

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

AGGREGATE ISSUE 27

APRIL 2000

Memory and Hope *Foy Valentine*

Be Hearers of the Word and Not Doers Only *Ralph Wood*

The Problem With Game Show Marriages *James C. Denison*

I Think We Need to See a Therapist *Hal Haralson*

Teacher *Roger Lovette*

Four Poems *Kenneth Chafin*

Shall We Give Citizenship to Fertilized Eggs? *John M. Swomley*

An Unnoticed Life Changing Moment *R. Hal Ritter, Jr.*

Reflection on Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom *Bruce McIver*

The Radical Right: Whither? *Franklin Littell*

KUDZU *Doug Marlette*

Memory and Hope

By Foy Valentine

[These remarks were made on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas on Monday evening, February 28, 2000, at the Park Cities Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas.]

Thank you. It is good to be introduced by a man with a glib tongue, a vivid imagination, and an elastic conscience.

This is the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. It is an occasion of very special significance to most of us in this room and especially to those of us who have been involved in it from the first day until now. Lord Acton rightly said, however, that “no awe surrounds institutions of which all have seen the beginning, and which many helped to make.” So, forgive me for saying up front that this king, even after 50 years, still doesn’t have much clothes. (The establishment is everlastingly determined to do us the great favor of not stifling our creativity with the tranquilizer of affluence.) So, it is not awe that I bring to this occasion tonight. It is *astonishment*. Astonishment, and wonder, and amazement, and delight at the ways of a Kindly Providence, the grace of God.

Phil Strickland said 15 minutes. 15 measly minutes. And after all I’ve done for him. (Hillel said, however, that we ought to expound all of Torah while standing on one foot and then honoring the rest as commentary.) Well. I *may* quit on time. But I plan to be awfully bitter.

We are gathered under the banner, Memory and Hope.

As the lead dog on this sled team—think about it—I ask you to focus your attention with me first on Memory. And then I ask you to join me in a brief gallop toward Hope. Bear in mind that I am an old man, biblically authorized to dream dreams—dreams that envision the fleshing out of our visions. Dreams and visions of Promise. Dreams and visions of Hope. Dreams and visions of Fulfillment. Dreams and visions of Blessing far beyond what we know to ask or think.

When Marcel Proust wrote his seven part magnum opus, *Remembrance of Things Past*, he touched the chord I now want to touch.

Remembrance is a special gift from God; and remembrance is a discipline to which we submit with profit.

It was for remembrance that God expected the Jews to go up to Jerusalem at the Passover to remember God’s grace in delivering them from the grim visitation of the Death Angel; it was for remembrance that the Jews were instructed to observe the Feast of Tabernacles as they recalled God’s grace given through forty years of wilderness wanderings; and it was for remembrance that the Jews were instructed to keep the Feast of Pentecost as a reminder of God’s grace in providing His people with sustenance for the necessities of life.

And it was for remembrance of our Lord’s supreme sacrifice that the church was given the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper—“This do in remembrance of me”; and it was for remembrance of His death, and burial, and resurrection that the ordinance of baptism was given and is still faithfully observed.

So, tonight we remember. It is good. And it is good for us.

I remember how inordinately pleased I was, a 29-year old callow youth, to be elected in 1952 to the Christian Life Commission’s official board, coming home to Mary Louise in the parsonage of the First Baptist Church of Gonzales in a state of euphoric elation to share this fantastic good news.

I remember Dr. A. C. Miller, the Christian Life Commission’s first director. He was a man of character, integrity, commitment, courage, intelligence, and honesty; and he had an incurable case of authentic religion. He liked his chili hot, his heroes human, and the truth with the bark on it. He was a lot like Moses who at 120 years of age had it said of him that his eye was not dimmed and that his natural strength was not abated. Tonight we rise up to call him blessed.

I remember how hotly I wanted to be in the Christian Life Commission harness when Dr. J. Howard Williams first talked to me in 1952 about becoming the Commission’s new Director after Dr. Miller had moved to Nashville—and then how torn I was about or not actually to take the job when he asked me to do it.

I remember how eagerly and with what clear vision and prophetic leadership Dr. Williams wanted to see the fledgling Christian Life Commission succeed, to do well, to realize its full potential, and to help Baptists, as he often said, “where the water hits the wheel.”

And then after I prayerfully and with uncharacteristic trep-

Editor: Foy Valentine

Publisher: The Center for Christian Ethics

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY is published spasmodically, as funding and energy permit, by the Center for Christian Ethics, Post Office Box 670784, Dallas, Texas 75367-0784. Phone (972) 404-0070 or (972) 404-0050. Produced in the United States of America. Third class postage paid at Dallas, Texas.

idation finally decided to accept the call to become the Christian Life Commission director, I remember the mounting excitement and unvarnished thrill I experienced as I moved with Mary Louise and our little girl, Jean, then 4 years old, to Dallas and this new task.

I remember how diligently and how hard the Christian Life Commission members worked to release our *tsunami* of Christian ethics on Baptists who in the middle 1950s, in the fullness of time, seemed ready to ride this tidal wave with us. There were T. B. Maston, Orba Lee Malone, Herbert Howard, Frank Pool, Arthur Rutledge, John Bagwell, Harold Basden, W.F. Howard, Jimmy Allen, and many more like them, all with hearts aflame with the power of an idea whose time had come. These were God's anointed who understood what Aristophanes in *The Clouds* was talking about when he had Socrates to say, "If you try to keep your feet on the ground, you never discover anything; gravity draws at the juices of the brain" (228-234).

I remember how carefully and meticulously we labored in those early days over our literature which we were offering to Baptists, some of which is as relevant and useful and needed today as when we first hammered it out with conviction, heat, unbridled aggression, and near violence. I recall no Commission member who struck me as being afflicted with the tiniest bit of timidity or self-doubt. There were, however, occasional lapses of slack-jawed stupefaction. (One Commissioner once tried to persuade us to crusade against occasionally undressed mannikins in downtown Dallas store windows. No man among us had a firmer grasp of the obvious.) And still another Commissioner, when I wanted to name a series of pamphlets "What It Means to Be a Christian" in family life, citizenship, daily work, race relations, and so forth argued heatedly that what he thought and said and did about race relations had absolutely nothing to do with Christianity. His name was Legion. Still is. Indeed while history was fashioning a disorderly, dysfunctional, and ambiguous spectacle on many fronts, we sometimes had meetings that were wracked by spasms of inanity so that we ourselves contributed our fair share to all that dysfunction, which is to say a right smart.

I remember how stalwart E. S. James courageously stood with us and encouraged us and befriended us, a tower of strength; the soul of integrity, and "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

I remember how Dr. Forrest Feezor stood tall when the foxes tried to gnaw our tender grapes. (That is a biblical figure for any here, who may not know because of having been so preoccupied with arguing about the inerrancy of the original autographs that they have had no time actually to read the Bible.) Well, it seems that a carload of Baptist Building divines (so to speak) went to Howard Payne one night to give the ministerial students there a dose of indoctrination, thus extracting a horrible price for their tuition partly paid by Texas Baptists. A student asked where Baptists came from. No answer was offered by the alleged divines. When the silence became awk-

ward and then painful, I told him. On the way home, I found that Dr. T. C. Gardner and Dr. A. B. White were not exactly elated with my response. The next day the two of them arranged an emergency meeting with Dr. Feezor to prefer charges against me. "We have a heretic in this Building," they said. He asked them to explain. When they had bared the awful truth that I did not believe you could trace us back in a line of unbroken succession to John the Baptist, that I did not share their readiness to quit preaching if I did not believe that the one who baptized me had ultimately been baptized by John, Dr. Feezor leaned back in his chair and said, "Well, brethren, I believe there are two heretics in this Building."

I remember how well and with what excellence the earliest Christian Life Commission associates, first Browning Ware and then Bill Pinson, represented the Commission and the cause of Christian ethics among Baptists and beyond. Browning Ware did observe that the only thing half time about this half-time job was the salary. And, Bill Pinson did once hold out vociferously for naming one of our pamphlet series, "Lip and Life."

I remember how pleased I was in 1955 when Bill Fallis at Broadman Press accepted the manuscript for *Christian Faith in Action*, the compilation of sermons preached mostly by our Commission members which really was the first book on Christian social ethics ever published by Broadman.

And I remember what wonderful, delightful fellowship we had in this Christian Life Commission company.

Sally Rogers was my secretary soon after I came to the Commission. Sally had just graduated from Baylor where she was a Baylor Beauty. She was from Athens in East Texas and spoke English without a trace of an accent. She was a free spirit who brought unbridled enthusiasm and overflowing happiness to our small shop. One day the phone rang; and, thinking it was Jerry Kolls calling her from the Student Department down the hall, she answered the phone call, "This is the Christian Life Commission. The Christian is out of town. This is the life of the Commission."

Later still another of Baylor's memorable gifts to the ongoing life and work of the Christian Life Commission, Leola LaGrone from Tahoka typed a letter from me in which I had dictated a note to the effect that we had finally got the garbed nuns out of the public schools in Bremond. Leola's typed version came out, "We have finally got the grabbed nuns out of the public schools in Bremond."

And it was Leola who did a P.S. to a letter I had written when we finished building our cabin at Red River, New Mexico, saying, "Everything is finished but the fireplace and the skeptic tank."

Festivity has been a Christian Life Commission signature. It beats crying. Please keep looking up. There must be a pony around here somewhere.

And now for a word of hope.

What word shall I speak?

Well. We have come down some crooked lanes and

(continued on page 20)

Be Ye Hearers of the Word and Not Doers Only: Romans 10:14-17

By Ralph C. Wood

[The following three sermons and lectures were prepared by Dr. Ralph C. Wood for the Warren Carr Preaching series at the First Baptist Church of Elkin, North Carolina. Since the three are a well-connected unit, they are presented here together. Dr. Wood is now University Professor at Baylor University.]

This series of sermons and lectures in honor of Warren Carr has been established in the conviction that we live amidst a great famine of the Word. We are a famished people because there is so very little preaching and hearing of the Gospel. This may seem to be a strange claim. Our churches as well as our television stations and our radio networks seem quite well-nourished with preachers. Indeed, we are bloated with them. Yet for all our religious fatness, we remain a skinny, even an emaciated people. We are anorexics and bulimics of the Word. We stuff ourselves with preaching, but then we put our finger down our throat in sickness at these thousands of words which are no real Word.

This anorexia and bulimia of the Word marks our great divide from Jesus himself. He was physically famished after his forty days of temptation in the Wilderness. Satan promised him power to turn the desert stones into nourishing bread, if only he would bow down and worship the Prince of this world. Jesus replied that there is a starvation far worse than having nothing to eat. He tells the devil that men will die if they try to survive on the foodstuffs of the world. Only the Word that proceeds from God will nourish of our souls. Eight centuries earlier, the Hebrew prophet Amos made a similar prediction of our late 20th century condition. Amos prophesied that God would send a time of dearth and drought on sinful Israel. It would be a famine that would make mere hunger and thirst seem nourishing. God would unleash, instead, a famine that would devastate his people at their very core: a famine of "hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11).

I believe that something similar has happened in our time. I believe that God has sent a terrible famine of the Word. Why would the good God do so horrible a thing? Why would He prevent the hearing of his Word? God is no capricious and arbitrary deity who acts without reason, much less a monster-god who delights in our misery, tearing the wings off flies to see them squirm. As always, God acts for our good, even when his actions seem hurtful. He sometimes takes good things away from us to awaken us to their real value and thus to prompt our eager return to them. We often learn the

privilege of health only when we've fallen sick, the value of money when we've gone broke, the sweetness of victory when we have suffered the bitterness of defeat, the blessedness of hearing when we've become deaf. The 19th century Danish poet and prophet Søren Kierkegaard explained the matter well. He declared that God would take the Gospel away from Europe—and America, we would add—as the final way to convince us of its truth. I believe that Kierkegaard has proved right: God is deliberately starving his churches and his people in order that we might learn to feast upon his true Food. My purpose in this sermon is to identify the reasons for this awful famine that God has sent upon us, this awful famine of the Word. For if we can discern why we have grown deaf to the voice of God, we might yet again become hearers of his holy Word. In religion as in medicine, diagnosis is two-thirds of the cure.

We Are Too Busy Doing

In Romans 10, the Apostle Paul wrestles with the problem of his own people's deafness to the Word: why his fellow Jews refused to receive Jesus as the Anointed of God—as the Messiah of Israel and thus of the whole world. Paul poignantly confesses, in the very first verse, that "my heart's desire and prayer is that [Israel] may be saved." Earlier Paul has admitted, in one of the darkest lines in all Scripture, that he would be willing to be damned if Israel could be brought to redemption (9:3). His people have rejected Christ, Paul says, not because they are so wicked but because they are so good. This is usually the case: we are undone by our virtues far more than our vices. We sin against God and man more often through our strengths than our weaknesses. The intelligent person looks with scorn on the stupid, the courageous man despises the cowardly, the beautiful woman has contempt for the ugly. Our blessings become our curses.

So it was with ancient Israel: she became deaf to God's Word precisely because of her obedience to the Law. God had given his elect Nation the precious gift of the Law to be the means of her salvation. Unlike all other races, Israel was set apart as the one People whom He would graciously enable to live in faithful obedience to the Law. Thus would Israel become ever more reliant on God, since the Law could be fulfilled only through the Covenant of forgiveness that God had made with her. Israel could not keep the Law of her own accord, but only by means of God's own goodness and power. This explains, by the way, why an Alabama judge is wrong to

think that posting the Ten Commandments on his courtroom wall will make the people there more righteous. It may have the opposite and terrible effect of making them self-righteous. For if we think we can make the state do the work of the church, as if we could obey God's Law by our own might—apart from the worship and service of Jesus Christ—then we are indeed damnably mistaken.

Israel made exactly this mistake. She came to regard the Law as something that she had to do, as an activity that she could undertake on her own. Israel could not hear the Word of God because she was so busy doing it. So it is with us. We Americans are nothing if not doers. This can-do spirit is our great national talent. Living in Europe will quickly make you wish you had someone who can do something and not just stand there. After spending a year in Italy, my family and students joked that the Italian national gesture is a quizzical shrug of the shoulders, and the national motto is *Forse domani*: perhaps tomorrow. Yet as I have said, our virtues become our vices. We Americans make long lists of things we have to do—as if the world would cease to turn if we stopped our desperate doing. Even middle-schoolers now carry calendars to keep up with their busy schedules. Parents wear themselves out running the taxi-service that takes their kids from one activity to the next. When we adults greet each other by asking how we have been, what do we nearly always reply? Exactly so: "Busy."

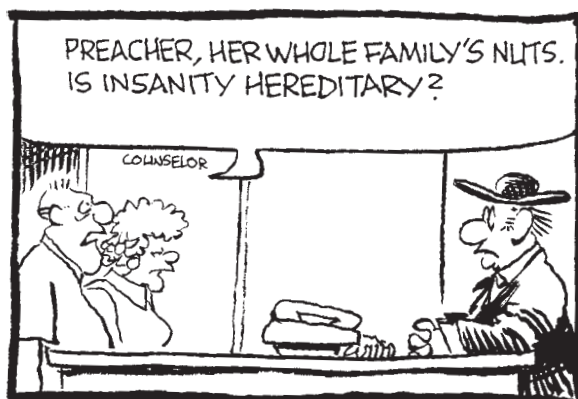
Our busyness comes in two kinds, the unworthy and the worthy. Our frenetic activity often constitutes a secret attempt to fill our emptiness. We hurry and scurry, lest we might have to stop and reflect upon the bustle of furious activity that we have become. Warren Carr taught me, early in my years at Wake Forest, that people always find time to do the things they really want to do. The 17th century French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal also saw how our busyness is a cover-up for some hidden malaise. "Most of the world's misery," said Pascal, "derives from our inability to sit still in our rooms." To sit still is to wait, to watch, to listen, to hear a surprising and uncomfortable word, perhaps even the Word of the Lord himself. I confess to being one who cannot sit still in my room: I have to be up and about, hurrying to and fro, wanting to get something done, and to get it

done not tomorrow but yesterday. Surely this fine line from Alice in Wonderland was meant for all of us: "Don't just do something; stand there!"

There is a second kind of busyness that is even more dangerous because its activities are constructive rather than self-interested and escapist. Surely you will ask what is wrong with constructive activity, especially when it occurs in the church? What is wrong with the father who gives up his entire weekend to work on a Habitat for Humanity house? What about the mother who surrenders her vacation week to accompany the young people of the church to summer camp? What about high school and college students who devote their spring break to helping storm victims clean up property devastated by tornado or hurricane? What about the family who is here every time the church doors open? Surely these are all worthy activities, and surely they are to be commended. Yet such noble doings are strangely dangerous. They threaten to become substitutes for what must always come prior to them: the hearing of God's Word. We should be active only and precisely because Christ acts, not in secret fear that God will do nothing unless we ourselves get busy.

I shall always remember, in this regard, an admission made by a middle-aged couple after I had lectured at a Presbyterian church in Pennsylvania. When I had finished my lecture, this husband and wife confessed that, if their marriage ever ends in divorce, they ought to sue their church—so totally have its activities consumed their lives. They have become such over-eager doers of the Word that they are in danger of not hearing God at all. Like many of us, they are doing themselves out of the Gospel—and perhaps out of their marriage as well.

My first call, therefore, is for us to slow down and to listen, to hear God's word before we too eagerly do it. Jesus Christ is the steady center of our lives, the stable stackpole around whom the harvested grain of our lives is to be gathered. He is not a helpless bystander to our furious activity, a mere hanger-on to our godless striving. We cannot work our way into the Kingdom, though we most certainly can work our way out of it. We are saved not by our works—not even by the noblest of activities—but by grace through faith, as hearers of the Word and not doers only.



We Are Too Noisy Talking

If busyness and activity are the first reason that God has sent a famine of the Word upon us, then our noisiness is surely the second. Ours is an age frightened of silence. We can't even shop in the stores, or be put on hold as we use the telephone, without the ever-present racket of Muzak in our ears. When I complained about the high-decibel background music in a local grocery store, the manager told me that it was required by company policy. We fear the prospect of being silent and alone with our thoughts, much less with our prayers. And so we fill our lives with constant noise. We leave the television on, even when we are not watching or listening to it. Young people turn up their car radios so loud that the whole machine shakes—as do all other cars in the vicinity—to the deafening erotic throb of the music. Yet we adults are no better able to withstand silence. Many of us now use sleep machines to make the soothing noises that help us drop off at night. How ironic that the silence which once was the precondition of sleep has now become its dread enemy!

Yet it is not only mechanical noises that make us very poor hearers of the Word. It is also our own noisy voices that silence the voice of God. We gab and rattle about everything and nothing. Again it was Søren Kierkegaard who gave the right name to our time when he called it the Talkative Age. He meant that, in our age, everyone has an opinion about nearly everything, but few of us have convictions about much of anything. We are eager to attitudinize about this and that, but we are reluctant to take a stand—to live and to die—for the sake of the Gospel. We can all give our opinion about Al Gore or George Bush, about Tiger Woods or Deion Sanders, about rock stars and movie stars. But when it comes to our convictions about Jesus Christ as God's saving Word incarnate, we hem and haw and stew and stumble. Or if we are professors or preachers, we are likely to chatter endlessly about those awful fundamentalists or those terrible liberals. Thus do we become noisy gongs and clanging cymbals—not only because we lack the love of God, but also because we have not listened to the God of love.

To hear God speak we must first fall silent. The Bible puts considerable emphasis on silence. Elijah hears the voice in God, not in the tornadic winds, not in the thunderous earthquake, not in the crackling and consuming fire. God speaks to Elijah out of the silence that enables him to hear “a still small voice” (I Kings 19:12). Because God does not shout, we must first be quiet if we are to hear his own quiet Word. “Be still, and know that I am God,” declares the Psalmist (46:10). Hebrew scholars tell me that this is a polite rendering of a rather harsh declaration that should better be translated, “Shut up, and listen to me.” To know that God is truly God—our Father, not our Daddy—we must first stop our mouths, sit still, and listen. St. Thomas Aquinas wisely declared that “Silence honors God.” When we are noisy, God refuses to speak. He sends, instead, a terrible silence of the Word. But when we stop prattling and rattling, God will

indeed speak. And when He speaks, He will enable us both to hear and to do His Word.

There Are Not Many Preachers of the Word

We fail to become hearers of the Word not only because we are too busy and too noisy, but also because there are not many preachers. Here, I believe, the fault lies less with us laypeople than with our ministers. To say that there are not many preachers may seem an odd claim. In the Baptist South, there often seem to be more preachers than believers. It is obvious that I am using the word in St. Paul's special sense when he says that “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ.” There are not many pastors who preach nothing but Jesus Christ and him nailed. Yes, there are many story-tellers who string together interesting narratives and call it preaching. Yes, there are many expositors who make verse-by-verse commentary on Scripture while the congregation faithfully takes notes, as if the church were a lecture-hall. Yes, there are many counselors who offer psychological help to the hurting, by feeling our pain and telling us how to accept our victimhood. Yes, there are a few social reformers who lead their churches to engage in worthy projects for the poor and the needy. Yet these are all preacherly substitutes for the proclamation of the Word, even as our own activism and noisiness are similar substitutes.

I receive occasional requests from Baptist churches to recommend preachers to fill their empty pulpits. It's always an embarrassing moment when I have to confess that I know only a handful of preachers. I quickly add that I know dozens of ministers who would make fine denominational servants and excellent administrators, who would visit in the hospitals and counsel the troubled, who would become well-regarded citizens of the community, who would join all the right civic clubs and be seen in all of the right places, who would smile a lot, shake a lot of hands, slap a lot of backs, and offend absolutely nobody. But one doesn't need to be a preacher to do any or even all of these things. I contend, on the contrary, that one had better not be a preacher if one believes that this is what it means to proclaim the Word. “How shall they hear without a preacher?” asks Paul. The answer is that God will send a famine of the Word against those who preach without having anything truly redemptive and revelatory to say—against those who preach without preaching the Gospel.

Who, then, is a true preacher of the Word? It is a man or a woman who has been encountered by the crucified and risen Christ, who has been saved by God's grace from all busy and noisy activity (albeit of the worthiest kind), who has been called and commissioned to announce the Only News that can redeem the world from sin, death, and the devil. True preachers of the Word are those men and women who wrestle daily with the dangerous God of the Gospel. Thus do they have a Word to declare which we can hear from no one else. They refuse to repeat the tired and boring (or even the fresh and interesting) truths that we can learn from television or from the public schools and the universities. They confront us

with the Good News that, while we were yet sinners, Christ has died for us, that he has risen from death's bonds to set us free from our busy and noisy lives, that he reigns at the right hand of God to put real life in us—new life, abundant life, eternal life.

With uncommon self-restraint, I have refrained from quoting the man whom this preaching series honors. Since nearly everything I know about the Gospel I have learned from him, this amounts to an almost miraculous silence. Yet I cannot end without this single personal reference. Warren told me recently that many people, especially those strange folks who calls themselves moderates, want to salute him for having been the first Southern Baptist pastor to ordain a woman to the Gospel ministry. They want also to honor him for having been one of the first Southern white preachers to insist that we must not deny black people their rightful place in society. Already in the 1950s Warren was preaching that Negroes are our fellow human beings created in the image of God, and also that most of them are our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. So it is with women: in Jesus Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female. In him alone are we all one. It is a gross sin against God, Warren preached, to exclude blacks and women from their rightful place in our churches and in our society. Warren Carr has been such a faithful doer of the Word because he first heard it.

Hugely important as the liberation of women and blacks remains, Warren confesses that this is not the thing that he most wants to be remembered for. He explained the matter recently by telling me about a phone call from a pastor in Charleston, South Carolina. This man had come under the influence of Warren's preaching many years ago, at the Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina. Through Warren's ministry there, he himself was called to become a minister of the Gospel, to proclaim and to enact the saving Word of God. "That," said Warren, "is the witness I hope to be remembered for." The preaching and the hearing of the Gospel redeems human life, Warren was confessing, as the grandest ethical ideals do not.

The liberation of women and blacks is hugely important, as is the overcoming of all the other sundry and sorry forms of oppression and self-absorption. But racial and gender justice will not endure forever. The one thing that remains the same yesterday, today, and forever is Jesus Christ: He is our only justice because He is our only mercy. God will lift our present famine of the Word, therefore, when we cease from our busyness and noisiness, when we sit still and listen to this one

Voice, and thus when we all become hearers and therefore doers of the Word.

The Sermon as the Center of Baptist Worship

I have argued that we live in a time of famine, a famine of the preaching and the hearing of God's Word. I have summoned us to be less busy doing and less noisy talking in order that we might become hearers of the Word, but that we will not be able to hear unless we have preachers who believe that their first and last call is to proclaim the Gospel. Everything else derives from this fundamental fact that we cannot hear and know Jesus Christ without the proclamation of his Word by authentic preachers: "How shall they hear without a preacher?" For this reason I hope that churches will learn to speak again of the Pulpit Committee rather than the Pastor Search Committee, since the pastor's many other responsibilities and privileges spring from and center upon this pulpit-act of preaching.

My aim in this lecture is to show that worship is the proper context for the hearing of God's Word, and that the sermon lies at the center of our worship as Baptists. This is not true for other traditions. Catholics and Orthodox, Episcopalians and even Lutherans, have a fixed liturgy as the heart of their worship. Like Methodists and Presbyterians, all these traditions also have the creeds to carry the weight of worship. We have no formally prescribed liturgy, and we do not recite the creeds. We often suffer, therefore, from a liturgical lack. Our services of worship frequently have a homemade air and rather crude quality about them. We need to do better by way of our pastoral prayers and congregational responses, so that they are not mere off-the-cuff effusions. Notice how predictable and trite most "spontaneous" prayers prove to be: "We thank Thee, O Lord, for the privilege of gathering in thy house on this beautiful day (even if it is raining cats and gerbils!) to worship Thee..." etc.

The congregation needs also to be carried into the presence of God by the choir's anthems and the congregation's singing. Worshipful music should thus complement the sermon rather than displacing it, as so often happens in our time. Our classic hymns must not be abandoned, chiefly because they serve as our Baptist creeds, the real carriers of our beliefs. When I find myself in a moment of extraordinary glory or terrible crisis, it is the hymns of Watts

*I hope that churches
will learn to speak
again of the Pulpit
Committee rather
than the Pastor
Search Committee,
since the pastor's
many other
responsibilities and
privileges spring from
and center upon
this pulpit-act
of preaching.*

and Wesley, of Fanny Crosby and B.B. McKinney, that come pouring forth. "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," "I Know Whom I Have Believed," "O Jesus, I Have Promised," "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," "On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand." This explains why the displacement of traditional hymns by so-called praise music has such deadly theological consequence. Our people will eventually come to have a faith, I fear, that is as trite as our music. True preaching, by contrast, should always find its appropriate echo and reinforcement in hymns and anthems that glorify rather than trivialize God.

The Primacy of Hearing

It's interesting that Scripture lays such great stress on hearing rather than seeing God. Notice well the biblical claim that no man shall see God and live. From Adam and Abraham to Noah and Malachi, nearly every major Old Testament character hears God, though none ever sees him, except Moses—who spies only God's hind end as He passes by, while Moses is hid in the cleft of the rock. So it is in the New Testament: there we who are the new Jews called Christians are instructed to walk by faith rather than by sight, to listen to God rather than to behold him face to face. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). Only in the life to come will sight of the holy God bless rather than destroy us. It is in "this hope [that] we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it in patience" (Romans 8:24-25).

Why is God invisible? Wouldn't it be better if God were palpable, so that we could see and touch him, and thus know that He is real and not merely imagined? Most pagan religions indeed make their gods visible by creating statues and images of them. In Acts 17, we hear that the Athenians have erected an idol even to an unknown God. Such visibility is what the God of Israel and Jesus Christ expressly forbids: Thou shalt not make a graven image of me. God wants to be heard rather than seen. A visible God would be a tyrant. There would be no room for faith or trust, no place for doubt or struggle, if God were open to view. The young Samuel does not request, therefore, that God show himself. Such a sighting would make Samuel's obedience compulsory rather than voluntary. "Speak, Lord," we hear Samuel pleading, "and thy servant heareth." A visibly undeniable God would be a dictatorial deity. And we would hate him for being such a silent Bully.

There may be a strange link between the decline of audibility and the rise of unbelief. Ours is a supremely pagan and thus a supremely visual culture. Almost everything important comes to us through the eye, almost nothing through the ear. It is not by chance that rock music issued in MTV: it is not sufficient to hear but also to see erotic music enacted. That the lyrics are mangled and indecipherable does not matter. Gyration and other visual stimuli take their place. The literary critic Irving Howe once said that we Americans have

become virtual mushrooms: we grow only in the dark, by the light of a flickering screen. George Will doubts whether we grow very much. Will once observed that there is more mental work in reading any cheap Harlequin romance or detective thriller than in watching the most sophisticated movie. Film is a lazy and passive medium insofar as it requires no imaginative labor but forms our images for us. Such sensory bombardments enervate both the intellect and the imagination. Because we are the passive recipients of such relentless stimuli, we come to believe that the rest of the world operates in similar fashion—passively—and thus that whatever is, is right. All moral and religious discernments and distinctions thus are glazed over by a film of visual stimuli.

In the *Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis speaks of the dread modern triumph of the eye over the ear. The cosmetic and fashion and advertising industries celebrate this mighty victory of seeing over hearing, as we come to have increasingly superficial notions of beauty and attractiveness. It is not the human face that reveals our souls, Lewis insists, so much as it is the human voice. Thus do I encourage my students to fall in love not only (or even chiefly) with another's image but with his or her voice, for it is in the voice that lasting friendship and commitment and true love lies. The Greek word for person comes from the giant masks that actors wore in performing the great public dramas of Athens and other Greek cities. Person literally means "to sound through." We are what we declare, what we speak, what comes sounding through us. Our ancient Christian forebears understood the primacy of hearing over seeing. Thus did the saints of the early church practice what they called "the discipline of the eyes," being even more careful about what they saw than what they heard.

Why is the spoken and heard word so much more important than its written and read versions? It is interesting to note that neither Jesus nor Socrates, the two most famous teachers in world history, left anything in writing. They both failed to publish, wags have said, and therefore they perished. Both men were indeed killed for their action-inciting words. Speech is our unique gift, the very image of God in us. Animals can do everything that we humans can do, except the most important thing of all: they cannot speak. This explains why, given the awful choice between sight and hearing, the wise and courageous person would choose sound—giving up the enormous ease and pleasures of the visible world for the irreplaceable world of the human voice. Winston Churchill was not the first to note that deafness is infinitely more isolating than blindness: it cuts us off from true human communion.

We ought therefore to reverse the trite aphorism about sticks and stones. They merely break our bones, while words can truly help or hurt us. A word of care and kindness can heal the deepest of wounds. A word of spite and deceit can rankle and fester forever. Once words are out of our mouth, we cannot retract them, any more than we can unscramble an egg or put toothpaste back in the tube. Their effects are permanent, for good or ill. Words are so powerful that the

Epistle of James calls the tiny tongue the most dangerous of all bodily organs, far more hazardous than the genitals. A single word therefore—most especially when it is the Word of God—is worth more than a thousand pictures.

The Primacy of the Sermon

When Luther and Calvin and the Anabaptists revolted against the medieval Roman church, they did so in protest that the proclaimed Word had been eclipsed by the same works-centered religion that Paul opposes in his Letter to the Romans. The Reformation was thus a preaching-movement intended not to create a special branch of Christendom but to renew the whole church in the doctrines of grace. The sermon thus became the Protestant sacrament of grace, our equivalent of the Roman mass, the very center of the worship and praise of God. The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann argues, in fact, that Israel understands God in fundamentally verbal terms. It is not God's miraculous acts in history nor his divine being in himself that matters so much as it is the unique Word that issues from God's revelation to Israel.

Scripture refers far more often, in fact, to God's speaking than to his doing. God is indeed a doer—the Maker and Redeemer of the universe—but He acts chiefly by his speaking. In the first chapter of Genesis, God speaks the cosmos into being. God doesn't take things into his own hands and fashion the world out of something prior to it. He says instead, "Let there be." We know, of course, that Genesis 1 is a theological story and not a scientific report. God is not a material being but the divine Spirit. He has no mouth or tongue, and he doesn't speak Hebrew or Greek, English or Ebonics. God speaks through his people Israel and finally through his Son Jesus Christ, the One Man in whom he has fashioned his own image.

The sermon is the center of our worship, our veritable sacrament, because there we encounter Christ himself in the heard Word. The Swiss Calvinists of the 16th century went so far as to declare (in the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566) that "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God." The Gospel is not something to be preached, therefore: the Gospel is preaching itself. This is a radical claim, but I think it is exactly Paul's point. *Fides ex auditu*. "Faith cometh by hearing," we remember from the King James, "and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:8). Note exceedingly well what St. Paul doesn't say: He does not say that faith comes by seeing, and that what is seen comes by writing, and that what is believed comes through reading. In his second letter to Corinth, Paul explicitly warns against an overemphasis on the merely written word. There he says that the word which is written down often serves to kill—while the Spirit, acting through the proclaimed Word, gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

We can close our eyes to what is seen. We can put down a book and either daydream or go change a light bulb. We cannot so easily dismiss the spoken and the heard Word. We

have eyelids for shutting out pictures and scenes that we don't want to see, but the ear has no flap for fending off the words of men or the Word of God. Our ear lobes are meant to increase our hearing, not to close it off. Jesus does not say, "Let those who have eyes, see," but rather "Let those who have ears, hear." "Stick your eyes in your ears," said Luther, "when you hear the Word of God preached." Luther calls us to see in a new way, through the proclaimed Word. We thus learn to look rightly at the world when we have first truly heard the Word. It follows, said Luther, that "the church is a mouth-house, not a pen-house." At church we don't write essays or take notes, lest our scribbling become a clever and pseudo-academic means of stopping our ears to the God who engages us as we listen rather than write.

It needs to be said that we Baptists run a great risk in focussing on the sermon. Christian worship centered on the proclamation of the Gospel is not the safest but the most perilous activity of the week. The worship hour is the hour of great risk. Something splendid occurs when we come to hear the Word proclaimed, or else something terrible. When the Word is not preached, everything else fails. Indeed, an awful sacrilege has occurred. Nothing can salvage a service that is void of true proclamation. Someone has described Hell as a perpetual church service minus the presence of God. I would add that Hell is an interminable sermon without the proclamation of the Gospel.

Faithful preaching is even more dangerous than its unfaithful counterpart. Calvin confessed, for example, that the truly proclaimed Word makes the world at once better and worse off. "For while there was no preached Gospel," he declared, "all the world was without care and at rest. There was little to argue or dispute about." The world remained at ease in its ethical slumbers. But with the true preaching of the Gospel, Calvin added, "the world is plunged into conflict." Faithful preaching—Calvin is saying—permits no neutral response, as if we had attended a civic club luncheon or PTA meeting. It makes us either hugely glad or unbearably sad. It either saves or else it damns. To hear God's Word is gladly to acknowledge his grip on our lives. It makes us eagerly seize the brass rung of grace for all we are worth. It prompts us joyfully to practice the Faith every day and every night until our last day and last night. Or else it forces us to turn away in wrath and scorn, spitting and scoffing at this call to devote our lives to Jesus Christ and to none other. There is no convenient middle path between these drastic extremes. Whether we know it or not, we are either hearers of the Word or else we are haters of the Word.

The early British Baptists were so convinced of what is dangerous and drastic about the proclaimed Word that they became suspicious of the merely written Word. Lest the Bible become a substitute for hearing the living Word, these our foreparents in the Faith prohibited worshippers from bringing their Bibles to church. They knew that in worship we come to hear the Word of God, not to look at it. The man whom this lecture-series honors never asks the congregation to follow along in their Bibles when he reads the sermon text. Such a

request would mean, as he wittily says, that we don't really trust him to read it aright. Like an apostle, he declares simply but forcefully: "Listen." When we truly hear, the sermon becomes God's Word. Sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the joint of bone and marrow, it rends our hearts and cleaves our souls. It wounds us to the quick, lancing the suppurating sores of sin, in order that it might heal us forever.

Most of us could not truly confess Jesus Christ if the sermon had not been the focus of Baptist worship. Yet few of us could honestly declare that our faith has been similarly formed by the Lord's Supper. My own childhood church observed it only quarterly, and then on Sunday evening, as if to admit that it wasn't very important. A friend who belongs to a prominent Baptist church in my city complains that there has not been a single communion service there during her two years of membership. How much wiser was Karl Barth to insist that the sermon is inseparably linked to the Table, that preaching proclaims the meaning of communion, even as the Supper gives dramatic and embodied life to the sermon. I wonder whether the slappy-happy, sloppy-agape atmosphere that prevails in much Baptist worship today is not the result of our low regard for the Lord's Table. If there is to be a recovery of preaching in our time, it must be accompanied by a recovery of the second and much-neglected sacrament of the Supper.

The Primacy of the Preacher

W come to a final claim that is as simple and drastic as it is startling and dangerous: the voice of Jesus Christ is none other than the voice of the one who proclaims his Word. The faithful preacher, I again repeat, is the voice of the living Lord. The first and still the greatest Protestant, Martin Luther, said it sharply: "When the Holy Spirit enables me to preach the Word of God, it is no longer Martin Luther but Jesus Christ who speaks." John Calvin, our other chief founder, made a similar case. "The Word of God," said Calvin, "is not distinguished from the words of the Prophet." The God of the Gospel, Calvin added, "is not separated from the minister." The preacher of the Word actually does God's own work. These are perilous sayings indeed. We all know preachers who think that they not only proclaim Jesus but that they have become Christ himself. Thus do they lord it

over their people according to this terrible self-perception. They swagger and bully and dominate their flock, as if they were not only the audible but also the visible God.

We who are not fundamentalists have become so afraid of their heavy authoritarianism that we have sadly diminished the role of the preacher. We are reluctant to speak of our pastors as having primary authority within our Baptist churches. We saddle them with such smarmy euphemisms as "servant-leader" or—God forbid!—"congregational facilitator." These are weasel phrases that dodge the true primacy of the preacher. Warren Carr has often noted the result: there are very few preacher-jokes. We make fun only of those things that we take seriously. Notice, therefore, that most of our jokes are sexual—sex being the one pseudo-vocation that our culture takes with utmost seriousness.

To diminish the primacy of the preacher is to ignore the fact that—in a tradition like ours which makes preaching the central act of worship—the preacher is bound to be the center of the church's witness and its religious life. Willy-nilly, he or she is the shepherd of the flock, the preacher of the Word, and thus the primary figure in the congregation. My friend, the British theologian Daniel Jenkins, sums up the matter well. The Protestant pastor, says Jenkins, serves as the exemplary Christian. He or she is set apart by the local congregation to do directly and full-time what the other church members are able, because of other exigencies, to do only indirectly and part-time: to proclaim and enact the Word of God. Yet let us be ever so clear that the preacher is not the political but the spiritual head of the congregation. When the church is in conference, the Baptist preacher is indeed one among equals: one man, one vote. Even so, I confess that I always eagerly await the pastor's point-of-view about any important matter that we are voting on.

Richard Neuhaus makes a similar claim about the primacy of the preacher in his splendid book called *Freedom for Ministry*. Neuhaus argues that ministers are called to serve as a virtual lightning rod: to receive fire from both God and man. Precisely because of the authoritative Word they proclaim in the pulpit, preachers are the singular individuals through whom the divine presence is brought to earth, even as they are the people through whom the hard human questions are clarified and rendered creative rather than destructive. A former student who is now a Methodist minister



illustrates the point powerfully. He tells about a drunk running down and killing two members of his congregation, a mother and father who innocently walked along the roadside. Four children under the age of thirteen were instantly orphaned. Great was the grief and distress of the family and friends who quickly assembled. God was by no means absent from that terrible scene. Prayers had already been made, and assurances had already been given, when my friend arrived. God was already at work. Yet everything changed when the preacher entered that house. Those prayers now had a single voice, and those assurances came from one who spoke not only for himself but for the God of the Gospel. Now the great grief and the furious anger had both a focus and a target: the preacher himself. There he acted as no mere servant-leader or pastoral counselor. There he became God's own surrogate, the one through whom Christ himself was made manifest.

It is not only during times of great crisis that the preacher's primacy should be observed. It should also happen during ordinary times. Preachers who are not afraid of their own authority and primacy will have such startlingly original things to say on Sunday that we who are their parishioners will seek their counsel during the week. Knowing that we have heard what can be heard no where else on earth, we will refuse to confine our conversations to polite palaver. We will not be content with mere congeniality. We will engage our preachers in the deep and hard and joyful things of the Gospel precisely because our ministers have first engaged us in those very things. Such vital exchanges between preacher and flock will symbiotically feed our preachers' own proclamation of the Word. No longer will they take their illustrations from television shows or sermon books but from felt and lived experience, and no longer will they preach what I call messages to the cosmos: Time-Life discourses addressed virtually to anyone and thus truly to no one in particular. Instead, our preachers will speak, as the Quakers used to say, to our condition—to our fallen and redeemed condition.

"How shall they hear without a preacher?" The answer for us Baptists lies in making the sermon serve as the center of our worship. There we will help restore the priority of hearing over seeing in a culture that will soon blind as well as deafen itself. There we will give unabashed pre-eminence to the preaching and hearing of the Word. And there we will acknowledge the true pastoral primacy of the preacher in the faithful life of God's flock.

The Uses of the Imagination in Preaching the Gospel

I have contended in the first two lectures that we are suffering from a terrible famine of the Word that God has sent on our churches. He has hardened our hearing—even as he hardened Pharaoh's heart—because our noisiness and our busyness make us unable to hear. Yet the unbelief of our preachers has also caused God to stop their mouths, or rather to fill

them with assorted and sorry substitutes for the Gospel, so that the more they talk the less they have to say. If this were all I had to argue, I would have brought only the counsel of despair. Thus have I also argued that God will relent from this theological starvation-program and feed us again on "the sincere milk of his Word" (I Peter 2:2) by making us learn to listen and thus to hear amidst this overwhelmingly visual age, by making the heard Word of the sermon once again the center of Baptist worship, and by making our proclaimers of that Word the leaders of our churches in becoming faithful witnesses to the Gospel. Now I will seek to make the case that God will also overcome the famine and restore his people to the hearing of his Word through a recovery of imagination in preaching. I will begin by dealing with the Bible's justified suspicion of the imagination. Next I will maintain that God's decision to image himself in Jesus Christ not only permits but demands that we give primacy to the imagination in our understanding and our preaching of the Faith. And finally I will seek to illustrate such an imagination-enlivened Faith by recourse to the final scene from Flannery O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger" as well as to a passage from G. K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*.

1. The Biblical Suspicion of the Imagination

Nearly everyone knows that Plato regarded the works of imagination as not once but twice removed from Reality. They imitate the shadowy world that in turn reflects the divine world of the Forms: thus are they but an image of an image. It is much less noticed that the King James Bible also uses the word "imagination" in an almost uniformly pejorative way. In Genesis 5:6 we read that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Again in 8:21 we hear that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Such evil-producing imagination makes God so sorry for even creating man that it prompts him to drown virtually his whole creation. Moses makes a similar use of the word in Deuteronomy 31:21 when he predicts the forthcoming unfaithfulness of Israel once they arrive in the long-awaited Canaan: "for I know their imagination, which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear."

So does Jeremiah warn his people against walking "after the imagination" of their own hearts (23:17). Again in the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah beseeches God to take vengeance on the prophet's enemies for "all their imaginations against me" (3:60). In his condemnation of pagans who make a false god of the good creation, Paul declares that they "became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21). In his second letter to Corinth, Paul urges his fellow believers to engage in spiritual warfare against the enemy strongholds of unbelief that we erect within the human mind: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the

obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Finally, the Virgin Mary declares in her Magnificat that God puts down the mighty and scatters "the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Luke 1:51).

Most modern versions of the Bible use terms like "stubbornness"—the deliberate plotting or devising of evil—to translate the various Hebrew and Greek words that the KJV renders uniformly as "imagination." Yet I wonder if the old Jacobean divines were not religiously right, even if they were linguistically wrong, to link imagination with both the conceiving and the doing of evil. We cannot commit sin without first justifying it. And we cannot justify sin unless we have first imagined it not as evil but as good. Indeed, it is human fantasizing—the mental picture-making of the evils that we can justify as good—that prompts nearly all of our wanting and seizing of sinfully desired things. How well the advertisers know this sorry truth! The imagination is indeed a faculty deeply linked to the corrupted human heart and its selfish longings. Calvin called the heart a factory for the perpetual making of idols. So is the fallen imagination a workshop for the infinite fabrication of self-serving fantasies.

Yet surely we must also argue the opposite case as well. As Reinhold Niebuhr taught us, all created things are characterized by a deep ambivalence. They have immense capacities for both good and evil. The imagination is capable not only of evil fantasizing but also of redemptive creativity. This is the true function of imagination that the Romantic poets sought to restore. They sought to recover the lost unity between the perceiver and the perceived. Rather than simply knowing about things through the processes of calculating reason, they wanted to get us inside the created world, to know things as they are, to appreciate the natural order in all of its wonder and glory. One hardly thinks of George Eliot as a Romantic, yet she has their positive regard for the imagination when she declares that "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity."

I would argue, in more mundane fashion, that all doing of good is also prompted by the imagination. Just as we sin first in pictorial thought, then in activating word, and finally in deadly deed, so must we first of all imagine the good before we can speak and do it. In order to counsel the troubled, to feed the hungry, to care for the neglected, we must first have a vision of their inherent worth, their true potential—indeed, we must learn to see the very image of God becoming fulfilled in such acts. What would these people look and act like if they were made truly whole—if they had the health and truth of God in them? It might be argued that the failure of theology in our time is a failure of imagination. The detective novelist P. D. James observes that most charitable acts are decidedly undramatic—caring for a dying person, befriending a lonely soul, even grading a set of exams. The good inherent in such actions is so quiet and unspectacular that it is ever so hard to make them artistically interesting. Murder

and countless other deeds of destruction, Baroness James adds, require little facility of imagination to conceive and to gestate and finally to deliver in fictional form. No wonder that violence and pornography are so tempting to the artist as well as to the rest of us who have fallen imaginations.

Yet there is a far more substantial reason for the Biblical suspicion of imagination than its moral corruptibility: Images that fertilize the mind and make it fecund with both good and evil serve, far more dangerously, to place a terrible limit on God. A god who is bound by our imaging of him is no God at all. Thus does the Second Commandment explicitly forbid the making of any image or likeness of Yahweh. God wants Israel to have no picture or statue of Him for the same reason that He will not permit his people to provide him his name: He is the God who will not be controlled and manipulated by human images and titles. God insists on his freedom to redeem humanity utterly on his own terms, never ours. The angel at the Jabbok rightly refuses Jacob's demand that the divine being reveal his name: God gives us our name and identity, not we his. As Moses has to learn, God's name is unlike any other: "I am who I am, I will be who I will be." Any god whom we humans could name or image would not be God but a projection of our own desires, an idol. As usual, John Calvin puts the matter most succinctly: "God rejects without exception all shapes and pictures, and other symbols by which the superstitious imagine they can bring God near to them. These images defile and insult the majesty of God" (*Institutes I*, xi, i).

Nowhere is the strangeness of the unimaged God made more remarkable than in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. As they razed the Temple, the Romans eagerly entered the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary of sanctuaries, the place where the pagans hoped at last to find the image of the Hebrew God and to smash it in triumphant glee. To their huge disappointment, they found no such statue or figure, but the Ark of the Covenant: a box containing mere scrolls. This bizarre religion without an imaged god was like unto nothing they had ever encountered! To the good pagan, a god who cannot be cast into bronze or carved from marble or wood is not worthy to be called a god. The early Christians encountered similar complaints. Their refusal to worship any other god than the God of Jesus Christ caused them to be branded as atheists. And on the one occasion, in the sermon at Mars Hill, when Paul sought to appeal to pagan images of the gods, he most notably failed to make many converts.

The Cruciform Imagination

Yet Scripture's rightful suspicion of the imagination is neither permanent nor absolute. Precisely in order to correct our many false images of him, God has revealed his own true image in Jesus Christ. In him the imagination can at last be redeemed to do its proper work. Christians claim, in fact, that the ancient Hebrew prohibition against images of God has been lifted by God himself. We are now free to seize everything in creation in order to make analogies and para-

bles, to find echoes and images, of this one True Image which God has made of himself. Because God has shown himself to us in Christ, our own images can become the vehicles of the divine presence itself. This is a remarkable thing and not a thing to be taken for granted. As Calvin teaches us, God graciously accommodates his otherness and mystery to our finite categories of speech and image. It is chiefly through the sacraments of bread and wine, as well as the baptismal waters, that God sanctifies our imaginations. There, said Calvin, God reveals to our eyes what the preached Word declares to our ears.

God's imaging of himself in Scripture and in Christ contains its own inherent safeguards against abuse and idolatry. The Cross is not an image of power but of weakness, not an emblem of triumph but of defeat, not a thing of beauty but of supreme ugliness. The Old Testament signs of salvation are also strange—the life-producing genitals circumcised, the green bush set aflame, the boat built in a desert, the creation drowned by the Creator, the deliverance from slavery through a wilderness wandering, the temple no sooner built than blasted, the people given a homeland and then exiled from it. The New Testament signs are no less odd: foot washings, baptismal burials, even resurrection from the dead. We should not be surprised at Chesterton's declaration that we cannot comprehend the God of the Gospel apart from radical paradox. Paradox, he explained, is truth standing on its head and waving its legs to get our attention.

The unexpectedness of the Gospel means that our own imaginative work will need to have a surprising strangeness and an equally surprising restraint. Just as God's own controlling image of self-identification is disharmonic and unsettling, so must our own imagination in preaching be cruciform rather than prettifying. Which is to say, of course, that it must be both inspired and limited by the Cross. An imagination cut loose from Calvary is even deadlier than an ethics thus severed, as we can witness in the terrible sacrilege at work in much contemporary worship. Flannery O'Connor was right to insist that sentimentality is to Christianity as pornography is to art. Much of what happens in our churches is but the religious equivalent of the fantasy-fed pornography and violence that are devouring our dying culture. Among the horrors of the Fort Worth church massacre not often noted is that the young people had seen so many church skits that they thought the gunman was another impersonator of the devil. They could not recognize a killer when they saw one.

George Macdonald, the 19th century Scots writer who inspired C. S. Lewis and the other members of the Oxford Inklings, defined imagination quite simply as "an imaging or a making of likenesses. The imagination is that faculty which gives form to thought—not necessarily uttered form, but form capable of being uttered in shape or in sound, or in any

*The Cross is not an
image of power but of
weakness, not an
emblem of triumph
but of defeat, not a
thing of beauty but of
supreme ugliness.*

mode upon which the senses can lay hold." Imagination gives concrete and sensible form to abstract and disembodied thought: it makes ideas incarnate. Macdonald thus regarded imagination as the highest and holiest of human powers, the faculty whose operations are nearest to the power of God. It is indeed the creative faculty. Just as God creates the universe out of nothing prior to or other than himself, and just as He sustains its on-going life by giving its physical existence constant spiritual sustenance, so does the imagination reshape the physical and spiritual realities of the earth into forms either divine or demonic. Poet means maker in both the Greek and Celtic languages: poetés and makar. Poets fashion

new worlds of terror and delight out of God's primary creation, even as preachers create similar worlds—either dead or alive, either faithful or false—out of God's primary act of recreation in Christ.

C. S. Lewis looked upon the imagination as a higher power than reason itself. "Reason is the faculty of truth," said Lewis, "while imagination is the faculty of reality." Lewis had no desire to demean truth; indeed, he was himself a rationalist. But there are varieties of truth. "Two plus two equals four" and "the boiling point of water at sea level is 212 degrees" are truths discerned by the calculating and collating powers of raw reason. Without such elemental truths to order and regulate our lives, we would dwell amidst chaos and cacophony. For most of our physical life, we utterly depend on such truthful deductions. As the beneficiary of the deductive science that produced hearing aids, I have the greatest regard for the truths of reason in this restricted sense of the word. Yet reality is a much greater thing than truth in this narrow sense. Reality is truth made personal and concrete and moral. It is the sphere where we live and move and have our being as creatures before God and our neighbors. Reality can be discerned only by the imagination through likenesses that give form to thought, not through propositions that make thought ever more abstract and lifeless.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the great Russian writer of the 19th century, must have had something like Lewis' distinction in mind when he declared that, "Even if it were proved to me that Christ was outside the truth, and it was really so that the truth were outside Christ, then I would still prefer to stay with Christ rather than with the truth." What Dostoevsky meant by this seemingly bizarre claim is that Christ is God embodied in all of his paradoxical mystery. Christ incarnates the divine Reality which (to borrow a metaphor from C. S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*) is thick and dark like blood. Truth, by contrast, is often a disembodied thing whose consistency is thin and clear like water. This explains why Harvard University impoverished itself when it altered its original motto, Christo et Ecclesiae, to the banal generality of bare Veritas. The church's Gospel gives truth its signifying

shape and direction and critique. Harvard now has truth alone and sufficing merely unto itself—a small and unimaginative thing indeed. Stanley Hauerwas has declared, however, that if Baylor University ever secularizes its own motto (Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana), it will not be nearly so impoverished. For any right-minded person, says Hauerwas, will always take Texas over the truth!

Truth is never abstract and disembodied for Christians. God in Christ is the truth made incarnate and living and real. As the God who has embodied himself in finite form, Jesus Christ can be known only in imagination, the embodied form of thought and experience. If we don't know Christ imaginatively, we don't know him at all. If we can't image who he is and how he works in the world, our faith will be in vain. I suspect that we live in an imaginatively flaccid time chiefly because our belief in Christ has also slackened. Walker Percy claimed that nearly all of the essential Christian words have been worn slick and faceless with unimaginative use. They are coins that no longer have value. Terms like salvation and damnation have largely ceased to register. Thomas Merton once declared that the command "Love God" has come to have as little spiritual force as "Eat Wheaties." It is just another slogan.

To many evangelicals and fundamentalists, the great sacred words of Scripture are often reduced to the bland notion that we are "going to heaven" because of some momentary decision or some highly emotional experience we have had. The equally innocuous notion follows that we are "going to hell" because we have not had such an experience after autonomously deciding to "get saved." The Gospel is accordingly reduced to a gnostic self-interest that leaves both us and the world unconformed to Christ. Ken Myers, the editor of Mars Hill Tapes, has acidly observed that most conservative Christians are "of the world but not in it." Theirs is indeed a worldly gospel of good feelings and untroubled success that in fact makes no real contact with the deepest desires and needs of the world. Thus do I tell my students that the real aim of the Gospel is not to get us into heaven but to get heaven into us—and thus to get the hell out! The popular Christianity of our time is sappy and sentimental, in short, because it lacks the imagination of the Cross.

Liberal Christians are right to reject the cheap grace of this crossless gospel. Yet in their revulsion against the easy-believism of the comfortable right, leftist Christians make their own deadly errors. Their first error lies in their obsessive need to be identified with a larger group. Embarrassed at the outrages of the fundamentalists who now control the Southern Baptist Convention, and unwilling to celebrate the glories of the local church and association, they must find some greater group to join. Rather than retrieving such a good name as "Baptist Christians," they seek to give them-

*Ken Myers, the
editor of Mars Hill
Tapes, has acidly
observed that most
conservative
Christians are "of the
world but not in it."*

selves a more satisfying title. Thus do they forget that Baptists and Methodists and most other Christian groups have rarely chosen their own names. They have been named by our enemies and then turned snide opprobrium into terms of praise.

Surely it is a failure of imagination that certain Baptists are now labeling themselves as moderates. Moderation is usually a political virtue, even a necessity, but it is also often a theological vice. Even St. Thomas, the most restrained and circumspect of all theologians, confesses that there is no moderation in the love of God. Many evils spring from an immoderate love of earthly things, says Aquinas, but the love of God in Christ is by nature radical, drastic,

excessive, indeed immoderate. Warren Carr reminds us that moderates are members of the church of Laodicea—the church which God promises to "spew" out of his mouth because of its lukewarmness, its blandness, its neither-this-nor-thatness, its very moderation. Perhaps he remembers Martin Luther King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail and its scorching use of the term "moderate." There King charged that white moderates, in their insistence on going slow and playing safe, were far greater enemies of racial justice and reconciliation than such hate-groups as the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens councils. King imaginatively discerned that true enemies are better than false friends.

In allowing their enemies to determine their entire agenda, moderates are in danger of becoming reverse and negative fundamentalists, remaining ever so much clearer about who they are not than who they are. Worse still, liberals often let fundamentalists rob them of the Gospel. Recoiling from the fundamentalists' unctuous use of Zion-language, moderates seek to avoid the slick and defaced terms altogether. I have noticed, for example, that the very word "salvation" is not often used in many old-line churches. Hence also the contemporary vogue for spirituality rather than religion, for vague notions of "faith communities" rather than concrete commitments to the church as the unique body of Christ. Surely we should recognize that Wicca worshippers and the Aryan Nation also constitute "faith communities." We cannot abandon the biblical words and metaphors without abandoning the Gospel itself. Our task is to revivify such indispensable images and doctrines as justification by grace alone and sanctification through faith alone. "Liberation" and "empowerment" are poor substitutes. So is the word "dysfunctional" a pathetic psychological surrogate for describing our sin and alienation from God. Such unimaginative recoil from traditional theological language among liberals reveals, as the late Walker Percy ceaselessly iterated, that they are the mirror image of conservatives. Bishop Spong and Doctor Falwell are twins without knowing it.

Two Examples of Theological Imagination at Work

Our remaining task is to illustrate Gospel-discerning, sermon-strengthening power of imagination at work in two 20th century Christian authors, Flannery O'Connor and G. K. Chesterton. It should be evident that I regard written works of imagination as theologically more fruitful than films. W. H. Auden once observed that there is a link between violence and the movies that is not found in novels. He argued that a novel is not likely to incite readers to deeds of terror or lust, chiefly because the action of a novel unfolds so slowly. Fictional carnage and mayhem are usually committed with a deliberation and a moral complexity that enables readers to deepen and complicate their own moral lives. In films, and especially television, action is usually swift and often unconnected to moral reality. Thus do they coarsen our imagination and corrupt our spiritual life.

This explains why I long to hear preachers take their sermon analogies from novels and poetry rather than television programs. To the objection that preachers must engage their television-watching congregations "where they are," I reply that they also are responsible to call their members to a higher plane of cultural and thus of theological life. If parishioners find out that their pastors are serious readers, they will be likely to follow suit themselves. We will all become deeper Christians when sermons are more deeply rooted in the imaginative life that reveals how the Gospel engages the world. The task of the preacher lies very considerably in the search for synonyms: in the quest for fresh ways of defamiliarizing the familiar, of reminding us that the Gospel we take as ordinary is in fact Extraordinary.

The late Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler was asked, not long before his death, to give his advice to the church. Rather than coming forth with some high-sounding theological pronouncement, Sittler offered this remarkable caveat: "Watch your language." He was not making a call to eloquence, I suspect, so much as to imagination and precision and care in our use of the words that God can turn into his Word. Since Christ is the Word incarnate, we must be ever so vigilant about our words. Mark Twain once declared that the difference between the right word and the nearly right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug! It is the failure of preachers to "watch their words"—to make vigorous and imaginative proclamation of the Gospel—that accounts, I suspect, for the nearly complete triumph of music over the sermon in most Baptist churches.

At the end of the story called "The Artificial Nigger," her

It is the failure of preachers to "watch their words"—to make vigorous and imaginative proclamation of the Gospel—that accounts, I suspect, for the nearly complete triumph of music over the sermon in most Baptist churches.

two protagonists, the boy Nelson and his grandfather Mr. Head, have come to a seemingly awful end. They have committed sins of rejection and betrayal and vengeance that make their racist deeds seem minor evils indeed. The young boy and the old man are physically lost in a city that resembles Atlanta, they are morally lost in their alienation from each other, and they are theologically lost in their total obliviousness to God's grace. Yet as always in her work, O'Connor offers her characters drastic images of divine grace that could transform their lives. Twice already, Nelson and Mr. Head have encountered Negroes who could have been instruments of their salvation. But they fail to perceive the grace that is pursuing them until they stumble upon a broken-down lawn jockey, a miserable Sambo-statue who looks more like the crucified Christ than a happy watermelon eater. This plaster Negro has one eye chipped out, the mouth seems to be grimacing rather than grinning, and the statue itself has tilted away from its base at a strange angle. Though neither of these country characters has ever been inside a Catholic church, they both recognize a crucifix when they see it. There at the foot

of this "artificial nigger"—as they call it, though the narrator does not—they encounter what eye has not seen nor ear heard, what has not entered into the human heart by its own devising:

The two of them stood there with their necks forward almost at the same angle and their shoulders curved in almost exactly the same way and their hands trembling identically in their pockets. Mr. Head looked like an ancient child and Nelson like a miniature old man. They stood gazing at the artificial Negro as if they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat. They could feel it dissolving their differences like an action of mercy. Mr. Head had never known before what mercy felt like because he had been too good to deserve any, but he felt he knew now....

Mr. Head stood very still and felt the action of mercy touch him again but this time he knew that there were no words in the world that could name it. He understood that [mercy] grew out of agony, which is not denied to any man and which is given in strange ways to children. He understood that [mercy] was all a man could carry into death to give his Maker and he suddenly he

burned with shame that he had so little of it to take with him. He stood appalled, judging himself with the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed it. He had never thought of himself as a great sinner before but he saw now that his true depravity had been hidden from him lest it cause him despair. He realized that he was forgiven for sins from the beginning of time, when he had conceived in his own heart the sin of Adam, until the present, when he had denied poor Nelson. He saw that no sin was too monstrous for him to claim as his own, and since God loved in proportion as He forgave, he felt ready at that instant to enter Paradise.

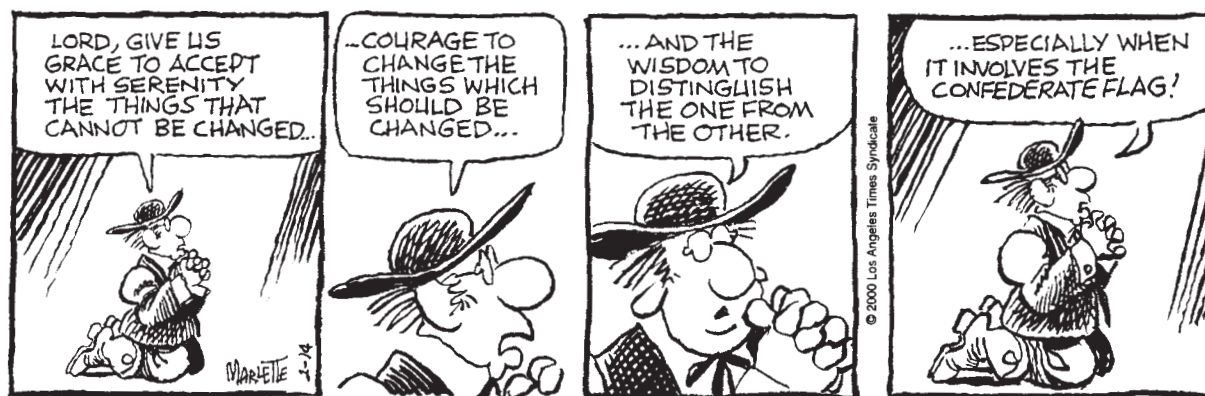
Here O'Connor brilliantly perceives a common Southern artifact, an object of racial pride and hatred and domination, as an image of the Cross. In it she describes a surprising earthly analogue of our divine redemption. Without a whit of sentimentality, she shows us the Mercy and the Judgment that unite everyone—old man and young boy, rich and poor, male and female, red and yellow and brown and black and white—in a commonality that no humanism can approach. The “artificial nigger” was meant, of course, to declare the white triumph over blacks. As David Smiley points out, the South won the second civil war, as the Jim Crow segregation laws at the turn of the century enabled Southerners to be racially victorious in the battle that they had militarily lost. This Sambo statue thus becomes an emblem of God's own defeat at the hands of human evil: every sin against man is always an even greater sin against God. Yet the great mystery of the Cross is that God defeats our sin with the sacrifice of his own defeated Son.

No longer do this grandfather and grandson believe that they are too good to deserve mercy. On the contrary, the old man sees that their sin has been hidden from them lest it

destroy them in its very hideousness. O'Connor has him discern that, from the very beginning, our lives are conceived in sin: as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we bring evil into the world with our very existence. Sin precedes us, even though we make it fully our own. Yet we are allowed to behold our monstrous evil only in the mirror of the Cross, an act of sacrifice conceived even prior to Edenic sin, a redemption determined from the foundation of the world. This redemption alone can disclose our sin without devastating us.

As Martin Luther taught, it is a hard and difficult thing to discern oneself a sinner. We will mistake a thousand other things for sin if we apprehend it apart from the Cross. Sin is not theft and cheating, not adultery and fraud, not racism and sexism and narcissism, not even murder and genocide. These are dreadful sins in the plural. Sin in the singular is disclosed only in the Cross and thus in this broken Sambo. The singular Sin which gives rise to all sins great and small is the distrust of God, the refusal to live and move and have our being in his Being, the desire to be our own lords and gods. We learn the meaning of this true and terrible Sin only in this one place called Golgotha, the place where our alienation from God is at once disclosed and overcome. There, as in the case of Nelson and Mr. Head, we are indicted by our pardon. As Karl Barth liked to say, we are sentenced by being declared free. We are imprisoned as God flings wide the cell door.

It is always God's mercy that prompts our repentance, as John Calvin declared, and never the other way around. If mercy were acquired only at the price of our regret and sorrow for sin, then salvation would be strangely dependent on us rather than God. Instead, it is nothing other than this unmerited gift of mercy, never our so-called good works, that we take to our Maker. The Cross is the only place where we can truly take our stand, the one and only Grace which we can both live and die by. Our real shame lies not in our sin, therefore, but in our obliviousness to the Agony which purchased our redemption. We should burn with embarrassment at having availed ourselves so little of it. And when we see



that our lives depend utterly upon such Mercy, we have already entered Paradise. What is Heaven but the reign of God's grace, as He at last becomes "all in all"? Flannery O'Connor gets this Truth this brilliantly right and clear in images that arrest and convince and bring the reader Home in both the literary and theological sense.

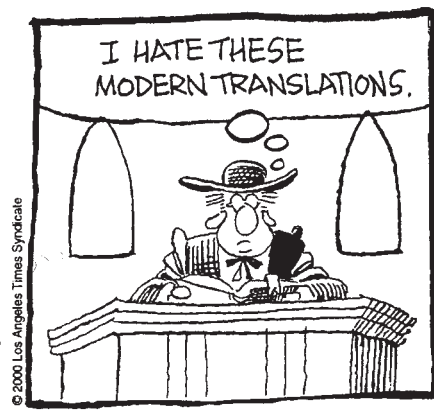
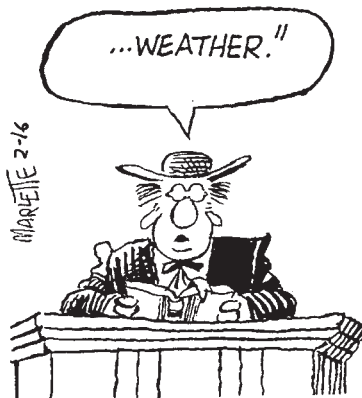
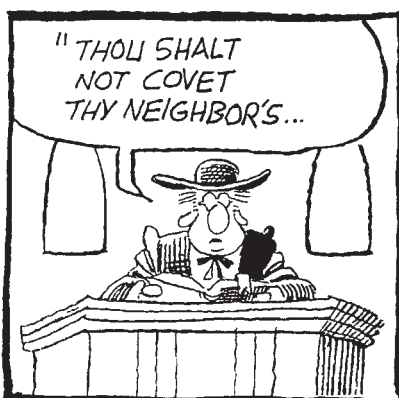
Our images of God's grace need not always be so somber, though neither may they ever be silly. Consider, then, an example, of the Gospel's sheer joyfulness and delight from G. K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*:

It is one of the hundred answers to the fugitive perversion of modern 'force' that the promptest and boldest agencies are also the most fragile and full of sensibility. The swiftest things are the softest things. A bird is active, because a bird is soft. A stone is helpless, because a stone is hard. The stone must by its own nature go downwards, because hardness is weakness. The bird can of its nature go upwards, because fragility is force. In perfect force there is a kind of frivolity, an airiness that can maintain itself in the air. Modern investigators of miraculous history have solemnly admitted that a characteristic of the great saints is their power of "levitation." They might go further: a characteristic of the great saints is their power of levity. Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.....Pride is the downward drag of all things into an easy solemnity. One "settles down" into a sort of selfish seriousness; but one has to rise into a gay self-forgetfulness. A man "falls" into a brown study [an act of grave inquiry and investigation]; he reaches up to the blue sky. Seriousness is not a virtue. It would be a heresy, but a much more sensible heresy, to say that seriousness is a vice. [Seriousness] is really a natural trend or lapse into taking oneself gravely, because

it is the easiest thing to do. It is much easier to write a good Times [editorial] than a good joke in Punch. For solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy: hard to be light. Satan fell by force of gravity.

Chesterton is no less original and discerning than O'Connor, but in quite a different way. Here he is resisting the grim Nietzschean gospel of hard self-sufficiency, the anti-gospel of power and force. He likens such brute power to a dead stone that may be cast upward but must always fall downward. A living bird, by contrast, looks like the weakest and most fragile of things. Yet its very softness and airiness enable it to fly skyward rather than fall earthward. Here Chesterton gives us a fresh and vigorous way of imaging St. Paul's declaration that "my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Lest we grow falsely pious about such a sentiment—thus turning it into something sentimental—Chesterton links the lightness of true power with the levitation which has been credited in certain saints. When Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross met in her tiny monastic cell in northern Spain, they were seen to be hovering slightly above the ground—levitating. Yet Chesterton had the remarkable imaginative power to espy not only the etymological but also the theological link between levitation and levity, and thus between gravity and sin. Sin is revealed in our heaviness, he saw, as we take ourselves all too seriously. Ever since the heavy-handed Tempter lured our aboriginal parents into becoming ever so serious about themselves, sin has flowed from us easily and naturally, like the seepage of a fetid pool. Salvation, by contrast, is something surprising like laughter. It springs forward with a transcendent leap, with a huge jump that takes us out of ourselves. It launches us into the flight of true freedom: into the life of the God who in Jesus Christ refuses to take our sin with any final seriousness, and who thus frees our imaginations to be put in the service of his Gospel. ■



The Problem with Game Show Marriages

By James C. Denison

[Dr. Jim Denison is pastor of the Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. This sermon on the Seventh Commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14) was preached on March 5 in the course of a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments.]

Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire is the talk of America. When Darva Conger married Rick Rockwell on national television, everyone was amazed. When she told him two days later that she didn’t want to be his wife, everyone laughed.

Unfortunately, marriage has become much more like that game show than anything God ever intended.

There are half as many divorces granted in a given year in America as marriages performed. One fourth of our adult population has been divorced. 53% of Americans said in a recent anonymous survey that they would have an affair if given the chance. 92% of sexually active people say they have had ten or more partners in their lives.

Marriage today is a game, played for our amusement, and we think we can change the channel whenever we want.

God knows better. He wants us to be pure and holy. He has given us all we need to defeat the temptations of our culture, and offers us hope even when we fail. Let’s see what he says.

What Is Adultery?

Martin Luther had picturesque ways of putting things. As relates to our topic today, for instance, he once said, “If your head is made of butter, don’t sit by the fire.” On another occasion he declared, “You cannot prevent the devil from shooting arrows of evil thoughts into your heart; but take care that you do not let such arrows stick and grow there.”

We’re going to use his metaphor for our study this morning. So, our first question: what is adultery? What is this “arrow” the enemy fires at us?

Jewish law defined adultery as voluntary sexual relations between a married person and someone other than the lawful spouse. That much is clear. But there’s more.

Adultery is not the only kind of sexual sin forbidden by God’s word.

Colossians 3:5: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.”

1 Corinthians 5:9,11: “I have written you in my letter not

to associate with sexually immoral people...but now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-10: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.” Satan has many such arrows.

And Jesus condemns them even further. In the Sermon on the Mount, he articulates the purest standard to be found in all of literature: “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).

Jesus forbids immoral action, and even immoral thoughts, as arrows from Satan. Why?

Why Is Adultery Wrong?

There are three basic answers to this question. First, sexual immorality destroys the family.

Dr. Frank Pittman, an internationally renowned expert on sexuality and marriage, reported recently in the *New York Times* that in thirty-seven years of practice as a therapist, he has encountered only two cases of first marriages ending in divorce where adultery was not involved.

Of those who break up their marriages to marry someone else, 80% are sorry later. Only 10% actually marry the person with whom they had an affair, and 70% of those who do later get another divorce.

Sexual immorality is an arrow to the heart of your family and home.

Second, *sexual impurity destroys our witness*. The only credibility for a Christian is his or her character. If that is ruined, our witness and ministry are ruined. And Satan knows this—he is a great economist. If he can get me or you to sin sexually, even one time, he knows that our witness and ministry will be ruined, perhaps forever.

Do you think it’s a coincidence that the great failures among prominent ministers in recent years have been sexual in nature? Aren’t these Satan’s arrows, fired at us all?

Third, *sexual impurity destroys our spiritual lives*, our souls. Listen to these profound words from Proverbs: “Can a man

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

Charles Allen was the longtime pastor of First Methodist Church in Houston. In his book on the Ten Commandments, he quotes a theology professor's statement, "About 50% of all human misery is caused by a violation of the seventh commandment." After decades of pastoral ministry, Dr. Allen came to agree. So would I. This is Satan's sharpest arrow, indeed.

How Do We Defeat This Temptation?

God has given us some shields to use when we're being attacked. First, *agree with God that sexual immorality is wrong.*

Refuse to accept the culture of our day, the "sexual revolution" characterized by the slogans, "Just do it" and "If it feels good, do it." Hollywood is wrong. The advertisers who simply want to make money off of us are wrong. Sexual immorality is wrong.

The Cherokee Indians, in their marriage ceremony, are said to have joined hands across a running stream to signify that their lives would flow together forever. And "white men" called *them* primitive! Agree with God that all sexual immorality is wrong.

Second, *guard your heart.* This is Satan's target.

Jesus warned us not to "look at a woman lustfully" (Matthew 5:28). The Greek here does not refer to natural, normal human instincts, but to the man who looks at a woman with the deliberate intention of lusting after her. This is not about the first look, but the second.

We are to do whatever it takes to keep this sin from growing in our hearts and souls. In the next verses (Matthew 5:29,30) Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away...And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away." This is rabbinical hyperbole, overstatement to make this point: we must do whatever it takes to keep from sinning.

Turn off the television set. Walk out of the movie. Cancel the magazine subscription. Block immoral Internet sites. Change your friends. Change your job. Do whatever it takes to remove this cancer before it kills your soul. Say "no" to sin, now.

Third, *get help.*

I believe every Christian needs an accountability relationship with someone. We need to empower someone to ask us the hard questions, to tell us when they see us going down the wrong road, to support and strengthen us with total confidence. Start with someone you already trust; covenant to make a time to be together this week; begin by sharing something with each other you'd not share with others. Ask God to help you help each other.

And if you're in trouble here already, you *must* get help. Dr. Brian Newman on our staff spent ten years as a full-time marriage and family therapist. I once asked him if he knows of a single person who has gotten out of an adulterous or lustful situation on his own. He doesn't know of one.

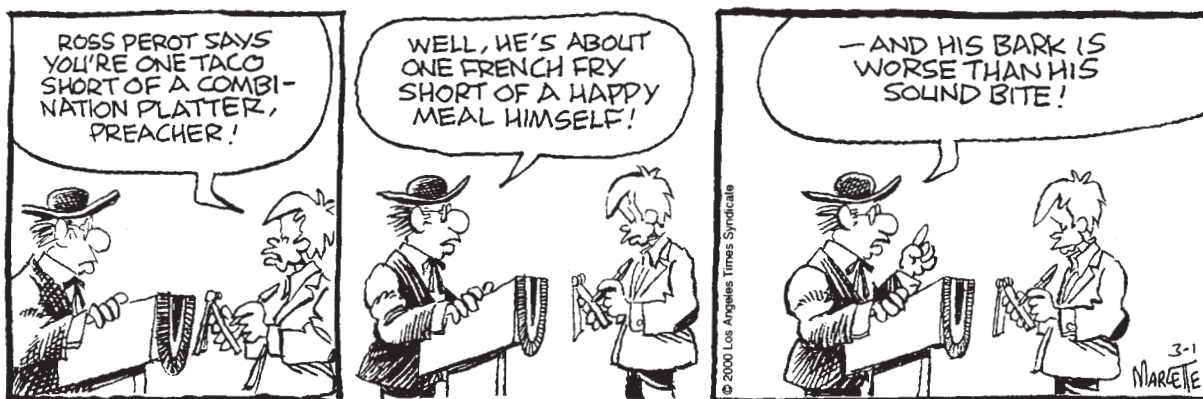
Here's the bottom line: run. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "Flee from sexual immorality." If you think you're the one person in all of human history who can get away with this, know that you're being deceived. My college professor was right: if we say "maybe" to sin, eventually we'll say "yes" to it. If we turn down the lights, our eyes adjust to the dark. As do our souls. Stop now. Run, now.

What If You've Sinned?

But, what if it's too late? What if you've already fallen here, if the arrow has already pierced your heart and home? God's word gives us the help and hope we need. His Spirit can pull out the arrows of the enemy, and heal their wounds.

The first thing to do is to *turn to God.* You may think your failure has forever ended God's love and care for you. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Listen to this verse of Scripture: after citing the "sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes and homosexual offenders," Paul says to the Corinthians: "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by



the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

It's never too late to turn to God. He can pull out arrows we cannot.

Next, with God's help, you must *make right what is wrong*. Get out of the relationship, now. The arrow will never be easier to remove than it is today.

Bill Hybels tells of a couple who visited at Willow Creek, and eventually became Christians. The pastor talked with them, and during their conversation it became clear that the two were living together. The pastor explained that this was not pleasing to God, and that they needed to make a change. They did—he made arrangements for her to live with his parents, and they lived in sexual purity until they were married a year later.

Hybels concludes, "They've been married two years now, and it's obvious God's hand is on them. They readily admit that the turning point in their relationship and in their spiritual lives was the day they decided to become sexually pure. I challenge those of you who are living in sexual sin to follow their example" (*Laws of the Heart*, 81).

Third, ask God to help you *make things right with others*. Who else has been hurt by your arrows? We need forgiveness from all those we have harmed, unless asking for that forgiveness would hurt them further.

Gordon MacDonald is an example for us. This well-known pastor committed the tragic sin of adultery. Immediately, he confessed this to his wife, then to his entire congregation. He resigned his pulpit, and entered into years of counseling and accountability. Over time, another church called him as their pastor; then several years later, his original church invited him back as their pastor again. He serves there today, and has a national ministry to hurting souls and broken lives.

God can redeem anything, given the chance. But we must be willing to make things right with all those we have wronged.

Conclusion

Luther was right; the arrows of the enemy don't have to kill us. God stands ready to help. But we must choose to let him, now.

It's never too late to make that decision. Recently Darva Conger, the bride on "Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire", told ABC's Diane Sawyer, "I have worked my whole life to be a credible person, a person of integrity. Unfortunately, in two hours I destroyed much of that credibility. And...I'd like it back." Don't go where she did. If you have, turn to God. Do it now. ■

Memory and Hope

(continued from page 3)

through some dark tunnels to where we are tonight. The achievements have been notable. The victories have been impressive. But we must everlastingly be about our special high calling, to use Immanuel Kant's word, of straightening the crooked timber of humanity.

So-o-o-o—

I hope that the Christian Life Commission and its now *many* friends will work with increasing effectiveness to help Baptists be the people of God in a state now without boundaries and in a world without borders.

I hope that your vision of Christian social ethics, of justice and peace, of truth and integrity, of personal morality and public righteousness may be increasingly clear and in focus and effective.

I hope that your prophetic forth-telling of the word of the Lord may be increasingly loud and clear and strong. Hear this word of the Lord, as recorded in Numbers 11:26-28.

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord, and he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and placed them round about the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But then they did so no more.

Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other Medad, and the spirit rested upon them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." And Joshua, the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, forbid them." But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them."

We need now to recover the prophethood of all believers, matching our zeal for the priesthood of all believers with a passion for the prophethood of all believers with which we serve as God's salt, God's light, and God's leaven.

I hope the Christian Life Commission will stay focused on Christian social ethics. Don't bother with trying to teach a pig to sing: it wastes your time and it annoys the pig.

And I hope we can all remember, as Cervantes put it, that the road is always better than the inn. Keep moving on and—get going. ■

I Think We Need to See a Therapist

By Hal Haralson

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

We had been married about 30 years. Our youngest son, David, had just left for college and Judy uttered the words that struck fear in my heart.

"I think we need to see a therapist."

David and Judy had talked constantly...about anything and everything.

That was okay. That meant I didn't have to say anything. That's what I did most of the time unless a question was directed specifically to me.

Maybe that was her problem. David was gone and there is no one to talk to but me. Yep...that's the problem.

"Who do you want to go to," I asked, knowing she had someone in mind before she brought it up. "His name is Tom Lowry; he's a psychologist."

Okay. I'm ready. Make an appointment. What I was thinking was, "She's got something bugging her. We'll go two or three times; she'll talk it out; and it will be over."

We saw Tom Lowry once a week. Eighteen months later, he said, "Okay, you two can make it without me."

During those 18 months, I learned more about myself and our relationship than I ever knew was possible.

Lowry wanted us to take the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory. That's about 300 questions that you answer and they can tell if you are an introvert or extrovert or somewhere in-between.

I was pretty relaxed by now. Nothing to this.

The second session, Tom told us how we came out on the Myers-Briggs.

"Hal, you are an INFJ. That's off the charts—Introvert."

"Introvert? I've been president of every organization I've been in since high school. You must be mistaken." Actually, I thought of introverts as slightly inferior and this threatened the daylight out of me.

Tom asked me what I did when I was really exhausted, when my batteries were down.

I go to the woods. I get away from people. Introvert!

Judy. She's off the charts—Extrovert.

Lowry asked Judy what she wanted to do when she was exhausted. He wanted to know how she recharged her batteries. She wanted to go to a party. Be around people. Extrovert!

I had the feeling that this was going to get worse before it got better.

Over the months, we opened every closet door in the house. What we found amazed me. We are so different it is incredible!

Money. Judy's a math major. She gets her bank statement (we had separate accounts at that time) and before the day was over, it balanced to a penny, or the bank heard about it the next day.

Me, I put the statement aside until the next statement was due to arrive. Then I checked the statement against my checkbook. If the difference was no more than \$200, I changed my checkbook to match the bank's record. This drove Judy up the wall.

We now have one bank account and Judy handles it. What a relief! We would have done this years ago but for my male ego that refused to admit she handled the money better than I did.

Being on time. When I tell someone I will be there at 7:00, I have given them my word. I consider it a lack of good faith to do otherwise.

This is of no concern to Judy. They can wait. They will be there when we get there.

I would tell her a 7:30 meeting was at 7:00 in order to make it on time. Nothing worked!

I finally relaxed and admitted that no one was all that concerned about this issue but me.

Lowry laughed as he pointed out the difference in the way we make decisions.

Judy is like an artist. She dabs a little paint here and a little paint there. She stands back and looks, then comes back the next day and starts the process over.

It makes no difference if this is a "big" decision. The process is what is important.

Hal, that's me, the judge. Line up the evidence, make a decision, and get on with it.

Now I realize why she takes so long to make a decision that could have been made in five minutes. It's the process. She honors the process. She blesses the process. Knowing that helps me to be more patient.

I'm a little embarrassed to tell you this one. Judy used to get angry at me because of my sweeping, picking up things, and putting things where they were supposed to be.

She is more comfortable if there's some clutter around. So she's allowed to "mess up" the corner where her computer is. As for the rest of the house, you can put anything down and come back five minutes later and it's gone. It's in the trash. I did it and I'm glad.

Judy's computer is in one corner of the bedroom. She sends "E-Mail" and gets "E-Mail." She does the bills on the computer.

A young graduate student from the University of Texas once called and asked to interview me on the use of the com-

puter in the law office. She was doing a paper in graduate school that would evaluate 100 law offices.

"Send me a copy of the paper," I said as she left my office. She did. "You're on page 23" was written on the cover.

I turned to page 23 to read, "I met one attorney I consider to be totally computer illiterate. He had 3 stacks of files on his desk and he knew what he was to do that day. He said he had done it that way for 27 years and had never lost a file. More power to him!"

Judy uses her cell phone constantly making appointments, checking her messages, returning phone calls. This is done while I'm driving.

You couldn't pay me enough to get me to have a phone in my pickup. It's the one place no one can get hold of me. I'm not in that big of a hurry. Besides...in 29 years of law practice I've never had a phone call that couldn't have waited until I got back to the office.

How have we survived all these differences?

It happened one Saturday morning. It was July and hot. I was down in the woods in front of our house cutting firewood. This is one of my favorite activities. I chew Levi

Garrett (chewing tobacco) and spit over the chain saw. This is about as far away from law practice as I can get. I love it!

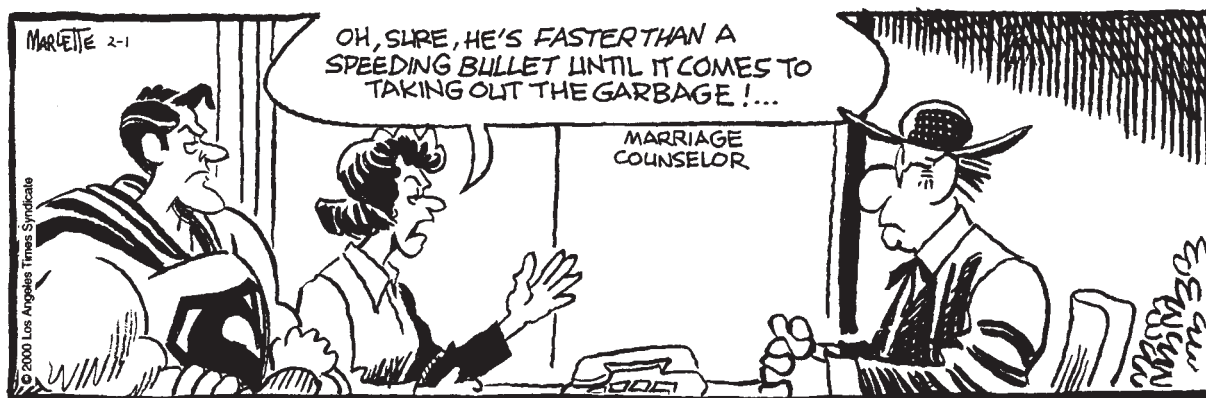
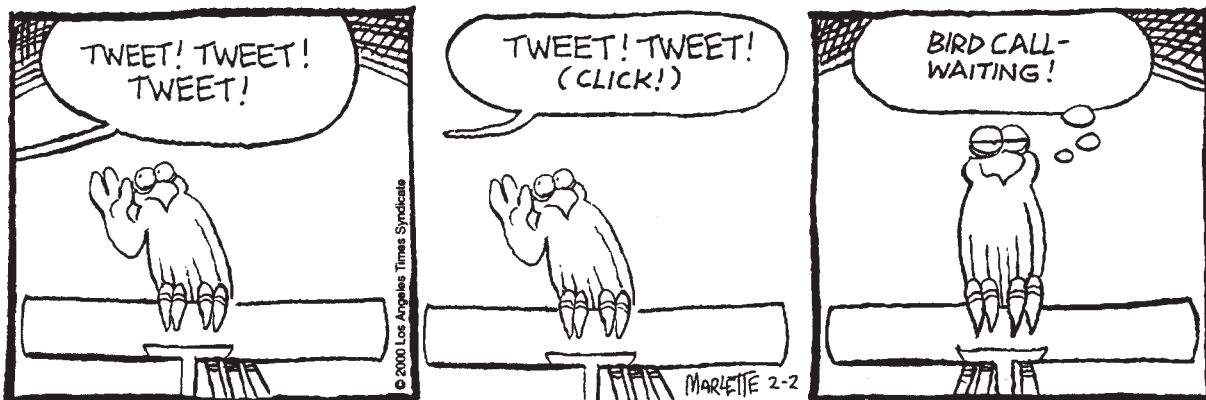
Then I started feeling guilty. Judy was up there in the house by herself. Saturday is our day to be together and here I am all alone...having fun.

I turned off my chain saw and went up to the house. I found Judy lying in a window seat, reading. Her favorite way to spend a Saturday morning.

I confessed my guilt. The pleasure of my solitude at her expense.

She laughed and told me she had thought that morning of how peaceful it was, lying on the window seat, in air conditioned comfort, with me working in the heat below. "I was about ready to leave and come to where you were because I felt guilty, enjoying my solitude so much!"

We embraced and laughed. Out of this experience came a gift from God...*celebrate your differences*. This has become the statement we have repeated through the years. The differences have brought life, rather than irritation to our marriage and after 43 years of marriage, it keeps getting better. ■



Teacher

By Roger Lovette

[Dr. Roger Lovette is Pastor of the Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Alabama. He is the author of a number of books and is a frequent contributor to this journal.]

Going back to one's hometown after a long absence can be a moving experience. Weeks after Christmas I visited relatives there. While I was home the lady who had kept us as children was celebrating her ninetieth birthday. I called her and an old familiar voice answered that took me back across the years. She had been our maid and nanny while my parents worked in the cotton mill. She took care of my brother and me. Later, when we were old enough for school she would move to the mill. Still after work she would clean our house. She was my first teacher and confidant. I would tell her things I would not dare tell my parents or anyone else. I would pour out my fears, my dreams, and my frustrations on that old round kitchen table that used to be in the center of our kitchen. I talked. Nancy, always in motion, washing dishes, preparing a meal, cleaning or dusting, would listen. From time to time she would stop and respond: "Just you wait, Mr. Roger, just you wait. It's gonna be all right." And when I would raise an objection, "But..." She would shake her head and raise her voice: "Didn't you hear me? Just you wait."

I didn't know then that she had five children of her own. I didn't know how hard life must have been raising them as a single parent. I didn't know she lived hand to mouth on the meager dollars we were able to pay her or the money she made sweeping floors in the mill. Neither did I know that she could not get the same job in that mill as the white women or that she would never make as much money as they. She never talked about her own frustrations and dreams as we sat around that kitchen table. But she listened as I talked and talked.

So when I asked her if I could come by and see her she said, "Come on; I'll be here." I hadn't been to her house in years but I could have driven there with my eyes closed. As I drove up I noticed the old three-story rooming house had not changed. The paint was still peeling off the outside walls. The yard held no grass—but was still swept clean the way Southerners used to do. All around were sagging buildings that had seen better days. A block away I noticed an old brick church. Two seedy-looking men leaned against a broken-down car and talked. One came forward as I turned off the engine. "What you doin' here?" I told him I was looking for my friend Nancy explaining that she had lived in that rooming house a long time. He brightened. "Go right up the steps, through the door—you don't have to ring the bell—she's in the last apartment on the left." I followed his directions and found her door.

As long as I could remember Nancy had lived in that tiny apartment. I knocked on the door and heard a shuffle from the other side. "Mr. Roger, is that you?" I laughed and said, "It's me." She

opened the door and we hugged each other.

She motioned me to a chair, "You sit there." She would sit by the window. Sitting down I saw her wince. "It's my arthritis," she said. Sure enough it was Nancy. Hair finally turned grey, she was smaller than I remembered. But still the Nancy I loved.

She told me she had been doing good. She had celebrated her ninetieth birthday in Atlanta with relatives. "Oh, did we have the food" she said and laughed.

We reached across the years and remembered. My Mother and Father long dead. We talked of her own children—two of whom had passed. She showed me pictures of her family—children and grandchildren. She told me where they lived and what they did. The roles were reversed. She talked, I listened. "Oh, we had some good days and we had some bad days but God was always with us."

We laughed about the whiskey my mother would send her to the liquor store to buy for the Lane cakes every Christmas. We talked about food and fun and kids and everything.

"I want to show you something," she said. She shuffled over to her dresser, opened a drawer and pulled out an old faded pink slip. "Your Mama give me this. This was the last present she ever gave me. Oh, she gave the nicest presents." She placed the faded slip back in the drawer as if it were a treasure.

"Come with me," she said. And we walked through her tiny living room and she pulled back the curtain. "See the back yard." It was swept clean. "I did that. I always clean the yard—who else gonna do it?"

Finally it was time to go. I hugged her once again and told her I loved her. There were tears in her eyes as she said: "I love you, too."

As I walked out I remembered the first book I had ever written. I sent her a copy with the inscription: "To Nancy—Who always told me 'just you wait'. You were right. Love, Roger."

Moving down the hall, toward my car I was now the one crying. Those encouraging words of "just you wait", spoken again and again, had come from a lifetime of experience. Now, at ninety she still believed.

This is Black History Month. It is that time when we pause to remember not only the famous Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King and Tiger Woods. The real heroes may just be all those silent ones who cleaned our houses and washed our clothes and raised their own families, enduring a multitude of daily indignities yet refusing to lose faith or give in to the injustices that continually surrounded them. I remember black Nancy whose name will never make the history books. Yet she was my first teacher and confidant. She opened doors and windows of my heart. She taught me that we really are, at bottom, all the same. The tears that ran down my face as I left that old house were tears of joy. That little ninety-year-old woman sitting in her chair by the window has immeasurably shaped my life. ■

Four Poems

by Kenneth Chafin

[Dr. Kenneth Chafin taught evangelism and preaching at Southwestern and then at Southern Baptist seminaries. He has been pastor of the South Main Baptist Church in Houston and of Walnut Street Church in Louisville. He is now retired and lives in Houston.]

Rain on a Cedar Roof

An unfinished attic was my first place apart.
At bedtime, I'd climb a ladder to where
rough boards formed a platform
for an iron bedstead,
a cane bottomed chair,
a small table, and
a coal oil lamp.

The ceiling was so low
I could touch the nails
that held the cedar shingles.
I loved rainy nights, which
meant pots and pans
under the leaks.

I'd blow out the lamp,
slip between the sheets, beneath a
quilt my grandmother made.
The sound of the rain on the roof
and the tunes the raindrops played
in the pans, spun me into
a cocoon of dreams.

When I awoke,
I had the feeling that I could fly. ■

The Street Preacher

He stands on the corner of Fourth and Broadway
in front of the Brown Hotel, catching his congregation
between "walk" and "don't walk," an open Bible
in his left hand, a fisted right hand pounding the air,
his words bouncing off the walls of his urban canyon.

He'd look like an Old Testament prophet with his
craggy features and full beard, if he'd trade his cowboy boots
for a pair of sandals and his polyester suit for a woolen robe.

His sermon is plain. "God's upset by how we live, and
wants us to repent and change our ways." It's a message
they aren't ready to hear, at least not from him.

More likely they'll learn of the sad state of affairs
from the evening news or their Wall Street Journal,
where they won't be embarrassed by the directness
of the report or the hint of personal responsibility.

On Sunday morning recognized ministers
will preach a more refined version of the

same message, to people seated in pews,
who also give too much weight to the nightly
business report and whose minds keep crossing
the street every time the light changes. ■

Letting the Silence Say It All

In memory of Ernie White

When I heard it was a cancer that
Wouldn't respond to treatment,
I made plans to visit, yet
Dreaded our meeting.

I armed myself with gifts—
Dahlia Zinnias from my garden,
Walnut raisin bread from the baker—
Afraid to let my presence speak for itself.

When I arrived, we sat and chatted
About the trivialities of the day,
Avoiding that larger theme we
Didn't feel free to explore—

Letting the silence say it all. ■

A Rhythm for My Life

Help me to find a rhythm for my life
in keeping with my strength, my gifts,
my opportunities, my commitments,
and Thy larger purpose.

Let there be a celebration of life,
the building of relationships,
and the nurturing of others.

Let there be unhurried strolls in the woods,
quiet mornings spent on the pond,
poking around country roads,

Afternoon naps in the porch swing,
leisurely meals with friends,
chickadees fed and zinnias grown.

Let there come to me a quietness of soul,
a relaxed body, an alert mind,
a gentle touch, an inner peace,
an integrity of being. ■

Shall We Give Citizenship to Fertilized Eggs?

By John M. Swomley

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

The Catholic bishops who organized the “right to life” or anti-abortion movement in the United States have also planned the various strategies to accomplish their purpose. Their most recent strategy, which raises serious ethical questions, is to involve Protestant allies in changing their theology to conform to official Roman Catholic politics. That strategy is to get Protestants to accept current Catholic dogma (in force for about 130 years) that a human being exists at fertilization rather than at birth, as biblically defined and accepted for thousands of years.

Before exploring this further it is important to note that the overall purpose of the Roman Catholic bishops is to eliminate not only legal abortion but also contraception by taking political control over Congress and the Presidency so as to secure appointments of only anti-abortion, justices to the Supreme Court. They could then overthrow *Roe v. Wade*, which made abortion legal. Their ultimate purpose is a Constitutional Amendment that would require federal and state governments to accept the Vatican position. To accomplish this objective they have been using incremental strategies, beginning with the organization of a “right to life” movement at every level within the Roman Catholic churches and at all political levels: state, Congressional district, county, and down to precinct.

Their next step was to expand it to Protestant groups so as to keep it from being rejected as simply a Catholic movement. They sent lay emissaries to persuade Protestant evangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson to get into politics on this issue. They were successful and before long the Mormons and Southern Baptist Convention leaders were also brought on board.

Successive strategies included, among others, persuading the Reagan administration, in the words of *Time* magazine, “to alter its foreign aid program to comply with the [Roman Catholic] church’s teaching on birth control” (February 24 1992).

Before that a group of Catholic bishops, led by Archbishop Joseph Bernadin, met with presidential candidate Jimmy Carter on August 31, 1976 and agreed not to endorse his opponent, Gerald Ford, if he would make Catholic appointees to certain positions when elected. Those appointees then crippled the State Department’s family planning program, and Dr. R. T. Ravenholt, director of the Agency for International Development’s global population program, was dismissed.

Henry Hyde, a Vatican loyalist, became the chair of the Republican Platform Committee and has succeeded in its adopting platform planks giving fetal life rights over those of pregnant women.

The bishops next made an important ideological move to persuade Congress and various state legislatures to adopt a ban on what they called “partial birth abortions.” Their strategy throughout was to adopt incremental legislation to limit abortion. Theoretically, the so-called “partial birth abortion” was to prevent the few late-term abortions which physicians perform to save the life of the woman or to extract dead or severely damaged fetuses, such as one without a brain or other essential organs.

The next strategy was to call late-term abortions “infanticide” and expand laws to preclude second-trimester abortions which are possible under present law. In Missouri, for example, the law that was adopted in 1999 was written by a lawyer for the state Catholic Conference, using language that would apply to early abortions. Legislators hesitated to oppose “infanticide.” When the Governor vetoed it, his vote was overridden.

Only three states—Washington, Colorado, and Maine—held referendums rather than let legislatures decide. Despite extensive well-funded campaigns by the Catholic bishops, the people in these states rejected these “partial birth abortion” laws, partly on the perception that these would have been the beginning of a ban on all abortions.

While the above strategies are continuing, the bishops have launched new strategies. An example is the following: “Be it resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of Kansas that, based on undeniable medical, biological and scientific facts, we do hereby acknowledge and affirm that the unborn children in the state of Kansas have an equal and inalienable right to life from conception/ fertilization and that allowing the termination of the lives of innocent human beings even before birth violates section 1 of the Bill of Rights of the Kansas Constitution.”

That resolution quotes the Bill of Rights: “All men are possessed of equal and inalienable natural rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” and then asserts that “men” includes women, children and unborn children. The resolution also states that “by using DNA profiling...even before the new being is implanted in the mother’s womb, we can be absolutely sure we are monitoring the same individual from conception/fertilization through the various stages of growth.”

The fallacies in such a resolution are these: 1) Personhood is defined in the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as

"All persons born or naturalized in the United States...are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside." 2) The resolution is mistaken in speaking of "undeniable medical, biological and scientific facts" that permit monitoring the same individuals from conception/fertilization through the various states of growth." Here is what Dr. Charles Gardner, who did his research at the University of Michigan Medical School's Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology, wrote:

The "biological" argument that a human being is created at fertilization...comes as a surprise to most embryologists...for it contradicts all that they have learned in the past few decades.

Gardner notes that "in humans when two sibling [fertilized] embryos combine into one [as sometimes happens], the resultant person may be completely normal. If the two original [fertilized] embryos were determined to become particular individuals, such a thing could not happen. The embryos would recognize themselves to be different...and would not unite. But here the cells seem unaware of any distinction between themselves....The only explanation is that the individual is not fixed or determined at this stage [fertilization]"

Gardner further states, "The information required to make an eye or a finger does not exist in the fertilized egg. It exists in the positions and interactions of cells and molecules that will be formed at a later time."

Gardner concludes that "Fertilization, the injection of sperm DNA into the egg, is just one of the many small steps toward full human potential. It seems arbitrary to invest this biological event with any special moral significance....It would be a great tragedy if, in ignorance of the process that is the embryo, state legislators pass laws restricting individual freedom of choice and press them upon the people. The embryo is not a child. It is not a baby. It is not yet a human being."

Michael Bennett, chair of the Department of Neuroscience, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, wrote: "Personhood goes with the brain and does not reside within the recipient

"If every human egg fertilized is immediately a 'fetus', 'baby' and 'person', then God and nature play a mean trick on us. Scientists estimate that in the five-six days following union of egg and sperm, between one-third and one-half of all 'persons' spontaneously degenerate and are reabsorbed or expelled. In the second week, 42 percent of the implanted 'persons' abort. In the fetal period one-third of the remaining fetuses spontaneously miscarry. Thus out of every 1000 'persons' 'conceived', only 120 to 160 survive...."

body....There is none, not heart, kidney, lung or spleen, that we cannot do without or replace artificially. The brain is the essence of our existence. It cannot be transplanted."

The National Academy of Sciences has stated that "The proposal that the term 'person' shall include 'all human life' has no basis within our scientific understanding. Defining the time at which the developing embryo becomes a person must remain a moral or religious value."

Dr. Leon Rosenberg, while chairman of the Department of Human Genetics, Yale University Medical School, stated: "Some people argue...that life begins at conception....I have no quarrel with anyone's ideas on this matter, so long as it is clearly understood that they are personal beliefs based on personal judgments and not scientific truths....The scientific method depends on two essential things—a thesis or idea and a means of testing that idea....I maintain that concepts such as humanness are beyond the purview of science because no idea about them can be tested."

A Catholic embryologist trained also in Roman Catholic theology, Robert Francoeur, ridiculed "those who claim a person is present at fertilization and thus denounce all abortion as murder. If every human egg fertilized is immediately a 'fetus', 'baby' and 'person', then God and nature play a mean trick on us. Scientists estimate that in the five-six days following union of egg and sperm, between one-third and one-half of all 'persons' spontaneously degenerate and are reabsorbed or expelled. In the second week, 42 percent of the implanted 'persons' abort. In the fetal period one-third of the remaining fetuses spontaneously miscarry. Thus out of every 1000 'persons' 'conceived', only 120 to 160 survive to be reborn! How do the anti-abortionists and theologians who denounce abortion as murder account for the prodigious waste of human life on the divine plan?"

Moreover, if the "right to lifers" insist on their idea of personhood in a fertilized egg, it is unenforceable in law. Robert Francoeur satirized the possibility that "legal pronouncements about personhood from the moment of conception could be translated into a Brave New World with pregnancy police to make certain that all fertile women have their monthly pregnancy test, and all

pregnancies are monitored to assure the Constitutional, God-given inalienable right of every fertilized egg to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Will fertilized eggs be counted in the census? Will parents receive conception certificates instead of birth certificates? Will the state issue death certificates for miscarriages and require embalming? If the pregnant woman commits a crime can the fetus keep her as a convicted felon out of prison because a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is guaranteed the fetus? What about denominations that accept the Biblical definition of a human being as being born, and do not baptize miscarried embryos and fetuses? Do the sectarian Roman Catholic writers of this proposed legislation really want to impose their religious beliefs on all other faiths?

From an ethical standpoint, the implications of this resolution are that the life of the fetus is more important than the life of the woman who carries it and more important than her born children.

This resolution does not recognize the conflict of life with life. Some years ago at a meeting of the American Society of Christian Ethics a workshop was confronted with the case of a 3-year-old child and an 18-week fetus, both with a dread disease for which there was only one injection of medicine in Chicago. The Chicago airports had been shut down by a blizzard, preventing the doctors from obtaining more of the medicine.

The Christian ethicists unanimously concluded that the

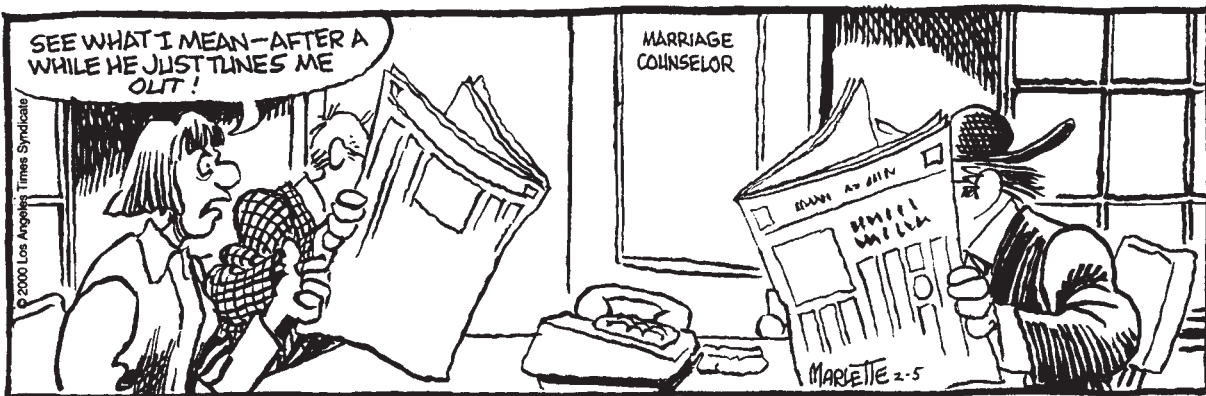
child should get the injection. The moral difference is that the child is among us in a way that the fetus is not. The child's claim is based on relationship, rather than on a legal point of birth.

Although the Roman Catholic hierarchy strongly opposes intentional abortion, in practice it sometimes recognizes the priority of the woman over the fetus, as is evident in the following excerpt from a U.S. Catholic Conference publication.

Operations, treatments and medications which do not directly intend termination of pregnancy but which have as their purpose the cure of a proportionately serious pathological condition of the mother, are permitted when they cannot be safely postponed until the fetus is viable, even though they may or will result in the death of the fetus.

Finally, this whole initiative is based on a propaganda approach known as *prolepsis*, which Webster defines as “an anticipation; especially the describing of an event as taking place before it could have done so; the treating of a future event as if it had already happened.” For example, describing an acorn as if it were already an oak tree or a hen egg as if it were already a chicken.

The most characteristic aspect of personhood is consciousness that is dependent on a brain. ■



An Unnoticed, Life Changing Moment

By R. Hal Ritter

[Dr. Hal Ritter is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Texas, and he serves as the Assistant Director of Pastoral Care for Counseling at the Hillcrest Samaritan Counseling Center in Waco. Ritter teaches counseling courses as adjunct faculty in the Graduate School at Baylor University.]

The purpose of this autobiographical story is to discuss, for the first time, a moment in my life that has challenged me for thirty-four years. I have never spoken about this incident, but for some reason I mentioned it last week to a colleague at a meeting of our local ministerial alliance. My friend suggested that I write it down.

I am sure that what happened went mainly unnoticed except for the few people who were involved, and I suppose that none of them has any memory of it. I have often debated within myself whether or not it was actually “life changing.” But I know it was life changing in the sense that it created a memory and awareness in me that I will never forget, and I hope it has made me a different person. However, I know with my human limitations, that I disappoint myself over and over again.

I was born in Summerville, South Carolina, in the Dorchester County Hospital. Years ago the hospital was moved and merged with two other county hospitals, and the old hospital building is now used for county health services. I lived in a segregated community, and my grandfather, who hired black men to work in his yard and plow his garden each year, always said that “nigras” were all right so long as they stayed in their place. Now, forty-five years later, I understand how offensive the term “nigra” is, but as a child I do not have any memory of ever hearing the term used in sarcasm or insult.

I did not learn blatant prejudice at home. My father always said that all people are to be treated with respect, until or unless they give reason not to be. Then they are to be treated with caution, but still respected. His particular saying was this: “A woman is to be treated as a lady until she proves herself otherwise, and a man is to be treated as a gentleman until he proves himself otherwise.” Dad made no racial distinctions in the application of this saying, and it equally applied to whites as to all others.

Nevertheless, I lived in racially segregated community. I went to white schools and a white church, and I knew I did not have to go to the “colored” restroom or the “colored” window at the Dairy Queen or the “colored” water fountain. In some ways, it was a fairly typical, southern town. To my knowledge we had no Ku Klux Klan, and I have no memory of ever observing anyone walking around someone else in order

to avoid the person because of their color. In other words, as my grandfather would say, all things were in their proper place.

At age eleven, my family moved to Littleton, Colorado. As a sixth grader I had to be bused to school, actually to two schools. I spent that year at two different schools because of over-crowding. While my younger sister walked to a neighborhood school two blocks from our home, my whole sixth grade class was bused across town to another school. It was an older, lower income area with a mixed ethnicity of whites, blacks and Hispanics. We were the whites from the “other side of town,” but I do not remember any particular concerns with the busing. But it was my first experience of ever being teased because of my southern accent. I was sometimes asked to repeat words that I had spoken, not realizing the sarcasm in the request to repeat them.

About fifteen days before my seventeenth birthday, in the middle of my junior year in high school, my family moved from Littleton to Montgomery, Alabama. There I attended the Sidney Lanier High School, which is named for a southern poet whose poetry I had to memorize for English class. It was there, in the spring of 1966, that the defining “moment” occurred.

I had just left a class in business law and was walking toward the boys’ restroom. While I was not a smoker, the restrooms were the places where the students were allowed to smoke between classes. I could smell the smoke as I approached the door. But then it happened. A black girl student, somewhat small in size, was walking between classes with an armload of books. An overweight white boy, who was also in the business law class, walked up behind her and shoved her books and papers out of her hands, spilling them all over the hallway floor.

Immediately, a number of white students gathered around the girl and began to laugh and laugh. I was paralyzed. I had never seen such blatant abuse. Quietly, alone, the black girl, surrounded by a sea of laughing white students, crouched down on the floor and began to gather her things. The white students continued to laugh. I stared in disbelief. The laughter continued until she had gathered all of her books and papers and silently walked away. As the moments passed, I felt awful. What had just happened was a violation of what I believed, as a Christian, to be right; and I stood by and did nothing. It is a decision that I have regretted for the ensuing thirty-four years.

I do not presume to think that I can know how the apostle Peter felt when the crowing rooster called him to awareness of his denials about knowing Jesus. But somehow I think that is how I felt. In that moment of denial, of just standing by and

doing nothing, I was saying, “No, I do not know Jesus. I have nothing to do with who he is. He means nothing to me.” No doubt Peter was acting in fear, perhaps afraid of arrest, perhaps fear for his own life. But what was my fear? I did not feel any threat physically, that somehow I would be in danger if I took a stand. Perhaps it was just peer pressure, or ambivalence, not knowing what to do. I do not know. But I do know that in a moment of ethical decision making in the presence of blatant injustice, I chose to remain silent and do nothing. Was I deluding myself, making myself think that I was simply staying neutral, that somehow I should not become involved, and that neutrality in the face of injustice is an acceptable decision?

I walked on to my next class, but I could not concentrate the rest of the day. Over and over I thought about what happened. Even now, all these years later, I remember the laughter of the overweight white boy and the terror in the eyes of the black girl who was totally alone and who knew that remaining silent was her only way to safety.

I have often wondered how to atone for that moment of denial of my Lord. I have prayed and asked God to forgive me, and yet the memory is as real as if it had happened five minutes ago. I have resolved within myself never to do that again, never to let a blatant injustice go unchallenged. And yet, as I know myself, I have, no doubt, walked by other incidents of injustice again and again without ever allowing them to register in my consciousness. My decision to do nothing on that day in 1966 lives on as a constant reminder that all of my good intentions may become denial in the moment of decision.

One of the things that I appreciate about the apostle Peter, however, was his willingness to move ahead with his life and be teachable. In his vision of the unclean animals and his subsequent encounter with the Gentile Cornelius, he took a stand for God as the God for all people. For me, after this “unnoticed, life changing moment,” I became much more vocal and active on issues of civil rights. I am proud of the fact that in my junior year at the Baptist school, Charleston Southern University, I was the only white charter member of the school’s Afro-American society. It is a membership that was very troublesome for my white fraternity brothers and for some of my fellow Baptist ministerial student friends. Three years later I was in Louisville, Kentucky, attending seminary, and while

*....In a moment of
ethical decision
making in the
presence of blatant
injustice, I chose to
remain silent and do
nothing....I have
often wondered how
to atone for that
moment of denial of
my Lord. I have
prayed and asked
God to forgive me,
and yet the memory is
as real as if it had
happened five
minutes ago. I have
resolved within myself
never to do that
again, never to let a
blatant injustice go
unchallenged.*

there I spent a year attending a predominantly African American Baptist church. One time, when the pastor was out of town, I was asked to preach in the Sunday morning service. It was a joyous time for me, and when the pastor returned the next week he thanked me from the pulpit and said, “I’ve talked to several folks, and they say Brother Ritter’s got soul.” There is no greater compliment that I could have ever received. Somehow, like Peter, I learned that a predominantly black church is still God’s church, and I learned that God can still use me.

I spent a year as a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and I participated in two open housing demonstrations. But through all the subsequent years of my life, the “unnoticed, life changing moment” is still the place that I return the defining event in shaping my thoughts and attitudes about social justice issues and human dignity. It is also a moment that taught me a humility about dealing with people who disappoint and do not live up to what they say, who do not take a stand when they should. Like Peter, I know how they feel. Maybe they are not scared. Maybe they are not embarrassed. But for some reason they do not know what to do, so they do nothing.

It is also a lesson about forgiveness for me. Peter bragged to Jesus that he would forgive his neighbor seven times, and Jesus responded that forgiveness should be unlimited, seventy times seven. No doubt Peter replayed the scene of denying Christ over and over again in his thinking across the years, but Peter also personally experienced the unlimited forgiveness of seventy times seven.

Perhaps, now, I am less impatient with those who disappoint. Perhaps I am more forgiving of those who do not act as I think they should. Perhaps. But I also know myself well enough to know that my indignation often flares when I think an unde-

served injustice is being perpetrated. Am I a different person now than I was when the “unnoticed, life changing moment” occurred? I hope so. I hope I have “changed.” But I am also painfully aware that I must not, to use Paul’s words, count myself to have apprehended. I hear in my heart the words of St. Augustine, that I am *simul justus ut peccator*, both justified and sinner. Thank God, that in the Lord Jesus Christ, forgiveness is seventy times seven. There is still much to do. ■

Reflections on Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom

By Bruce McIver

[Dr. Bruce McIver is a well-known author and public speaker. Before retirement he was pastor of the Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas.]

I've just finished reading Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. It's a challenging and magnificent read. As you know, he spent 28 years of his life in prison—in the worst of privations. But, like his hero, Gandhi, he both refused to bow to the authorities and to retaliate with violence.

Near the end of his prison stay he was given a small piece of ground that he cultivated into a garden, growing a variety of vegetables and plants.

A garden was one of the few things in prison that one could control. To plant a seed, watch it grow, to tend it and then harvest it, offered a simple but enduring satisfaction. The sense of being the custodian of this small patch of earth offered a small taste of freedom.

In some ways, I saw the garden as a metaphor for certain aspects to my life. A leader must also tend his garden; he, too, plants seeds, and then watches, cultivates, and harvests the result. Like the gardener he must mind his work, try to repel the enemies, preserve what can be preserved, and eliminate what cannot succeed.

I wrote Winnie two letters about a particu-

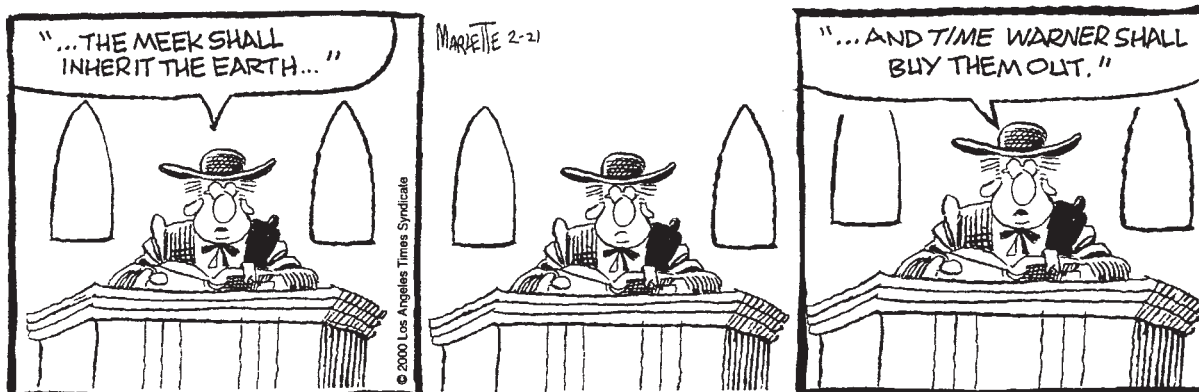
lar beautiful tomato plant, how I coaxed it from a tender seedling to a robust plant that produced deep red fruit. But, then, either through some mistake or lack of care, the plant began to wither and decline, and nothing I did would bring it back to health. When it finally died, I removed the roots from the soil, washed them, and buried them in a corner of the garden.

I narrated this small story at great length. I do not know what she read into that letter, but when I wrote it I had a mixture of feelings: I did not want our relationship to go the way of that plant, and yet I felt that I had been unable to nourish many of the most important relationships in my life. Sometimes there is nothing one can do to save something that must die. (Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Little, Brown and Company, 1994, pp.489-490)

I have read Mandela's words dozens of times—words of wisdom that grew out of pain and privation, suffering and aloneness for 28 years. Words of a prophet.

In retrospect, too much of my time has been spent pulling up dead or dying tomato plants, examining them, whining and wishing for some sign of life. In short, I've too often given energy to "saving" things that have already died.

Sometimes it's time for a funeral...and a benediction. Amen. ■



The Radical Right: Whither?

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*.]

In his membership manual, *The Blue Book*, the founder of the John Birch Society laid out his strategy for saving the United States from liberalism, communism, and democracy. "Democracy," he had said, "is simply a deceptive phrase, a weapon of demagoguery, and a perpetual fraud." His declared plan of action, so he wrote, was to imitate the communist conspiracy by organizing John Birch Society membership in disciplined cells and through appealing for public support by the use of a number of organizational "fronts." The "Birchers" have in truth wielded "the organizational weapon" with a zeal that Nikolai Lenin, who invented the phrase and much of the tactics, would have approved.

Beginning in the 1960s the John Birch Society's campaign gathered momentum, and today the effect of this politics of conspiracy and infiltration is felt at all levels—from local school boards through state legislatures to the rightwing hard core of the Congress of the United States.

Without space in this article to discuss fully the nature of this hard core of the American Radical Right, nor even to point out parallels to other totalitarian movements (Communist, Fascist, and Nazi), a few quotations from Welch's manual will have to suffice to sketch the picture.

- America is so far gone that free citizens cannot save the day: they can resist "only by themselves becoming conspirators against established government" (p. 29).
- Affirming "the organizational weapon:" "We are at a stage where the only sure political victories are achieved by non-political organization; by organization which has a surer, more positive, and more permanent purpose than the immediate political goals that are only means to an end; by organization which has the backbone, and cohesiveness, and strength, and definiteness of direction, which are impossible for the old style political party organization" (p. 111).
- "Our only possible chance (to save the country) is dynamic personal leadership." (p. 113) "What is not only needed, but is absolutely imperative, is for some hardboiled, dictatorial, and dynamic boss to come along" (p. 117). And on pages 158, 159: "The John Birch Society is to be a monolithic body....The John Birch Society will operate under completely authoritative control at all levels."

The Radical Right entered the Congress with trumpet calls

for a dramatic change in national dialogue and direction. They called for a "revolution," a "return to American values." For a number of reasons their initial impact was muffled. The major reason was President Clinton's talent as a consensus builder: they could only rarely confront head-on someone as skillful in backing and filling, ducking and weaving, in salvaging 75% rather than dying for 100%.

The Congressional Radical Right then turned to a more than forty-million dollar fishing expedition by Kenneth Starr, starting at Whitewater but ranging without parameters into anyone's private life that might—by cunning and strategic (and sometimes clearly illegal) releases to the press—damage the public opinion of the President.

But here they ran up against the common sense of the American people. There were some local and regional issues that colored the subsequent elections. But the over-all national picture is easy to read. Surveys of those exiting the polls (voters) showed percentages comparable to those in the population as a whole. *Item:* by 61% to 36%, voters *disapproved* of President Clinton's personal behavior. *Item:* Since, however, they were not voting on a Sunday School Superintendent, they give him 54% *approval* as President. In contrast, the leader of the attack pack in the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, was awarded 57% *disapproval* for his role as a public leader. *Item:* Congress, for months directing a program of media attention to a peep show, earned 61% *disapproval*.

In sum, the Congressional Radical Right fell on its face, leading the Republican party to a rare defeat in an off-year election. Under normal circumstances, they would have picked up enough seats to thwart the Chief Executive by over-riding his vetoes and mangling his programs. What did they lack to carry through their "revolution?"

Whatever the local and regional factors, they fell short at the national level for one great reason: they lacked a single leader of intense charismatic personality. They lacked a man who was a powerful speaker, a veteran with the highest medal for bravery in battle, a proclaimed champion of Christian values, a man praised for his personal life as an austere bachelor and vegetarian and non-smoker.

Sixty five years ago the German Radical Right managed to offer the citizens of the Weimar Republic such a leader, Adolf Hitler. Will the American Radical Right be able in the fast-approaching national elections of 2000 to offer the American Republic such a choice? Or will they be looking around at the rubble of their shattered movement, their trumpeted "revolution" broken on Americans' residual instinct for fair play, due process of law, and patriotic love of our country and its face—how we appear both in the mirror and abroad? ■

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, in Pat Neff Hall, Waco, Texas.

TRUSTEES

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

SUPPORT

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

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE

- Greatly needed
- Urgently solicited
- Genuinely appreciated

OBJECTIVES

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

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

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

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

The Center for Christian Ethics
CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY
Post Office Box 670784
Dallas, Texas, 75367-0784

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
DALLAS, TX
PERMIT NO. 3648