause or no cause. In the winter we went to the mill in the dark and came out in the dark. We got one week of vacation per year. So much for the good old days. After six grinding years, by the grace of God, I left the mill for the ministry.

In heaven there must be catch-up courses for those left behind who never had an opportunity to attend school for the development of their intellectual potential. As for me I would like a graduate seminar on why God loves us so much.

Now, some of us are living in the evening shadows and are looking forward to a glorious sunrise. We think often of our own end day. What will be our last deed, or last meal, or last word before we make the Great Transition. Reflection on the end day may strengthen our resolve to be more kind, more gentle, and more humble. So bring your last day in today and live in the light of it.

Right moorings require no less. ■

Walking in the Way

"An Introduction to Christian Ethics"

By Joe. E. Trull

Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1997

A Book Review

By Darold H. Morgan

Walking in the Way is a good book which deserves a wide reading. It is exceptionally well-written, replete with solid research, timely, and biblically oriented. It demonstrates this author's ability to wade through complex and controversial waters and produce material which beautifully supports his title, "Walking in the Way." This book merits a place on the desks of pastors and teachers and thoughtful believers everywhere.

While this volume was written as a text for the academic discipline of Christian ethics, as one works through it, it soon becomes apparent that these pages are immensely helpful to laity and clergy alike. Guidance is provided in the multifaceted field of ethics from a distinctively Christian point of view. There are manifold issues to consider, some ancient and some modern, and the current issues are expanding at a breathtaking rate. Confirmation is especially evident in Trull's chapter on Biomedical Ethics. That preconceived ideas and prejudices about these issues abound is obvious. That many church leaders have abdicated their leadership responsibilities because they lack substantive information is painfully apparent.

There are many strengths in Trull's book. One of the major ones is its readability. Dr. Trull has a pronounced skill in his writing technique which is particularly rare in this field. His techniques are effective and his reasoning is persuasive. He is able to take complicated philosophical and theological concepts and translate them into understandable conclusions.

Another strength is the organization of the book. It is divided into two parts: Foundations for Christian Ethics and

Issues in Christian Ethics. He develops the basic framework for an approach to Christian ethics with a very helpful section on Greek philosophy. Usually one is quickly mired in the vagaries of these ancient teachers whose influence in all succeeding generation is acknowledged. Yet Trull nails down simply and effectively these necessary corollaries which are of major value for background and direction in this fundamental area of foundations.

An additional positive strength in this book is evident in both of these major sections—the author's deep and abiding respect for biblical truth. Before he goes on to the specific Issues in Christian Ethics, Part 2, he establishes with specific precision and effectiveness his conclusions about the Bible. Repeatedly through the book, there is a refreshing biblical exegesis which confirms his statement that "the Bible is an indispensable and reliable source of ethical wisdom for Christians" (p. 232). In today's theological minefield of conflicting views about the nature of biblical authority, it is helpful to read Trull's conclusions about the Bible, particularly as they relate to the divisive issues of the day.

Ethical issues have a way of reflecting the culture of the day, but the principles the author presents from the Bible are powerfully consistent. "The most important test for determining the ethical authority of biblical materials is to ask the question—'Does the ethical teaching reflect the character and nature of God?'—the moral truth gleaned must never contradict the integrity of God. The authority of the Bible is derived



from God, who is truly absolute” (p. 45).

Trull’s high view of biblical revelation and authority is balanced, helpful, sensible, and refreshing. Frankly, all segments of the confused theological world of today should agree with these stated views of biblical authority as they relate to “Christian ethics as a way of life.”

Trull quotes widely from ethicists of many backgrounds and varied approaches. His research is carefully done with the endnotes constituting a fine and current bibliography for the ethics student who wishes to go further into these issues. A beautiful tribute to Southern Baptist’ master ethicist, T.B. Maston, is obvious throughout the book. Quotations abound from writers like Stanley Hauerhaus, Douglas Stewart, Waldermar Janzen, Gordon Fee, H. Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Carl F. H. Henry, Paul Ramsay, Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, James McClendon, Daniel McGee, John Bennett, Richard Foster, Max Weber, and others.

This sampling of renowned authors is listed not only to point out the breadth of Trull’s research, but also to emphasize the wide-ranging scale of his sources. Ethics by its very nature is controversial and debatable. Effective scholarship mandates an understanding of as many points of view as possible. In this Trull excels.

Part 2 in the book brings the reader to most of the major ethical issues we face today. This section is worth more than the price of the book. The format is good and consistent in each of the chapters. There is first a statement of the issue and its relevance. Then comes a solidly stated biblical background for the issue. This is followed by a brief historical overview. What follows then

*Buy this book and
study it. Underline
it and keep it.
Preach it
and teach it.*

in each of the specific chapters in Issues is of major importance as the issue is considered in perspective with the Christian response and application being then clearly stated.

The issues considered are (1) Sexuality and Marriage; (2) Human Equality—Gender and Race; (3) Biomedical Ethics; (4) Economics and Politics. Let the reviewer repeat himself: every pastor and teacher needs to be apprised afresh of these complex and urgent challenges facing all of us. Trull’s fresh and useful conclusions will assist with formulating healthy and needed points of

view in these areas. Congregations and classes desperately need practical biblical guidance here.

This section contains some helpful guidelines on current ethical issues such as homosexuality, authority and submission in marriage, abortion, racism, the role of women in religious leadership, euthanasia, genetic engineering, reproduction technologies, hunger and poverty, and church and state. What Trull does is to consider this array of ethical challenges (many of them of recent origin) in the context of biblical principles.

Trull is right on target when he concludes that “in the Christian faith, theology and ethics are married” (p.285). This expands on his comment that “Christian belief without ethical behavior is not genuine faith” (p. 285). The primary goal of a study like this is to develop a trustworthy style of making sound moral judgements. Joe Trull’s *Walking in the Way* is characterized by sound biblical guidelines and practical Christian principles which can really work in the ethical challenges which keep on coming at us in this kind of world.

Buy this book and study it. Underline it and keep it. Preach it and teach it. ■



Dividing Up America

By Franklin H. Littell

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

Our country is being rapidly broken into several parts, so rapidly that much of today's political debate is about matters that ceased to be important a decade or more ago. Our "leaders" are inviting us to return the balances between the Federal government and the states, and between the states and the counties and cities, to their status before the New Deal radically changed their supposed early and unpolluted relationships.

In the meantime, the real changes going on are quite different and much more substantial. In the economy, we are not being returned to the design that prevailed before the Great Depression and the introduction of social welfare. We are rapidly being returned to the plantation society with its drastic separation between the "haves" and the "have nots" that characterized a major section of the republic before the Civil War, and that still characterizes most of Latin America.

The independent farms and ranches have been replaced by huge agro-industry corporations. The family-owned farm in the Middle West not long ago fed a family and exchanged its surpluses for necessities. The family ranch of the West developed vast surpluses of grain or beef and fell victim to the prices fixed by the cartels. In the 1990 census there were not even enough family-owned farms or ranches left to be entered in the tabulations.

*Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.*

On the accumulation of wealth: in 1980 there were 16 billionaires in the United States; in 1997 the number was 136. A shamelessly regressive tax policy has since 1980 freed the wealthy of their fair share of the patriotic task of serving the general welfare, has shrunk the middle class year by year, and has greatly increased the number of millions of Americans without medical care, decent housing, or adequate food. All of this has been done to the tune of hypocritical phrases about "protecting the family," when in fact both man and wife must work now to provide a family income equivalent to what the man alone could earn in 1946.

The costs are both individual and social. We are becoming a penitentiary society for those outside the hacienda system, with more money being spent on imprisoning the derelicts

than committed to a higher education that could help them move in another direction.

Why does organized religion, in the face of such an apocalyptic social and economic prospect, mute the message of the Jewish prophets and Jesus? Because, while America is being divided between the few very rich and multitude of those sliding into poverty, major religious leaderships are bent on dividing up America in their own way. The plight of the public schools, which in spite of a malnutrition and neglect, are still the best general youth education network in the world, shows what is happening at this level.

An alliance of Roman Catholic bishops, Orthodox Jewish rabbis, and Protestant Fundamentalists has launched the most massive attack on the public schools since they emerged as part of the American dream in the early 19th century. The bishops are pressing desperately for tax assistance because the cheap labor once readily available to them from their religious orders has diminished in quantity. Furthermore the state requirement of educational standards means that the parochial schools also must now compete in quality of instruction. Lay teachers with families, an ever larger percentage of teachers in the parochial schools, have not taken vows of poverty and must be paid.

The Orthodox Jewish rabbis and associated politicians are still living, in basic perception and philosophy, in the "Christendom" that was never a dependable setting and that half a century ago under the Nazis made its most malevolent assault on the Jewish people, through a combination of mass murder and indifference from the gentiles.

The mushroom growth of Protestant Fundamentalist schools can hardly be attributed to a sudden passion for culture and learning, coming as they did after the school integration decisions by the Supreme Court. Although a few token matriculations are allowed by blacks, where discrimination would otherwise be most glaringly illegal, the hidden thrust to get public funding for a white Protestant portion of a divided America cannot be hidden.

Can the rush back to a plantation pattern be halted? Can the vision of an America united in brotherhood, "from sea to shining sea," be regained? The justification of naked greed is far gone in organized politics and in the corporate world: the first pig to reach the trough gets the corn. But how is it that so many of the spokesmen for organized religion have lost the imperative for justice and mercy for all, have accepted in their own way the drive to divide up America? ■

The Slow, Slow Art of Urgency for Women in Ministry

By Calvin Miller

[Dr. Calvin Miller is Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Studies at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama. He delivered this sermon to the Woman's Missionary Union in their annual meeting in Atlanta on June 13, 1999.]

We have met in Atlanta because we believe that Jesus saves and that preaching the gospel is urgent business! (Of course, while we are here we must also go to our Alumni dinners!) We met in Atlanta because we believe that everybody has a right to know Christ and we all have the responsibility to tell the world that Jesus saves. (And then there's the matter of seeing old friends, who are always a little older and a little less friendly from year to year). A part of what it means to be a Baptist is that we tell others about the same grand liberation we found when we found Christ. In America the message goes on and on, as regular as cable television. If there's anyone in America who doesn't know how to be saved, it is because they just prefer ESPN over Benny Hinn.

But we're "the world" people. We want the message that Jesus saves to permeate the Planet.

We are most urgent about it all. *Urgency* is a noun which has to do with *pressing importance*. The reason for our urgency is that life is uncertain and hell is eternal. So we have circled the globe, preaching hurriedly, evangelizing hurriedly, telling hurriedly. It is odd that when our convictions about hell were more pressing than they have been in recent decades we were content to be urgent with a great deal more calm. We used to think it important to evangelize by building schools and hospitals, appointing teachers and doctors. Of course, hell is eternal and the world needs to be saved. Still we took time for medicine, because as one fine missionary doctor pointed out, a hospital bed in any foreign culture is more effective than a pulpit for preaching the gospel. We built schools because for people to be literate is a great gift. Illiterate but saved people can go to heaven stupid, but they rarely do well in the here-and-now stupid. It is the oddest of discrepancies that wants missionaries to be well educated, but doesn't give a fig about having literate converts. It is even odder that often well-educated temporary missionaries (those who flit about the world doing big revivals) come home with huge statistics about those who received Christ (before translators and photographers, of course) but who were never given any lessons to read or write by their literate evangelists.

But then all of this may be changing as Americans continue to dumb-down. Doing Bible translations at 5th grade levels, because that's the American level, can hardly give us an intellectual credibility in the first place. Generally the church is

dumbing down faster than the culture as a whole. Os Guinness said in *Fit Bodies Fat Minds*, "The chances of meeting educated people in America is better outside the church than inside it. People tend to be 68% better educated outside the church than inside it." In the last few years while Koreans have soared to 1st place in world-wide reading ability, Americans have slipped to fourteenth. So it would appear that we have no great concern even about our own literacy.

Now, of course, it is easier to ask two questions than to build a school and it is a whole lot faster. Roman Roads, Evangelism Explosions, Four Spiritual Laws booklets have some place in a culture where evangelism is seen as a sales technique. These plans work reasonably well in a near-Christian culture like our own. But they major too much on bottom line sales figures really to impress those who need Christ far away from us. They seem to be falling out of favor in a fast-track missions world where we often want to apply 10-minute evangelism programs in complicated cross-cultural settings. I have no proof of this but I have always wondered if fast-track evangelism programs aren't invented by men—American men steeped in tooth paste commercials and Dow Jones fast turn-around money making, liquid returns capitalism. It is all a kind of Dow-Jones evangelism, where you can watch the big board telling you just how it's all going.

It is faster to read somebody a four spiritual laws booklet than to build a hospital. But that was the way that we used to Missionize. It was pitifully slow. Yet it was this slowness that created the credibility for our witness. People who care enough to build hospitals, find themselves listened to when they do get around to reading the four spiritual laws booklets. It is my general opinion that pressing American sales forms into ancient, class cultures does not work very well. You can translate tracts into foreign languages but culturally they don't translate very well.

The world is urgently lost, but the most formidable kinds of urgently lost people, probably can be saved only gradually.

Now, I want to say what will likely seem the most sexist thing I'm going to say in this sermon. Women are generally not as good at the four spiritual law booklets as men are. Why? Who can say? Maybe the little booklets just don't have enough poetry in them. Some might say that they don't read enough like a Jeannette Oke novel. But I believe that women have always been more intuitive and sensitive. It is harder for women to read a booklet and say, "Sign here." Women have a penchant for feeling their way into every situation, and it is harder for women to condense the Bible to two propositions and a signature. Maybe that's why they have generally been the

best missionaries. They can plug into a culture and live there for years after men would have read a four spiritual laws booklet and flown back to the states in time for the Super Bowl. Women seem to find time for being human. They love Jesus but they are bigger on listening men and women into the Kingdom than they are on talking men and women into the Kingdom.

I learned a long time ago that the first two critical questions for evangelism are never, “If you died right now do you know for sure you’d go to heaven?” And, “If you were standing before God and he said ‘Why should I let you into heaven’ what would you say?” The first two questions are, “How are you?” And “How are Madge and the kids.” These are the human questions that slow down the process of evangelism, but in the end make it real and lasting. We cannot make any divine propositions seem important without being human beings. I have led a lot of people to Christ, but I have done it by listening people into the Kingdom of God rather than talking people into the Kingdom of God.

Women are more likely to go to the mission fields to be a doctor or a nurse or a teacher, I think, than men are. Once they get there they can work with a situation by living in it better than men can. They can more easily embrace people of other faiths with other value systems than men can. In short, they are able to go more slowly in redeeming a complicated world than men are, and in going more slowly they change the world about them, step by credible, slow-paced, and very human step.

There are many reasons we should slow our missionizing methodologies down.

First: a rapid fire evangelism often shows a disregard for the cultures we want to evangelize: How true it is that before we seek to displace the culture of whatever religion we wish to replace, we should at least show some interest in it. An evangelist who can rapidly and unilaterally kill another’s faith without seeing how precious their faith is, has not looked into the eyes of his or her converts long enough to see their humanity, their life-styles, etc. There is salvation in none other but Jesus, but not to esteem the way others believe fails in some sense to take them seriously.

Second: Those in the more liberal wings of Christianity, now discourage all missions because they believe that it is immoral to try and change anybody for any reason. These see Christlikeness as a Live-and-Let-Live philosophy. Trying to change a Hindu to a Christian, these say, would meet the same kind of resistance we would resent when approached by a Hare Krishna or a Moslem or a Jehovah’s Witness. There is no way to harmonize such a view with the great commission, but we should let it teach us that we are confronting the lost whose lostness should get our special and studied consideration. We have the God-given right to seek to change others, but we do not have the right to trivialize what they believe.

Third: Multiculturalism and its acceptance is viewed as the only way to the kind of tolerance that makes it possible for a world to live together. As long as any one world religion insists

on its right to live above all others, the world will continue on in bloodshed and wars of one kind or another. This is the philosophy that sponsors ethnic cleansing or white supremacy or supremacy of any other culture. Only Jesus saves, but until he does it, we ought to live at peace, respecting those with other faiths.

The big question is this: What are we to do in such a growing world of resentment toward conversionism? Did not Jesus say, “GO into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature?” Of course he did; and missions ought always to be at the heart of all things truly Christian. Without being committed to world evangelization we cannot call ourselves the people of God. Still at the heart of all things Christian, there also lies the issue of our humanity. If we do not approach a lost world as human beings genuinely interested in their welfare, then we eventually wind up with a huge sales program that wants to rack up sales at the expense of those being evangelized.

This slower speed will demand that we become determined to listen people into the Kingdom of God rather than talk them into it.

Hildegard of Bingen was born in 1098, but she did not set off on her first preaching tour till she was 60 years of age (Things have always gone rough for women in ministry). Her tour was especially hard on her but we are indebted to her for several insights.

First: “Most people come slowly out of sin,” she taught. In fact they do it in four steps: When God touches evil people for the first time, they say to themselves, “What is God to me?”

Second: Then God touches them a second time. They may feel less threatened by God’s touch, because they have experienced it before.

Third: They then enter a period of internal struggle in which the zeal that they once showed for sin is now transformed into a zeal for repentance.

Fourth: Gradually they wake up from the sleep of death and embrace life. (Scivias. 3.8.8, Hildegard in a Nutshell. Robert Van de Weyer, p.70)

She also said that *we understand so little of what is around us because we use so little of what is within us (Scivias 1.2.29, p. 37, Hildegard in a Nutshell). There is no God for the arrogant, she said, and that the major cause of sin is blindness to the beauty of God.*

All in all, she said that evangelism cannot be hurried beyond the confrontation of God’s will and human will and that gentle intuitive missions may in the long run be the most effective.

Therese of Liseux—a contemporary of Lottie Moon (although she died in 1897 at 25)—wrote:

O Eternal word, my Savior, You are the Eagle I Love and the one who fascinates me.

You swept down to this land of exile and suffered and died so that you could bear away every soul and plunge them into the heart of

the blessed Trinity, that inextinguishable furnace of love. Like the prophets and doctors of the church, I should like to enlighten souls. I should like to wander through the world preaching your name and raising your glorious cross in pagan lands. But it would not be enough to have only one field of mission work. I should not be satisfied unless I preached the gospel in every quarter of the globe and even in the most remote islands. (pp. 158, 153)

One thing we should remember is that women have not just recently become involved in missions. They have been involved in missions from the very beginning. The scriptures themselves are filled with the tales of women in ministry. Yet, whether actual or merely perceived by other Christians, our denomination is perceived as being anti-feminist. This is due in part to a partial hermeneutic that sees the role of women totally in terms of the family. I do not object to seeing women in this way as long as we define men in the same way. In the New Testament, women are often defined in terms of the family but I do object to seeing them totally in that way. Men would object to being defined totally in terms of the home. They want to be defined in terms of the Kingdom of God and world enterprise. There are a great number of New Testament passages that define the role of women in missions and evangelism as well. Therefore, they hold as legitimate a place in the spread of the gospel as they do in the role of the home. This can hardly be a new insight, but I recommend that when defining the role of women in the ministry, that the people of God stack along side 1 Timothy 4, 1 Peter 3, and Ephesians 5:22 or 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, not a new hermeneutic for women in ministry but a very old one. I believe the Bible, but I believe in developing our rules for faith and practice by using the whole Bible and not just those parts that support some particular viewpoint.

Our new hermeneutic should be our old hermeneutic for Women in Ministry. It should include these passages:

Acts 2:17-18: this is a primary passage regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit in which women are seen being filled with the Spirit and prophesying just as men are.

Romans 16:1-7: in this remarkable passage, more women are mentioned than men and they wear such titles as "deaconess" and "apostlette." None of these women are mentioned in terms of their family roles but in terms of their kingdom roles.

Galatians 3:28: this passage seems to teach that there is to be no gender distinction in how men and women serve in the kingdom. Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women are all to share equal status in the kingdom enterprise.

Ephesians 5:21: this is one of those six "hupotasso" passages in the New Testament that speak of submission. But this one, different from the other five, does not speak of a woman submitting to a man but all Christians submitting to each other. This passage precedes what Paul is about to say on the home, but it is not really a part of the passage.

While all of these passages speak of women, they do not do it in terms of the home but in terms of their kingdom callings. We are here to celebrate our Savior's last command. We are

here to be effective in our evangelism. Jesus died for the whole world. It is too important a subject to exclude the fifty percent of ministers who are not men.

Marguerite of Oingt wrote a long time ago,
Jesus are you not my mother? Are you not even more than my mother? My human mother, after all, labored in giving birth to me for only a day or night. You, my tender and beautiful Lord, labored over me for over thirty years.... Oh, with what measureless love you labored for me!... But when the time was ripe for you to be delivered, your labor pains were so terrible, your holy sweat was like great drops of blood that ran from your body onto the earth.... Whoever saw a mother endure so dreadful a birth? When the time of your delivery came, you were nailed to the hard bed of the cross... and your nerves and all your veins were broken. How could anyone be surprised that your veins were broken. How could anyone be surprised that your veins broke open when in one day you gave birth to the whole world."

Marguerite of Oingt (p. 107, *Teachings of the Christian Mystics*)

In the year of Lottie Moon's death, the war for suffrage was at its apex: those were hard years for women. In Peter Jennings, *The Century*, he writes, "Women were often spat upon, slapped in the face, tripped, pelted with burning cigar butts, and insulted by jeers and obscene language" (p. 26, *the Century*).

On they fought!

One of the progressive era jingles ran:

*Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater,
Had a wife and tried to beat her:
But his wife was a suffragette,
And Peter's in the hospital yet* (*The Century* p.27)

Bill Sherman of Mary Poppins fame had the suffragettes singing:

*Cast off the shackles of yesterday, and forward and forward into the fray.
No more the meek and mild subservient we, we're fighting for rights militantly
We're clearly soldiers in Petticoats, And dauntless crusaders for womens' votes.
Though we adore men individually, we agree that as a group, they're rather stupid.*

It is time for a healthier hermeneutic. It is time for a wider and more inclusive hermeneutic.

We are not arguing for Sophia and the Mother Goddess Movement.

We are not out to call the Father Mother, nor our Lord the Lady,

But we are out to recognize the courageous evangelism and missions of the gentle and intuitive sort that remembers that most people come out of sin slowly,

And that the hunger to call the world to Christ has never been a gender-exclusive task.

Our mission has always been a matter of Expediency. The most indicting line in Lottie Moon's letter: *It seems odd that God would call 500 preachers for Virginia and leave one lone woman for all of China.* The Promise Keepers have gained the freedom for feminizing their feelings. The new Tender Warriors were suddenly free to talk about the home and cry and hold hands. Suddenly they were apologizing to women for forcing them into patriarchal roles while they abdicated the home. But let us have no more apologies from men for what they haven't done. Let us simply say that the Kingdom of God is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female. The world is lost and its lostness, in neither the 19th or 20th century was never in the mind of God a gender consideration.

I met on a recent round-the-world trip four steel magnolias who impacted forever my view of women in missions and ministry and their right to do it. Each of their tales is too long to recount, but let me say briefly that the first was a woman in Xian, China, whose heroic and courageous ministry had won many beautiful converts. She did all this really without much human support, and she was unmarried, so she ministered alone.

Secondly, I met a woman in Mother Theresa's house for the dying, who was not a Baptist (I think she was an Episcopalian, although most of those who come there to die, aren't really all that interested in American denominations) and she was married. She left her super-executive-CEO husband in the United States and served alone among a team of volunteers in India. She worked tirelessly day after day, and her ministry made very few converts, but she so resembled Christ, it didn't matter, overmuch.

Thirdly, I met a woman in Calcutta who passed out day-old bread to the hordes of insane who roam the midnight streets of Calcutta. She was assisted always by her husband, and their ministry goes unrecorded since most of the insane are not likely to be Baptists (at least in India).

Finally, I was in India at the time of Mother Theresa's passing and happened to see her as she lay in Calcutta. I cannot tell you the full range of my emotions. I can say this: I was struck by her bare feet, protruding from under the flag of India, and I wept when I realized that she had literally worn them out in ministry. What man would be so presumptuous as to say that God has no place for women in ministry? Not, I.

Conclusion

I wonder if all these women found such joy in ministry, that pleasing the Lord was quite enough for them. They win the world slowly and surely. They let their singular compassion speak for them. They not only have the right to do what they

do, they have the commendation of God. Women are God-called; and thank God for their callings. They deal with hardship and sit through the pain of their callings with more charity. What is it that they do to contend with the difficult world of missions? I think, women better than men take the 9 steps to Third World Living. What are those steps?

First, take out all the furniture: leave a few old blankets, a kitchen table, maybe a wooden chair. You've never had a bed, remember.

Second, throw out your clothes. Each person in the family may keep the oldest suit or dress, a shirt or blouse. The head of the family has the only pair of shoes.

Third, all kitchen appliances have vanished. Keep a box of matches, a small bag of flour, some sugar and salt and a handful of onions, a dish of dried beans. Rescue some moldy potatoes from the garbage can; those are tonight's meal.

Fourth, dismantle the bathroom, shut off the running water, take out the wiring and the lights and everything that runs by electricity.

Fifth, take away the house and move the family into the tool shed.

Sixth, no more postman, fireman, government services. The two-class-room school is three miles away but only two of your seven children attend anyway, and they must walk.

Seventh, throw out your bankbooks, stock certificates, pension plans, and insurance policies. You now have a cash hoard of \$5.

Eighth, get out and start cultivating three acres. Try hard to raise \$300 in cash crops because your landlord wants one-third and your moneylender 10%.

Ninth, find some way for your children to bring in a little extra money so you have something to eat most days. But it won't be enough to keep bodies healthy, so lop off 25 to 30 years of your life. (*Leadership*, Summer, '98, p.81)

The world is obviously broken and in great need.

Come; let us come slowly and thoughtfully to such a world. Save human kind slowly—at a rate that does not frighten, further frighten, the dispossessed.

The world is in desperate shape.

We dare not go too fast. ■

Compulsory Celibacy

By John M. Swomley

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

The Vatican, which has the last absolute monarch in the Western world and a ruling court elite known as the Curia, is now facing widespread resistance. A Catholic referendum movement began in Europe: "More than 2.3 million Austrian and German Catholics have signed referenda" and "similar initiatives have been undertaken in Italy, France, Belgium and Australia" according to a full page ad in the May 31, 1996 *National Catholic Reporter*.

In the United States a group of ten unofficial groups calling themselves the "National Task Force of We Are the Church Coalition" is also seeking major church reforms. These include "equal rights for women," and "a church which affirms the goodness of sexuality" and "the primacy of conscience in deciding issues of sexual morality" such as birth control.

A key aspect of this reform movement is a rejection of compulsory celibacy and the welcoming of married priests back into church service.

One need not be a Roman Catholic to recognize the value of such reforms in a church with such world-wide influence which stands in contrast to the Eastern Catholic and Protestant churches that have long valued marriage and married clergy. It is therefore fitting to examine the concepts of celibacy, subordination of women, and marriage in the light of biblical practice, and past and recent history.

The concept of celibacy was alien to Hebrew law and practice. From the beginning of the priestly Levites there was marriage and a hereditary character to the priesthood. In the New Testament marriage was freely acknowledged by the disciples and apostles. Paul, who for his own reasons rejected marriage,

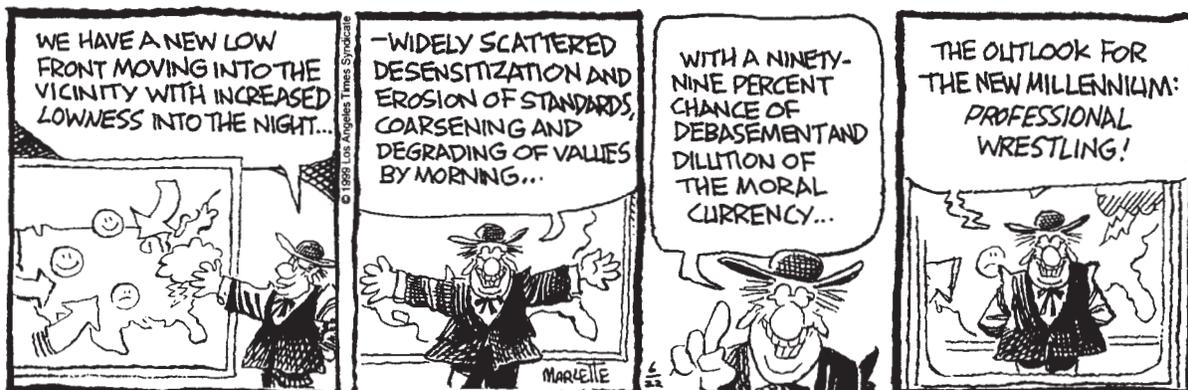
wrote in First Corinthians 9:5: "Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas (Peter)?"

Certainly Jesus advocated marriage. Referring to the creation of male and female, he said, "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two shall be one." Then he added, "What therefore, God has joined together let not man separate" (Matthew 19:5, 6).

C. J. Cadoux in his *The Early Church and the World* refers to the beginnings of celibacy as "due to the contagion of Oriental, Essene or neo-Pythagorean notions as to the impurity of matter." He also wrote that in the pre-Constantinian period "the several achievements of the Church were gradually perverted and corrupted in different ways. The opposition to wrong sexual habits overreached itself and developed into an unhealthy horror of all sex life and a morbid idealization of celibacy and virginity."

Historian Henry C. Lea also wrote that the practices of asceticism in early Christianity came from the East "and were chiefly represented by Buddhism such as monasticism. . . confession, penance, and absolution, the sign of the cross" among others.

However, it was only after Constantine (312) and his successors that asceticism triumphed because of the immorality of the Christian pastors, says Williston Walker. The first Christian monasteries were established in Egypt between 315 and 346. Celibacy was the rule in monastic life. It was not until 385, however, that Pope Siricius tried to impose celibacy on the clergy. In addition to the idea that sex was sinful there was another reason advanced for celibacy. Vast amounts of property were donated to the church by wealthy members, including emperors. There was danger of these possessions being lost to the church if the clergy who were in charge of these riches were



married and wanted their children to inherit them.

However, as late as the third and fourth Councils of Carthage in 397 and 398 the canons prescribing celibacy had no enforcement mechanism and evidently left the decision to the individual conscience whether each should abandon his wife.

In spite of the efforts of some popes and of a monasticism that involved communities entirely of men or entirely of women, celibacy could not be enforced. There were married clergy, clergy with concubines, clergy with children, and other sexual expressions outside marriage.

All of this changed when Hildebrand, or Gregory VII (1073-1085) became pope. He viewed priestly celibacy as essential to theocratic rule by the papacy and to the church's supremacy over the various kingdoms and empires. Lea said of Gregory's view: "The priest must be a man set apart from his fellows, consecrated to the one holy purpose, revered by the world as a being superior to human passions and frailties, devoted soul and body to the interests of the Church, and distracted by no temporal cares and anxieties foreign to the welfare of the great corporation of which he was a member."

In other words, the power of the church over secular society depended on the immense power and authority it could exercise everywhere through priests "holding the keys of heaven" in their hands, using "the machinery of confession, absolution and excommunication" over each member of his parish. The priest therefore could not have "any other loyalty to family or property."

However, Hildebrand's iron discipline led eventually to widespread corruption of both the papacy and the clergy. Lea described the lust and sexual corruption of the clergy: "They were the natural product of a system which for four centuries had bent the unremitting energies of the Church to securing temporal power and wealth, with exemption from the duties and liabilities of the citizen. Such were the fruits of the successful theocracy of Hildebrand, which, entrusting irresponsible authority to fallible humanity, came to regard ecclesiastical aggrandizement as a full atonement for all and every crime."

One outcome of the "dissolute and un-Christian life of the priesthood" during the 1400s, was the "success of the Reformation" in the 1500s. Even those who remained celibate

The Catholic theologian Richard McBrien...suggests that the priesthood may be "attractive to certain people precisely because it excludes marriage. To put it plainly: as long as the Church requires celibacy for the ordained priesthood, the priesthood will always pose a particular attraction for gay men who are otherwise not drawn to ministry." In effect it provides them "occupational respectability and freedom from social suspicion."

were described as having an influence of almost "unmixed evil."

If we jump now to the 20th Century, we discover that the popes have continued to enforce celibacy. No one has been more rigorous than Pope John Paul II in defending celibacy and avoiding gender equality. Except in the Eastern churches, priests who marry are forced out of their churches or in some cases laicized. Yet there are numerous priests who secretly marry or have sexual relationships with women.

Celibacy is not the same as chastity. Therefore it is quite possible to conform to the unmarried or celibate rule and be involved sexually in secret, to be in technical adherence to the church rule. But this presents a serious question of ethics not only of personal dishonesty but of the involvement of another person or persons who are also pressed into secrecy.

David Rice, a former priest, in his book, *Shattered Vows*, has a chapter, "The Shadow Side of Celibacy" which details the worldwide violations of celibacy. In Pennsylvania, for example, there is "a nonprofit organization called 'Good Tidings' which helps women who have become involved with priests." The leader of the organization says "She has over seven hundred women on her books."

An active priest wrote in the Franciscan magazine *St. Anthony's Messenger* in 1986 that "mandatory celibacy has become the millstone around the neck of the priesthood and is threatening to destroy it." David Rice summarized his article as follows: "The law of celibacy is routinely flouted by many priests, some of whom have secretly married and pass off their wives as live-in housekeepers in the rectory. Others . . . have taken lovers. The law has also led to 'rampant psychosexual problems' including a huge increase in reported cases of child molesting and a 'noticeable increase in the number of gay seminarians' at Catholic divinity schools."

The Catholic theologian Richard McBrien in an article in the June 19, 1987 *Commonweal* suggests that the priesthood may be "attractive to certain people precisely because it excludes marriage. To put it plainly: as long as the Church requires celibacy for the ordained priesthood, the priesthood will always pose a particular attraction for gay men who are otherwise not drawn to ministry." In effect it provides them "occupational respectability and freedom from social suspicion."

Rice says "compulsory celibacy does not work." The result

is “thousands of men leading double lives, thousands of woman leading destroyed lives, thousands of children spurned by their ordained fathers, to say nothing of...the psychiatric cases, the alcoholics and the workaholics...”

Rice adds, “Yes, our men in the Vatican know.”

The Vatican’s tough response is that if priests resign or are married and exposed, they lose their pension, insurance, and may be excommunicated.

Why does the Vatican continue to insist on celibacy? According to Rice, celibacy is a “control factor par excellence. Bachelors are quite simply easier to manage. There is no family to care for; there is no wife to counsel disobedience or to stiffen resolve; there is no danger of nepotism or of children inheriting church property.”

Actually, there is in some places nearly open disregard for the celibacy rule. In some parts of the world more than half of all priests live with women: 80 percent in Peru, between 60 and 70 percent in Brazil, over 50 percent in the Philippines, and in parts of Africa it may approach even higher rates.

Also, there is serious inconsistency in the compulsory celibate rule. In the Eastern Catholic church priests have always been free to marry. And in the United States and England, a number of married Protestant clergy who oppose women ministers and bishops convert to Catholicism and are accepted as ordained priests in the Roman church, which is opposed to the ordination of women.

These issues are not unrelated. One plausible and perhaps the dominant reason for male celibacy and for the acceptance of married Protestant clergy who don’t want to serve with women ministers is patriarchy. The Roman Catholic church will not risk even the slightest opening of the door to equality of women, lest men eventually lose control at all levels of the church. What does the church lose in continuing the celibacy rule? One thing is the inevitable disconnect in the fact of a celibate priest extolling the sanctity of marriage and the family. Speaking of the celibacy required by Hildebrand, writer Henry Lea said, “The parish priest, if honestly ascetic, was thereby deprived of the wholesome common bond of human affections and sympathies and was rendered less efficient for good in consoling the sorrows and aiding the struggles of his flock.”

Modern priests are keenly aware of this deficiency, and in the light of new respect for women, see the need for partnership in both ministry and in life. There is recognition and celebration of sexuality, and a renewal of the role of individual conscience against the strictures of compelled behavior. What does this mean in terms of numbers? There are more than one hundred thousand priests who have left their ministry, which is close to “a quarter of all the active priests in the world.” David Rice describes this as follows:

Most of them marched resolutely out, vowing to take no more; others stormed out in fury and disgust; many simply got up from their knees, made the sign of the cross, and walked quietly away. The rate could be calculated at more than one every two hours, for more than twenty years, they left — and left, and left. And still they leave. Right now, according to sociologist Richard Schoenherr, 42 percent of all American priests leave within twenty-five years of ordination. That means that by now half of all American priests under sixty have left.”

Does this mean that non-Catholics should rejoice at this massive exodus? Not at all. It has been a personal and institutional tragedy. If the Roman Catholic Church is nudged by its reformers who still love the church into treating marriage of both clergy and laity as a great institution, women as equal to men, sexuality as good, and conscience as superior to patriarchal dogma, the world will be a better place. There will be greater respect for family planning and birth control as well as concern for overpopulation and the environment. In short, non-Catholics should welcome the Catholic reform movement and unofficial agencies within the Catholic church, such as Catholics for a Free Choice. Likewise, Protestant church leaders engaged in ecumenical dialogue with their Catholic counterparts should make it clear that ecumenism must include major reforms and not be dependent on minor theological concessions. ■



New Millennium Families

By Michael C. Blackwell

[Dr. Michael C. Blackwell is President of the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Inc.]

A friend of mine defines a family as “a group whose members are irrationally crazy about each other.”

Call me irrational, but I'm crazy about families.

To negative folks, the new millennium looms as a big dark cloud, portending evil. To those with a positive outlook, however, it lights a dark night and promises intrigue, challenge, and opportunity unlimited.

This new age won't be an easy time to raise a family; but then, I'm not sure there ever was an easy time. Adam and Eve had trouble with their boys. Earlier generations—especially those before 1910—suffered the agonies of having many babies' lives snuffed out by epidemics. My parents didn't think it was easy raising me in the textile town of Gastonia, N.C. My wife and I struggled raising children in parsonages, in the glass houses of pastorates and public professions. Each generation faces challenges and struggles to learn together to overcome them.

We can hardly fathom the difference in human existence in the broad but brief span between the end of the first millennium, and the end of the second. It's just one millennium. Ten short centuries. But think of this.

Just one millennium ago, the now extinct Incas were developing a culture that built an incredible empire which they ruled from Peru. Leif Erickson landed on the shores of North America with a band of Vikings; a newly invented rigid collar gave horses four times the traction they previously had and thereby improved the lives of subsistence farmers everywhere. In the Americas, the native peoples domesticated corn and made the first chocolate drinks. During the first few centuries of this millennium the Black Plague killed one European in four; and then the survivors beat back Arab invaders from the south, and fought Mongol hordes from the east. From the beginning of the millennium to its last hours, savage wars ravaged the populated continents.

Sure, life was hard a thousand years ago. But even in America just one century past, children openly sewed clothes in textile sweatshops. A century ago, coal-burning stoves fouled the air and horse traffic clogged the streets. Women couldn't vote. Water fountains were segregated, and public education was pitifully inadequate.

There were no telephones, airplanes, automobiles, computers, or satellites. We didn't have strawberries all year or CNN all day. There were no Social Security or disability payments for those too old or injured to work. And two catastrophic

world wars, separated by the worldwide Great Depression, were still to come.

Do you suppose the grandparents of that era also told their children, “I'm glad I'm not starting a family at a time like this!”

Also remember: In 1900 AIDS was unknown; few smoked tobacco; 50,000 fewer people died in highway accidents every year; our inner cities throbbed with new vitality and fresh hope. There were no gasoline shortages or electrical power outages; no Y2K fears; no suicidal bombers blowing up markets in Europe and schools in America.

So while “Family” is being assaulted at every turn today, I hold to a robust hope for families. “Family” will survive. This conviction is born not only of faith but also of facts, facts which support the hope.

The 1900 definition of family may not be the definition families of the 21st century will use most frequently. In fact, the definition of the distant future may be closer to that of the distant past—if families of the year 1000 even thought to define themselves.

“Family” is God-ordained and self-defining. Given enough latitude, of course, anyone can define family. However, I like Christian author Gary Smalley's definition of a healthy family which he says has six consistent elements:

1. Members exhibit a high degree of appreciation for each other.
2. They spend considerable time together.
3. There is open communication among members.
4. They share a strong sense of mutual commitment.
5. Their common life is marked by a high degree of spiritual orientation. And
6. They are able to deal with crisis in a positive, constructive manner.

Especially note numbers 2 and 3—time together and communication. They are interrelated, and if your family members are going to be something more than boarders in a shared building, you have to make time and communication a priority.

If parents deprive each other and their children of face-to-face time so that they can work night and day to provide “things,” they may find no one there when they have “arrived.”

Family therapy textbooks recognize these elements in any unit defined as a “family:”

1. Rules
2. Roles
3. Boundaries
4. Distribution of power
5. Communication, in some form, among members.

It is virtually impossible to arrive at a definition of family that is universally accepted. In our Christian context, family includes a caring adult or adults who strive to raise children in a safe, wholesome environment in which they can thrive and come to know the God who created them and who loves them.

Of course you can have a family unit with two adults, who are neither parents nor intend to become parents. This contributes to the difficulty of defining family. Twenty-first century social scientists will struggle with definitions of family that don't necessarily include more than one adult, or whose members are of a single generation.

In America, "family" enjoys certain legal and tax benefits. Is the day upon us when *anyone* can claim himself/herself or a friendship group as a "family" and thus qualify for insurance and tax considerations, or claim discrimination if they are denied?

In my present position of Christian ministry to families, we've had to expand our definition of "family" beyond the immediate circle of parents and children, to include relatives at any distance who are involved in the lives of the children we serve. An uncle in Baltimore may be more "family" than is a local dad who refuses to be involved with his child.

However you define it, "family" is society's basic building block.

The media depict very few whole, healthy families in the sense that tradition defines them—loving married male and female parents in a home, caring for each other and mutually nurturing their children in a family relationship characterized by commitment and sacrifice.

When such families are portrayed, they often are the objects of ridicule or disdain. Plainly, healthy families have disappeared as an entertainment concept, but they are only out of vogue in the minds of media executives who seem to think that the only things that sell are sex and violence. Heartwarming stories of family life—particularly those showing families overcoming challenges—seem never to fail to find wide acceptance.

It is the powerful pull of family members toward each other that keeps our society from simply flying off the face of the earth under the centrifugal forces of a culture spinning out of control.

With all the negatives, is there still hope for families? Yes! I'm genuinely enthusiastic about new millennium families. I believe they can soar above the coming flood of change. Here are a few reasons for my optimism.

1. The Family is God's creation. Who would give up hope in something God has created? That's why those who serve God through specialized ministries to children see every child not as a problem child, but as a child with problems. We don't abandon hope. Each child, and each family, was intentionally formed by a loving and just God and is a part of God's plan.

God created man and woman, and joined them together, for fellowship and for family.

2. God is still in control. Although evil abounds in the world and the world is clearly in bad shape, the Bible teach-

es us that God is in control. The sun rising this morning told me the same thing, as did children waiting at the bus stop, the dogwoods blooming in season, and my dog licking my hand.

There is order in the world. While bad things will always happen, God's natural order moves time and space in a consistent pattern. Love begets love; justice issues in justice; smiles multiply; consistency in child rearing is rewarded; hugs melt defiance; tomorrow will come.

As we crest the new millennium, the measuring rod of all history remains the same. God is still in control.

3. There are family units modeling healthy families and children are paying attention. Look around. Someone you know is holding to a standard that promises positive results. Kids on the honor roll are volunteering at the hospital, studying in the library, sacrificing summers in volunteer missions, and working hard at home, school, and church. Parents are diligent in their duties, delaying selfish goals, leading young people as volunteers in school, in church, and in neighborhoods. Someone is modeling and encouraging that behavior. This tells us that the standards and values are not lost.

Support young families in their efforts. If your family is solid, mentor a young couple just starting out. Have them in your home. Take them an unexpected present. Help that family anticipate the rough spots and be there for them to steady their boat.

4. The very flux and turmoil of the American family in this transitional epoch provides opportunity for the next great step forward as adults react to the disorder around them by making the creation of a healthy family a priority. Life and its elements undergo swings to the extremes. Since the American family seems near the peak of the negative extreme, the pendulum should soon begin swinging the other way. Who would have thought the longhaired tie-dyed shirt and bell-bottom-jeans-wearing protesters of the 1960s would become conservative businesspeople driving a booming new millennium economy? Who would have thought their children would be more conservative than their parents?

5. The Church hasn't given up. Churches are striving to provide positive answers to the question, "What can be done for our children?" without succumbing to the notion that church is just for children.

Many parents seek a "positive socialization and values education" for their children. The best answer lies in their response to the question, "What can the church do to help parents enjoy a close, personal, meaningful relationship with God?"

Churches are ideally pro-family. Clergy know that the most positive way to support the family is to provide each member with a nurturing circle of spiritual friends who can encourage, challenge, and support their common journey toward God and the doing of his will.

The church is now more accepting of "flawed" families than in the past, making it more willing and more able to

minister to hurting families. Not long ago, divorced persons often felt cast out from the church. Today churches are taking the lead in divorce recovery, single parent classes, day care, job-networking groups, physical fitness to go with spiritual fitness, marriage retreats, couple times, and classes to help adults gain parenting skills.

Because the church has the answer to all questions of ultimate significance in the person of Jesus Christ, it is sometime slow to respond to new questions. But family issues light up the night sky like the “rocket’s red glare.” When “dawn’s early light” breaks, the faithful church will seek to be equipped and found standing by the shore, ready to carry on in redemptive witness and ministry.

6. Family support organizations exist to help. Dozens of family help organizations exist to help and preserve families.

Child care agencies across the land have expanded services to families. They consider themselves to be “child centered, family focused.”

Children come into their care because issues of abuse, neglect, abandonment, rebellion, death, and broken marriages have forced the family to separate. While child care workers in the cottages help the children work through their issues and deal with their part of the problem, social workers deal with other members of the family to help them resolve the issue for which they have special responsibility.

When the children in their care meet their goals, they are able to return to a family that has become healthier than when the children left it. Other organizations the world over are working to help families succeed.

Four basic assumptions stand out:

1. People want to change for the better.
2. Other people can help people change.
3. As an individual, “I” can help people change.
4. Jesus Christ is the source of all positive change.

Can we see ourselves in this picture? As fewer people throw up their hands over the way things are, and more people roll up their sleeves to change the way things are, we can become more encouraged about the future of families.

A family is an organism, a living, breathing entity with a life to preserve, a future to secure, a destiny to claim. God is in control. The believer’s hopes, dreams, and convictions are positive.

New Millennium Families under God’s leadership can soar above the swelling flood of change. ■

Watching the World Go By

Idealists in a Hurry

By Ralph Lynn

[Dr. Ralph Lynn is retired as a History professor at Baylor University and is a regular contributor to Christian Ethics Today.]

My favorite definition of revolutionaries fits the Moral Majority-Christian Coalition-Religious Right perfectly: “idealists in a hurry.”

The idealists’ hurry leads them to use the methods of the world they condemn. The Religious Right’s efforts have failed for this reason—and one more. They have never understood and accepted the realities of the world they seek to transform.

A new book, *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?*, by a pair of disillusioned, repentant, nostalgic idealist-revolutionaries, Ed Dobson and the more widely known Cal Thomas, tells their story.

Ed Dobson is not to be confused with Dr. James Dobson, the president of Focus on the Family, an even less responsible organization than any ever launched and supported by Jerry Falwell, for whom both Ed Dobson and Cal Thomas once worked.

Ed Dobson, now the pastor of a church in Grand Rapids, is an immigrant from Northern Ireland where, one would think, he might have learned that dogmatic religion and doctrinaire politics make a most dangerous mixture.

On the religious-political hustings, one of Dobson’s best lines is, “God is neither a Democrat or Republican—and he is sure not a Democrat.”

Thomas can be astonishingly frank. He observes that, despite the Religious Right’s best efforts for twenty years, “The moral landscape of America has become worse.”

Even more astonishing, he admits that in the earlier days of the Christian Right, “It wasn’t big government itself that was evil. Our primary job objection was that we weren’t running it.”

Both Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson indulge in memories of the past. Two sentences illustrate Thomas’ stance. “The Reagan-Bush landslide in 1980 was the greatest moment of opportunity for conservative Christians in this century. We had been disgraced at the Scopes (evolution) trial; but we were vindicated.”

Ed Dobson is similarly disillusioned, repentant, and nostalgic. He harks back to the failure of conservative Christian movements: “The leaders of the temperance movement expected the government to do the work of the church.” (He might have pointed out a practical flaw in the work of the

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Religious Liberty: A Heritage at Stake

By Paul D. Simmons

[Paul D. Simmons, is Clinical Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Louisville School of Medicine. He is also Adjunct Professor at the Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. He served as professor of Christian Ethics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, for twenty-three years. He has been pastor of churches in Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee and leads conferences on issues in medical ethics, sexuality and the family, and human rights. He is author of *Birth and Death: Bioethical Decision Making* (Westminster, 1983) and *Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue* (Prometheus, 2000). This material was first presented as the Howard Spell Lectures at Mississippi College and after various reprintings has now been revised and updated.]

Freedom loving Americans take justifiable pride in celebrating the religious liberties assured by the First Amendment. Such freedoms should not be taken for granted. They were a long time in being fashioned but are under constant assault from opponents motivated by opportunism and/or ideology. A brief history of religious liberty is a reminder of the tortured story of this treasured heritage.

On October 15, 1573 in Antwerp, Belgium, the Inquisition was in full swing. A woman named Maeyken Wens was arrested and tortured. Her tongue was then screwed to her upper palate so she could not witness to her faith while she was hauled in a cart to the place where the sentence was carried out. She was burned at the stake.

What was her crime? What violation of law had she committed for which she was now suffering the ultimate punishment? She preached the Gospel as she understood it from her personal readings of the New Testament.

The Inquisitor had found her guilty of heresy, impiety, and disobedience to the Roman Catholic "Mother Church." And for that, the government put her to death. There was no separation of church and state. "God" was directly related to the affairs of government. Catholic doctrine was imposed by law.

Religious liberty was only a dream. It was put to the torch as they burned Maeyken Wens, an Anabaptist mother of nine.

A century later (1672) in Bedford, England, a gentle woman pled her case before the judge. Her request was simply that her husband be released from jail. He was now in his twelfth year without a trial.

Her husband was John Bunyan. His crime was that he had disobeyed the Queen's orders to stop preaching Baptist doc-

trines and beliefs. There was no room for dissent from orthodox Anglican doctrine in England. Bunyan served a total of 14 years in prison for insisting on freedom of conscience in religious matters. His imprisonment was interrupted for a time when his wife appealed to the sympathetic judge.

The fires of religious intolerance still burned in England. An official church and its "Act of Intolerance" forbade any religious witness not approved by the Crown. Bunyan died in 1688.

Nearly a century later, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, a dramatic conversation took place between neighbors in Orange County. They were James Madison and John Leland. The subject was the established church of Virginia. The Baptists felt it unjust that they should be taxed to pay the salaries of Anglican priests and support the work of a church with whom they had strong religious differences.

A political consensus was apparently reached. Leland would withdraw his opposition to Madison and Baptists would support the Jefferson-Madison efforts to disestablish religion in Virginia, and to assure religious liberty in the Constitutional Congress. Virginia approved a declaration of religious liberty in January, 1786, and the Constitutional Congress followed suit under the leadership of Madison and Jefferson who later spoke eloquently of a "wall of separation" that should exist between church and state.

A Free Church in a Free State

Maeyken Wens had not died in vain. John Bunyan's imprisonment had been redemptive. From the blood, tears, ashes and prayers of those who had suffered so brutally for insisting on liberties of the mind and conscience, a new era came into being. A new relation between church and state without parallel in other countries of the world was being implemented in America.

States slowly but wisely adopted the new Amendment. Connecticut dropped its established church in 1818 and Massachusetts in 1833. That new vision was taking hold in the community of states that was to assure that ancient patterns of oppression and evil alliances would not be repeated in America. Three patterns were clearly rejected.

First, in this new republic there would be no dominant church over state. The Holy Roman Empire was dead. It would not extend its evil collusion of church and government into this "kingdom by the sea."

Second, gone were the days when the King could control a subservient church. King Henry VIII had only reversed the

political alliance he saw in Rome. With Thomas Hobbes, he felt the state should control the church.

Third, the theocratic vision of Puritan New England was also rejected. In America citizenship would in no way be linked to orthodox religious believers, whether Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Puritan.

A New Vision had been born—a Free Church in a Free State. An amendment was added to the Constitution of this new and different land: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

This simple but profoundly important amendment was intended to guarantee that:

- Congress would make no religious group or church the established or favored or official church for the nation;
- Citizens would not be required to pay taxes to support any religious establishment; the various religious groups would be free to support themselves by their own constituents, but government funds would not be used to support religious causes or institutions;
- Congress or government officials would not interfere in doctrinal disputes; no religious dogma would be made law for everyone; nor would anyone be forced to live by any particular doctrine;
- Dissent on religious opinion could not become the basis of criminal prosecution;
- Government would not interfere with religious exercises; it would occupy itself with maintaining domestic tranquility and defending the country against enemies both domestic and foreign;
- The people would be free to be religious or not religious; the power of government could not be used to force religious practice or doctrine upon anyone. Religion was to be purely voluntary. Government could use its coercive powers only for the interests of state; it would not attempt to be a religious body; prayer and doctrine are not in its jurisdiction.

By this Amendment, a new relation between religion and politics was fashioned. Gone was the fear of the executioner's gibbet for heresy; gone were the tears of broken homes and tortured bodies for those who dared dissent; gone were the days of paying taxes through government channels to support religious causes.

The task of government was to preserve and protect this arrangement of religious and secular affairs. The courts were appointed guardians to assure strict adherence to the “wall of separation” that should exist between the powers of church and those of the state. Congress was carefully restricted in the types of law that could be imposed upon the citizenry—no dogma could be camouflaged as law—even under the guise of majority opinion.

Religious liberty was given birth. A glad and glorious era was conceived and brought forth in this new land. A witness was raised to all the world that drawing a firm line between the interests of government and those of institutional religion would best protect the uniqueness and value of each. Religious

groups like the Baptists and Methodists and free-thinkers like Madison and Jefferson believed that liberty in religion would better assure the freedoms of government and civil co-existence in a pluralist society.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION meant that government could not coerce people of faith to conform to regulations in doctrine, morals or polity not of their church's own making.

FREEDOM FOR RELIGION meant that religious leaders were free to speak their mind, even criticizing policies and practices of government without fear of civil punishment or retribution.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION candidly recognized that even atheists have rights of conscience in a free and pluralistic society. Government would also protect the rights of those who preferred no religion at all.

Religious Freedom—A Fragile Possession

A Social Contract of toleration, respect, and acceptance of various religious traditions and doctrinal persuasions was fashioned and accepted by all groups consenting to the new Constitution.

The covenant was dearly won. But religious liberty and the tolerance it requires between and among the various faith traditions was and is a fragile possession. Its protections lie in the First Amendment, an informed Supreme Court and judicial system, a friendly and supportive Congress and Executive branch of government, and the mutual agreements of the various denominations in America.

Over two hundred years after that precarious agreement, we are now testing whether it can survive a new assault and assure our children of the liberties thus far enjoyed but too often simply taken for granted. New alliances have emerged that threaten the guarantees which are at the heart of the First Amendment. Religious Liberty is under fire.

The “Free Church in a Free State” idea has probably always been a minority opinion in America. Now the church-over-staters, the state-over-churchers, the Puritan theocrats, and a variety of politicians who care little for religion but a great deal about personal power are working feverishly to erase the protections and privileges of separation of church from state.

Fundamentalist or Evangelical Christians whose roots are in Puritan New England are trying to exploit newly-organized political power in Washington. Pat Robertson with his Christian Coalition intends to name the next president of the United States and to influence if not control the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court. The Religious Right wants America to be a theocracy with civil and religious morality intertwined. They seek to impose their moral and doctrinal opinions on everyone. They would make us all free to believe just as they do. The Puritan preacher was a stern moralist who believed that the laity, mere mortals, could never decide rightly before God. Only the clergy had such authority from God. Playing God, judging the laity, and ordering the magistrate to pass laws to serve righteousness and assure doctrinal fidelity was God's will for the Puritan preacher, or so they believed.

Religious Liberty Under Fire

The long line from Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards now includes Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Dobson and other Fundamentalists who seek political power “in the name of God.” Falwell believes God has called him to reform America in the Puritan image. As he once said: “I have a divine mandate to go right into the halls of Congress and fight for laws that will save America. He has called me to this action.”

The mentality that blended religion and politics is precisely what drove Roger Williams out of Massachusetts and into the wilderness with the Indians during the frigid winter of 1635. The land he purchased became the Colony of Rhode Island, which became a bastion of religious freedom. No matter whether one was Catholic, Jew, Protestant, Muslim, or an atheist, one was free to follow the dictates of one’s own conscience. The First Amendment to the Constitution followed the Rhode Island example.

The Puritans among us would still suppress dissent, control our thoughts and freedom of expression, muzzle our minds and ban our books. They still insist on doctrinal creeds and conformity to their own moralistic codes. Puritanism we have with us always; it lives to kill the freedom of the human spirit in the name of “Christian orthodoxy.” Soul competence and freedom of conscience have never been tenets of Puritan theology. The Fundamentalists are putting religious liberty under fire.

Politically, the evangelical fervor is organized into a powerful rightwing movement. The coalition supports ultra-conservative causes and political leaders. The coalition is broad enough to include certain Protestants, the National Council of Catholic Bishops, and others who share their radical socio/religious agenda. The fiery rhetoric of “culture wars” and the belligerence of an absolutist mindset typify the style and strategy of the religious right. Politicians such as Pat Buchanan, Steve Forbes, Lamar Alexander and Gary Bauer openly solicit the favor of this reactionary movement by supporting policies that are inimical to the First Amendment:

- Tuition tax credits and school vouchers are sought under the guise of “choice” and quality education and would in effect provide public funding for religious education;
- The traditional Roman Catholic approach to family planning has dictated federal regulations domestically and in our nation’s foreign policy;
- A proposed ban on abortion has wide support in Congress and in state legislatures based on Roman Catholic dogma, a doctrine that one is a person “from the moment of conception” which is odious doctrine to many Protestants, American Catholics, and Jews.
- Barriers to abortion are imposed by many states which penalize women whose faith tradition and religious convictions support their decision to terminate a problem pregnancy.
- Requirements for mandated prayer in the public schools continue to be proposed at both state and national levels; and,

- Continued efforts to pass an Amendment to the Constitution declaring that “America is a Christian nation.”

The Constitution assures us that Congress should make no law governing religious matters. Prayer is the business of the church; it is entirely voluntary and should not be used to badger or harass people with different religious perspectives. The coercive arm of government does not belong in the religious arena.

William Bennett, Former Secretary of Education and now active in the Religious Right argues that “freedom of religion is being destroyed” by those who oppose government-mandated prayers and tuition tax credits. His “values in education” agenda is strongly committed to breaking down the wall of separation between church and state. He believes religion will not survive if government does not subsidize the educational and missionary enterprises of the churches.

To the contrary, religion in America has never, does not now and will not in the future depend upon government subsidies to survive. Only those theocrats and church-over-staters who believe government *should* finance religious affairs believe otherwise. Their ideology, self-interest and tradition seem clearly evident. Those who say that separation of church and state is supported only by secularists are sadly mistaken. It was given birth and is strongly supported by those of the free church tradition.

Former U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese led repeated attacks on the Supreme Court which were thinly-disguised attacks on religious liberty. He advocated government-mandated prayer in good theocratic or church-state collusion fashion, and screened candidates for federal judgeships who met his religious “litmus test.” Judge Roy Moore of Alabama, who had prayers and posted the Ten Commandments in his Courtroom in violation of the Supreme Court’s rulings, was a Meese choice. Moore was joined in his crusade by then-governor Fob James who threatened to call out the National Guard if anyone attempted to remove the Decalogue from the courtroom.

Bennett and others are right to say that the Judeo-Christian tradition has made a vital contribution to American government. But that contribution is best seen and experienced in one word—freedom. That means freedom from coercion by government in religious matters; freedom from doctrinal orthodoxy imposed by legislative fiat; and freedom from state financial support for religious enterprises.

Speaking Up for the First Amendment

All political leaders need a good course in American history taught by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. The text could be *The Federalist Papers*. And if they are genuinely interested in religious liberty, let them learn from those who suffered, bled, and died to win that First Amendment guarantee. Let them listen to Maeyken Wens, John Bunyan, John Leland, Isaac Backus, and uncounted others! Let them listen to the cries of those children who suffered when their parents were

imprisoned, tortured, or burned at the stake. Let them listen to the moans and prayers of those who cried for liberty from prison cells.

Those who suffered for religious liberty did not need, and we do not want, kings or parliaments, presidents or Congress to tell us we must pray. Politicians need to pray for themselves and by example show the power of prayer to overcome personal prejudice and the arrogant misuse of political power. When they learn the stern lesson of voluntarism in religion, they will begin to understand the First Amendment.

Until they do, those blessed heirs of Williams, Leland, Jefferson and Madison ought to band together, not only to pray for Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court, but to insist that they respect and protect our rights to religious liberty.

Thomas Jefferson once vowed to maintain eternal vigilance and wage constant war against every tyranny over the human mind. Our spirits, our consciences, and our minds are in jeopardy of an old tyranny, church-state union in a new disguise. It seems clear that those politicians and religious charlatans speaking most about the danger to religious liberty are the biggest threat to that precious freedom. Let not the misguided, the ignorant, and the demagogues rule the day.

The time has come to say "NO" to further assaults on the wall of separation between church and state. With our cards and letters, our telephone calls, our personal influence, and our votes, let us stand for religious liberty.

And there is Scripture for this. Hear the word of God proclaimed by Baptists and others who died for the right to be heard by presidents and parishioners alike:

"For freedom Christ has set us free: stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). ■

Idealists in a Hurry

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Women's Christian Temperance Union; they were less interested in temperance than in outright, total prohibition.)

Dobson is sometimes the master of understatement: "When religion and politics are one and the same, the situation tends toward intolerance."

All this reveals the past. What do Dobson and Thomas propose now that they have renounced the past?

Not surprisingly, they have difficulty in stating clearly the new strategies and tactics they favor.

Thomas resorts to cryptic rhetoric: they are not quitting the battle but planning to "use better weapons, superior battle plans, and a far better Commander-in-Chief than any candidate for high political office."

Dobson says that "he can do nothing more nor less than to preach the gospel and love the people."

These prescriptions appear to offer little but nostalgia for "the old time religion" which itself had a serious flaw. In hindsight, it seems that even the old time religious leaders should have understood that the "converted" would be unlikely to seek to apply the social teachings of the gospel in worldly affairs unless they were taught to do so, encouraged to do so, and patiently led to do so.

Unfortunately, on the current religious scene, Ed Dobson and Cal Thomas are not alone in being sadly oblivious to this flaw.

God's word to the prophet Isaiah comes to mind, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" to fix the flaw. ■



THE CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS AT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

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

CHRONOLOGY

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

TRUSTEES

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SUPPORT

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

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE

- Greatly needed
- Urgently solicited
- Genuinely appreciated

OBJECTIVES

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

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

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

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

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