

# CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

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

Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23

**"If Gold Rusts, . . . ?"** *Joe E. Trull*

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# “If Gold Rusts, . . . ”

By Joe E. Trull

*That, if gold rust, what shall poor iron do?  
For if the priest be foul, in whom we trust,  
What wonder if a layman yield to lust?*

Chaucer, in his *Canterbury Tales*, raises the question of ministerial ethics. Moral failures in the ministry are all too common today. Recently I learned that two of my best students in Christian ethics had resigned their churches and were divorcing their spouses—both due to moral failures.

In my first three full-time pastorates, covering a period of twenty years, I was forced to deal with sexual misconduct by ministerial staff—three cases in one of them. As I talk to other ministers, I find my experience is not out of the ordinary.

The present crisis in ministerial ethics, particularly sexual misconduct, is both a reflection of our age, as well as an influence on our society. Teaching a course in ministerial ethics since 1986, as well as co-authoring a textbook on the subject, has made me acutely aware of the large numbers of ministers guilty of sexual abuse. Many are immediately terminated. Others are protected and defended by well meaning but naïve parishioners, who often enforce a “code of silence” which allows the abuse to continue.

About the time I began a sabbatical in 1998, the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission (CLC) began an extensive study of the problem. I was asked to serve as a consultant for a large and competent convention committee, who investigated the issue of Clergy Sexual Abuse (CSA) to determine how the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) should assist churches, victims, perpetrators, and their families.

Our task was monumental. We listened to victims share their stories. We discovered the depth and breadth of the problem. Lay leaders and churches told of the aftermath in their congregations and communities. Counselors explained the damage done by CSA and the complexity of therapy. Legal questions frightened the convention lawyers.

After nearly two years, the CLC is ready to report to the BGCT annual meeting this month. Response teams will be available to churches needing help. The BGCT will subsidize counseling for survivors, perpetrators, and family members. A packet of educational materials and other resources are also available.

The first articles in this issue present two of the four pam-

phlets produced, as well as a sexual code of ethics presented to the BGCT in 1999. I hope this trilogy will help ministers, churches, lay leaders, perpetrators, and survivors to understand the problem and to realize that help is available.

Clergy sexual abuse is a serious problem in all churches. Most other denominations are far ahead of Baptists in facing the issue. It is time for us to act also.

## Cries from the Grandstand

Many of you are writing, calling, and e-mailing good suggestions. I am listening and will do my best to respond. Please remember, however, that this is a one-person operation: no secretary and no staff. Without the wonderful assistance of Audra and Marilyn (who type and proof-read), Randy the layout man in Des Moines, Etheridge Printing in Dallas, and James Kim (our mailer in Dallas), the Journal would never be.

A common request is for more diversity. This issue has Bill Moyer’s recent commencement address to the University of Texas grads (a monumental statement on American society), excellent sermons by two women (one an African-American), and a preview of Foy Valentine’s dream taking shape (told by a Kentuckian turned Texan now living in Waco). How’s that for diversity?

Some of our readers are still confused about the future. As the last issue and the back cover seek to explain, CET is no longer a part of the Center now located at Baylor. Dr. Kruschwitz defines the role of the Center in his article and the new journal he will publish next year—it will be different from CET. God willing, and finances permitting, we plan to continue publishing CET as a unique voice for Christian ethics today.

Some have called or written asking, “What can I do to help during the transition?”

1. *Spread the word.* Tell your friends and acquaintances about CET—our mission is to promote the cause of Christian ethics as widely as possible. I will be at the Texas Baptist Convention in Corpus Christi October 30-31 at the CLC Booth—come by and visit, bring a friend, and pick up some of our past issues.
2. *Help us keep the costs down.* I know this sounds mun-

*(continued on page 11)*

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# The Forbidden Zone

## The Nature and Prevalence of Clergy Sexual Abuse

[In 1998 the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas established a special committee to study the problem of clergy sexual abuse. The group discovered the problem was serious. The issues involved included education, counseling, local church assistance, convention policies, and financial assistance. This month the CLC will report to the BGCT a wide range of resources for churches, pastors, and family members of victims and perpetrators. Following are two of the pamphlets available (other pamphlets deal with "Impact" and "Responding to CSA"), as well as a "Covenant of Sexual Ethics." The Editor assisted the committee by preparing these educational materials.]

The sexual abuse of parishioners by clergy is a major ethical problem. No denomination has escaped the spotlight of scandal. One example, recorded by Marie Fortune, is the story of Peter Donovan, pastor of First Church, Newburg (actual names and places are changed). Six women lodged formal charges against the pastor. Donovan's misconduct included sexual contact with counselees and employees, misuse of the pastoral office to manipulate members, verbal threats to intimidate victims, and rape.<sup>1</sup>

Incidents like this have become all too common. Numerous studies over the past decade support the research of pastoral counselor G. Lloyd Rediger, who contends that 10 percent of clergy are guilty of sexual malfeasance, and another 15 percent are approaching the line of misconduct.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the number of ministers involved, numerous persons are victimized by clergy sexual misconduct. Pastor Donovan at First Church Newburg abused as many as forty-five members. A growing number of survivors have organized to provide support for victims and to wage an aggressive battle against clergy sexual exploitation.<sup>3</sup>

Through numerous interviews within his own profession, psychologist Peter Rutter has brought to light the power dynamic often at work in abusive relationships. In our culture the connection to power makes sexual misconduct mainly a male problem. Rutter asserts 96 percent of sexual exploitation by professionals is by a man in power who capitalizes on a woman's trust.<sup>4</sup>

Rutter also clarifies sexual abuse. He defines as "the forbidden zone" any sexual contact that occurs within the framework of a professional relationship of trust (such as a counselor or pastor). Thus clergy sexual misconduct includes any contact or action intended to arouse erotic interest, whether there is touching or not.<sup>5</sup>

Seminary professors Stanley Grenz and Roy Bell assert that sexual misconduct in the pastorate is a grave betrayal of trust that operates in two directions. "It is a violation of a sacred sexual trust,

marring the beautiful picture God has given of the relationship of Christ and the church. And it is a violation of a power trust, abusing the privilege of the pastoral position with which the ordained leader has been endowed by the church and its Lord."<sup>6</sup>

Sexual exploitation ordinarily occurs in an atmosphere of enforced silence. This silence is maintained not only by the participants but also by others who are unwilling to breach the dictated censorship. The director of an organization for survivors of clergy abuse writes that the initial response of church officials is to hush the victim and cover-up the sexual abuse, which continues unchecked for years.<sup>7</sup> Rutter insists that this "code of silence" must be broken.<sup>8</sup> A major step in breaking the silence about clergy sexual abuse is to understand the prevalence of the problem.

### The Scope of Clergy Sexual Abuse

For years congregants and the wider community have assumed ministers are persons of integrity, worthy of respect and trust. Yet, from King David's illicit affair with Bathsheba to Jim Bakker's liaison with Jessica Hahn, the reputation of spiritual leaders has been tainted by sexual scandal. Most preachers begin their ministries with good intentions. Yet as they face sexual temptation, some succumb. When they fall, they land hard and injure others.

During the past decade the media has profiled case after case of ministers, priests, televangelists, and other religious leaders who were guilty of clergy sexual misconduct. Ethical failure in ministry has become so widespread that insurance companies are reevaluating their coverage of abuse cases, sometimes excluding coverage altogether.<sup>9</sup>

Clergy sexual abuse is not new. The Old Testament records the story of the sons of the priest Eli, who misused their position to engage in sexual misconduct—"they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting" (1 Sam. 2:2). In the first century of Christianity, the apostle Paul warned church leaders about the dangers of sexual sin (1 Cor. 6:9-16; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:2). Early church leaders such as Jerome, Tertullian and Augustine instructed pastors about sexual misbehavior.

Today the situation is especially acute for Roman Catholics, who have lost almost one-fourth of their active priests due to sexual and marital reasons.<sup>10</sup> Protestants are not immune. One denominational study reported "clergy were sexually exploiting their parishioners at twice the rate of secular therapists."<sup>11</sup>

Present research indicates the incidence of sexual abuse by clergy has reached "horrific proportions." Two seminal studies in 1984 reported 12 and 12.7 percent of ministers had engaged in sexual intercourse with members, and 37 and 39 percent had acknowledged sexually inappropriate behavior. More recent sur-

veys by religious journals and research institutes support these figures. The disturbing aspect of all research is that the rate of incidence for clergy exceeds the client-professional rate for both physicians and psychologists.<sup>12</sup> Often the clergy sexual offender is guilty of multiple transgressions. In one case reported by *Newsweek*, while seducing one woman her minister boasted of having slept with thirty others.<sup>13</sup>

Along with an increasing number of allegations, reports of clergy sexual abuse involve broad areas of misconduct: long-standing affairs, homosexual liaisons, abuse of children, seduction of youth, inappropriate touching, and verbal and non-verbal sexual innuendos. Rediger identified six specifics of sexual malfeasance:

- Sexual intercourse with persons outside of a marriage covenant.
- Oral sex with persons outside of a marriage covenant.
- Unwanted or inappropriate physical touch.
- Physical-sensual displays of the body or titillation of senses in suggestive ways.
- The use of pornography, individually or with others, to stimulate erotic fantasies.
- Verbal or visual contact with another person which implies or demands sexual response.<sup>14</sup>

### The Nature of Clergy Sexual Abuse

After we grasp the scope of the problem, a second necessary step is to understand the nature of clergy sexual misconduct. When a male minister exploits his privileged position for personal sexual satisfaction—whether seemingly innocent innuendos, obnoxious harassment, or actual contact—he has strayed into the “forbidden zone.”

Clergy sexual misconduct is a violation of the integrity of the pastoral office, a betrayal of ordination vows. Regardless of how it happens, it is a betrayal of trust between pastor and people, which involves both an abuse of sexuality and an abuse of power.<sup>15</sup>

Betrayal of Sexual Trust. The Christian ethic proposes that God has placed boundaries for sexual expression, which reveal and support its intended meaning. Only within the context of heterosexual marriage can sexual intercourse express the proper intent of the sex act: unconditional, covenantal love. Sexual expression is meant to be both the symbol of mutual commitment and the celebration of the “one flesh” marital relationship (Mt. 19:4-6).

When the sex act is practiced outside the context of marriage, it also carries meaning, but not the one God intends. Extramarital sex relations lack unconditional commitment, and all too easily become an expression of self-gratification, exploitation, and infidelity. Outside the boundaries of the marriage covenant, sex relations actually work to deny the intended meaning of the act—sexual intercourse becomes bonding without permanency, a non-binding covenant, and a false declaration about the depth of the relationship.<sup>16</sup>

For the married pastor, the basic commitment is to marital fidelity. For the single minister, sexual faithfulness begins with an equally important commitment to sexual abstinence before marriage. Some have tried to put a positive face on certain extramarital sexual activities, but any intentional sexual contact beyond the

boundaries of marriage violates the marital bond and constitutes adultery (Mt. 5:27-28).

Thus, sexual misconduct by clergy is a distortion of human sexuality—a betrayal of sexual trust. For an offending pastor, whether single or married, the betrayal is a violation of God’s intention.

Betrayal of Power Trust. Every act of clergy indiscretion also is a betrayal of trust in the use of power. One writer asserts the problem “is less about sex and more about power. It has less to do with sexual misconduct such as adultery, and more to do with exploiting one’s professional position for personal gain.”<sup>17</sup> Only when the power aspect is accepted, writes Pamela Cooper-White, can the church stop engaging in denial and collusion and become a place of authentic power and healing.<sup>18</sup>

Every minister is a symbol of religious authority. By virtue of the pastoral office, the minister interprets religious truth, the meaning of life, the way of faith, and even the reality of God. Add to that status the power of the pastor’s presence through ministry, and you realize the special influence a minister holds among his congregants.

For example, in pastoral counseling a female member brings into the relationship her intimate, wounded, vulnerable, or undeveloped parts, which the minister holds in trust. Often the problems are closely tied to her sexuality. Whatever the cause of her wounds, she comes to her minister seeking acceptance, self-worth, and emotional support. Ultimately she seeks healing.

A special bond of trust develops between her and her pastor, which may lead to more openness and more vulnerability. Peter Rutter notes that even a woman with a firm sense of sexual boundaries often stops guarding them in order that her inner self may be seen and known by this healer.<sup>19</sup> Motivated by his own needs, a minister easily may move this relationship into the sexual sphere, seeking his own “healing.” Whatever the motive, through sexual contact a pastoral counselor has exploited a congregant’s vulnerability, violated her trust, and met his own needs at her expense. Lebacqz and Barton conclude, this sexual contact “revictimizes her, repeating patterns from her past, and keeps her from recognizing and claiming her own strength apart from a man.”<sup>20</sup>

While this scenario describes the typical situation in clergy sexual abuse, what about the congregant-initiated sexual contact? Or what if the sexual affair is by mutual consent? Most male ministers have encountered seductive behavior in unstable members, and the story of a colleague who has left his spouse because of a sexual involvement with a congregant is not uncommon.

Recognizing these situations do occur, most authorities insist that *any* sexual contact between clergy and congregant involves an abuse of power. Whatever the circumstances, any sexual behavior by a man in power is inherently exploitive of a woman’s trust. Even a woman’s advance does not relieve the minister from his responsibility to maintain boundaries.

Types of Abusive Ministers. Clergy sexual misconduct takes many forms: voyeurism, exhibitionism, incest, child molestation, homosexual liaisons, and rape. Clergy sexual abuse usually begins with acts or statements intended to arouse erotic interest, sometimes including harassment. When pastoral power is used to manipulate a congregant to engage in sex relations, the results are devastating.

What type of minister becomes involved sexually with a church member? A *Newsweek* article provided a profile of the minister who strays. He is usually middle-aged, disillusioned with his calling, neglecting his own marriage, and a lone ranger who is isolated from his clerical colleagues. His failure commenced when he met a woman who needed him.<sup>21</sup>

There are many ways to classify abusers. Observers of clergy abuse list as many as seven profiles.<sup>22</sup> Marie Fortune has made a major distinction between *predators* and *wanderers*, to which may be added a third type, the *lover*.

The *Predator* is a person acting as God's representative who actively seeks opportunities to abuse women sexually. Targeting his prey, the predator pretends to be a caring pastor, using his power and position to manipulate his victims. The pastoral predator is "manipulative, coercive, controlling, predatory, and sometimes violent. He may also be charming, bright, competent, and charismatic. He is attracted to powerlessness and vulnerability. He is not psychotic, but is usually sociopathic; that is, he has little or no sense of conscience about his offending behaviors. He usually will minimize, lie, and deny when confronted. For these offenders, the ministry presents an ideal opportunity for access to possible victims of all ages."<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to the predator, the *Wanderer* is not violent, not premeditative in his sexual abuse, and generally less successful personally and professionally. Because he is a vulnerable and inadequate person, the wanderer easily becomes emotionally and sexually involved with a congregant or counselee. According to Fortune, the wanderer "has difficulty maintaining boundaries in relationships and attempts to meet private needs in public arenas."<sup>24</sup> The catalyst for his sexual misbehavior is usually an equally needy woman who holds her minister in high regard, almost to the point of adoration.

The growing intimacy between pastor and parishioner usually culminates in an emotional moment when inhibitions are cast aside and the two engage in an episode of sexual intercourse. Once the passions have subsided, both begin to feel anxiety, shame, guilt, and a sense of betrayal. The two express regret and swear themselves to secrecy. Although things seem to return to normal, a trust has been violated and a shadow falls over their lives and relationships.

The *Lover* is another minister who enters the forbidden zone with a parishioner. This spiritual shepherd becomes infatuated with one of his flock. Though a sexual transgressor like the other two, he is motivated neither by the desire to conquer nor the need to overcome personal inadequacies. Whether single or married, the minister knows a sex relationship with a church member is wrong and tries to guard against inappropriate behavior.

Although there is no stereotypical perpetrator of clergy sexual abuse, the distinction between predator, wanderer, and lover is insightful. The predator offender moves from conquest to conquest, leaving a trail of victims. The wanderer minister yields to temptation in a moment of crisis and immediately feels remorse over his failure. The romantic minister is drawn to a church member when his passion convinces him he is in love.

Clergy sexual abuse raises many other important questions. What is its impact on victims and churches? How can sexual

abuse be prevented? Is restoration possible for fallen ministers? How should churches and denominations respond? What are the legal implications? The ethical problem is many-sided. Understanding the issue is vital, but it is only the beginning. ■

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1989).
- 2 Cited in Joy Jordan-Lake, "Conduct Unbecoming a Preacher," *Christianity Today*, 10 February 1992, 26.
- 3 *The Linkup* (1412 W. Argyle #2, Chicago, IL 60640) conducts annual conferences and publishes a quarterly newsletter (*Missing Link*) in which news reports of "Black-Collar Crimes" are printed to identify clergy sexual abusers.
- 4 Peter Rutter, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women's Trust* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1986), 15-16.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 6 Stanley J. Grenz & Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 17.
- 7 Tom Economus, "Buzz -words that put victims over the edge!," *Missing Link*, Spring-Summer 1998, 1.
- 8 Rutter, 17.
- 9 Thomas S. Giles, "Coping with Sexual Misconduct in the Church," *Christianity Today*, 11 January 1993, 49.
- 10 David Rice, *Shattered Vows: Exodus from the Priesthood* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990), 3.
- 11 Bob Harvey, "Sexual Harassment," 31 March 1992, A14, cited in Grenz & Bell, 22.
- 12 For a summary of the surveys see Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 80-81 and Grenz and Bell, 22-23. A research survey by Jeff Seat of Southern Baptist pastors (*The Journal of Pastoral Care*, Winter 1993, 364) revealed 14.1% engaged in "inappropriate sexual behavior" and 70.4% had knowledge of other ministers who have had sexual contact with a congregant.
- 13 *Newsweek*, 28 August 1989, 49.
- 14 G. Lloyd Rediger, "Clergy Moral Malfeasance," *Church Management—The Clergy Journal*, May/June 1991, 37-38.
- 15 Grenz & Bell, 62-106.
- 16 Grenz & Bell, 81.
- 17 John D. Vogelsang, "From Denial to Hope: A Systemic Response to Clergy Sexual Abuse," *Journal of Religion and Health*, Fall 1993, 197.
- 18 Pamela Cooper-White, "Soul-Stealing: Power and Relations in Pastoral Sexual Abuse," *The Christian Century*, 20 February 1991, 199.
- 19 Rutter, 124.
- 20 Karen LeBacqz and Ron Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 124.
- 21 *Newsweek*, 48.
- 22 See Grenz & Bell's list in footnote 4 on page 179.
- 23 Fortune, 47.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 156.

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# Defeating the Demons

## The Prevention of Clergy Sexual Abuse

Clergy sexual misconduct has not reached epidemic proportions, but most experts agree that the number of incidents is increasing. Reliable research over the past fifteen years concludes that about 10-12 percent of ministers have engaged in sexual intercourse with members of their congregation, and about 25-35 percent of clergymen have admitted to sexually inappropriate behavior with parishioners.<sup>1</sup>

If sexual misconduct by the clergy is so common, and if virtually all ministers are tempted to sin sexually, what can be done to prevent this destructive behavior? Why do some ministers fall and others do not? Are there preventative measures that can help ministers and churches nip in the bud this breach of power and trust?

Clergy sexual abuse is seldom an isolated action. The sexual exploitation of a congregant by a minister is a complex problem involving a confluence of circumstances and motivations, especially the twin dynamics of sexuality and power.

While serving as a missionary in Africa, Dee Miller was sexually assaulted by an SBC missionary co-worker.<sup>2</sup> Out of her ordeal she has become an advocate for survivors and a recognized authority on clergy sexual abuse. Recently she wrote, "The demons are not the perpetrators. They aren't the colluders, and certainly not the survivors. I've named the collective demons in an acronym—DIM thinking—Denial, Ignorance, and Minimization."<sup>3</sup> To address the problem and stem the tide, ministers and churches must develop constructive ways to "defeat the demons" of sexual abuse.

Some offer a straightforward solution to the problem: the church should weed out those who are likely to abuse. Certainly ordination and ministerial placement should be limited to persons of the highest spiritual maturity and moral integrity (1 Tim. 3:1-13). No one disagrees with that principle. However, clergy sexual abuse is very difficult to predict. As Christian psychologists Jack Balswick and John Thoburn confirm, "No one factor in and of itself can be identified as the reason why a given minister succumbs to a sexual temptation. In most cases, a combination of factors contributes to their behavior."<sup>4</sup>

Adding to the difficulty of predicting abuse is the fact that comparatively little has been written about what factors make a person vulnerable to victimization. Even less is available on what makes an individual in the institutional church vulnerable to colluding.<sup>5</sup>

A better approach for preventing clergy sexual misconduct is to equip ministers and churches to understand negative influences and encourage positive resistance. Clergy and churches must refuse to succumb to the demons of denial, ignorance, and minimization, which usually foster secrecy and collusion. Research indicates that ministers who withstand sexual temptation understand their own personal susceptibility, recognize the

danger signals, and build strong support systems. Churches assist in prevention by perceiving the dynamics of the clergy role, encouraging methods of accountability for its ministers, and developing wise policies.

### Personal Awareness

For perpetrators, victims, and colluders, the first step in the prevention of clergy abuse is a personal recognition of the actual problem. An inadequate approach is to ask, "Who's at fault?" The blame game usually misreads the situation and offers little help for prevention. Some blame the minister who profanes his calling by taking advantage of a vulnerable church member. Some blame the church that puts its pastor under pressure to perform. Some identify the culprit as a seductive female or an inadequate wife.

Sex abuse expert Marie Fortune insists most offending ministers violate ethical sexual boundaries long before they commit vocational suicide. "It's not about sex. It's a misuse of power." Fortune observes that church members want to excuse the pastor and often slip into denial. But it is not fair to the pastor or the congregation to ignore the problem. "We need to say, 'Look, it was wrong. It was unethical behavior.'"<sup>6</sup>

The ministry is a very attractive profession for anyone who is looking to exploit vulnerable people, claims Roy Woodruff, executive director of the 3000 member American Association of Pastoral Counselors. "The average parish pastor has no one he reports to or is supervised by. And he has a lot of needy people coming for help. A pastor who could be needy himself can exploit the needs of others."<sup>7</sup>

Even for sexual relationships described as consensual, abuse of power is an issue. Whenever there is a significant power imbalance, as a counselor/client or pastor/parishioner relationship, consensual sex is always an abusive act that exploits the powerless victim.

Awareness of the dynamics of clergy sexual abuse is basic to all other prevention strategies. Every minister needs to realize that he is at risk to cross the boundary into the forbidden zone every day. The male pastor is not exempt from sexual attraction to congregants. He must be aware of his feelings and honestly acknowledge the sexual urges he senses.

In addition, as a professional caregiver, the minister is a special target for sexual failure. Some ministers have difficulty accepting their limitations, especially in counseling members of the opposite gender. Pastors who see themselves as rescuers may create a codependent relationship that is dangerous. A rescuer-healer minister is susceptible to sexual failure because he may cross over healthy boundaries to fulfill his own personal needs.<sup>8</sup>

A minister must be aware of personal susceptibilities that make him more prone toward sexual abuse. Deep-seated insecurities, which easily surface as sexual and power needs, often fuel misconduct. Unresolved questions relating to a pastor's own sexuality, especially destructive experiences from the past, can contribute to the exploitation of others. Sexual addiction is a critical influence upon some abusers.

Pastoral counselor Woodruff contends sexually abusive ministers usually fit one of two profiles: the "prima donna" or the depressed pastor.<sup>9</sup> The "prima donna" pastor operates out of a desire for power and control, loses touch with boundaries, over directs peoples' lives, and develops a sense of "I can do no wrong." Central to this person is the idea of entitlement—that he is "entitled" to certain behavior that others are not. The highly publicized televangelist scandals and the sexual failure of many contemporary mega church pastors illustrate this type.

At the other extreme is the depressed pastor, whose judgment becomes cloudy because of very low self-esteem and a growing inability to function as a minister or as a man. Thus he becomes vulnerable to relationships that provide gratification. The high-profile pastor and the despondent minister share one fatal weakness—isolation.

Out of her experiences with survivors, Dee Miller has identified a wide range of factors that increase a person's vulnerability to be abused. Being younger than the perpetrator, smaller in size, of a minority race, and having a limited support system increases vulnerability. Quite often the female victim lives alone or is a minor whose parents are uninvolved in the church. Many of the abused are employees of the church. Crises that increase vulnerability are marital problems, domestic violence, a recent divorce or death of a spouse, or a minor who is separated from one or both parents. Chronic health problems also contribute to victimization.<sup>10</sup>

What positive lessons can be learned from this summary of significant factors related to clergy sexual abuse? First, ministers inclined to abuse urgently need personal therapy. For them, the personal and professional risk of ministering to women is too great.

For pastors who do not sense vulnerability toward abusing parishioners, but who do recognize the reality of sexual temptation, the dynamics of the pastor/congregant relationship may offer another lesson. Peter Rutter observes, "Every forbidden-zone relationship in which sexual tension appears also presents an opportunity to heal."<sup>11</sup> The male minister holds the power to move the arousal of sexual feelings beyond temptation into an opportunity for the healing of deeper wounds. He alone can turn an impending disaster into a life-giving moment.

### Warning Signs

Knowing the warning signs of clergy sexual abuse can aid the prevention of it. Lebacqz and Barton insist that ministers should be aware of their boundaries and always seek to maintain those borders. "Even if the boundaries for sexual intimacy are the same for pastor and lay person, the responsibility for maintaining those boundaries fall to the professional person."<sup>12</sup>

Ministers need a "warning system" that will alert them when they are approaching unacceptable levels of intimacy with parishioners. Lebacqz and Barton have proposed a checklist of signals that warn ministers when they are headed for trouble:

- the "publicity" test: what would others think?
- physical arousal—one's own or the other's;
- inordinate sexual fantasy;
- sexual gestures or body language;
- intuition, instinct, or not feeling right;
- wanting to share intimacies that are not called for;
- a parishioner wanting too much time or attention;
- wanting to shift the focus to sexual subjects.<sup>13</sup>

Marie Fortune has developed a list of questions that pose the possibility of sexual misconduct: Is the minister doing a lot of counseling beyond his or her scope of responsibility? Is the person not taking care of himself or herself, canceling vacations, and neglecting time with family? Does the person tend to sexualize conversations? Are mechanisms of accountability being ignored? Is lay leadership discouraged? Does everything in the church focus on the pastor?<sup>14</sup>

The vulnerability of the counseling process has led some to conclude that pastors should not counsel at all or restrict their counseling to the same sex. However, counseling across gender lines is an inevitable part of pastoral ministry. A better approach is to establish some necessary precautions that help prevent sexual misconduct. Guidelines for pastoral counseling usually stress: (1) Always have another person nearby when counseling; (2) Develop a method which prevents total privacy in the counseling office (unlocked door, glass panel, etc.); (3) Publish counseling guidelines; (4) Create a referral list for persons needing long-term counseling; (5) Decide in advance and indicate to counsees how much touching is appropriate.

Grenz and Bell offer six warning signs that indicate boundaries are being violated:

- The conversation becomes increasingly personal, as the pastor talks unduly about himself;
- The pastor's physical contact has moved beyond greetings to friendly pats and hugs;
- The pastor fantasizes about a sexual relationship with the congregant;
- The pastor offers to drive the congregant home;
- The pastor arranges meetings with the congregant outside of the normal counseling time;
- The pastor increasingly hides his feelings for the parishioner and his meetings with her from his accountability systems, especially his wife.<sup>15</sup>

### Support Systems

One of the best ways to ensure responsible sexual behavior is for the minister to build strong support systems. Accountability relationships offer a crucial antidote for misconduct.

A wholesome marriage reinforces sexual fidelity. The research of Balswick and Thoburn revealed, "Over one fourth of the pastors cite their relationship with their wife as the most important

reason for sexual fidelity.” The study also concluded, “Marital dissatisfaction coupled with work boredom is the kind of situation that has been conducive to the most fantasy and openness to actual liaisons.”<sup>16</sup>

A good marriage provides a wholesome context for sexual expression. It enhances intimacy and facilitates honest communication, while reminding the married church leader that he is accountable. Colleagues and personal counselors provide another support group. A pastor should not hesitate to seek personal counseling from a qualified therapist when he needs inner healing and emotional health.

Models and mentors make an important supportive contribution. Many pastors have formed accountability groups who meet regularly to develop trust, offer encouragement, and hold one another morally accountable.

The greatest role model for ministers is Jesus, who ministered to women without moral compromise. He viewed each woman he encountered through God’s eyes, not as objects for selfish gratification, but persons with deep needs and spiritual aspirations. As disciples of Christ, pastors are to minister to women as Jesus did.

### Professional Safeguards

Prevention for the individual minister should begin during the preparation for ministry. Both seminary students and ministers serving in churches need information and clarification of ethical standards for ministry. Marie Fortune believes ministers “need to understand the nature of the power and authority of their role and the responsibility that goes with it. They need to learn how to maintain boundaries in relationships with parishioners and counselees. They need to learn to care for their own emotional and sexual needs in appropriate ways.”<sup>17</sup>

Individual churches share some responsibility for prevention. Issues that churches must address beyond the basic education of their leaders include employment policies for ministerial search committees and procedures for handling allegations of sexual misconduct by ministers.<sup>18</sup> One reality that compounds the problem of clergy sexual abuse is the common practice of perpetrators to move from one state to another, one institution to another, and one denomination to another. The structure and practice of Baptist churches make them vulnerable to traveling abusers unless they do a thorough background check on every potential minister. If a past history of sexual abuse is discovered in a candidate, the church body should be informed.

Most professionals operate under an accepted code of ethics developed and enforced by their peers. Authorship, instruction, and enforcement are three major problems in writing a code of ethics for clergy.<sup>19</sup> In addition, autonomous Baptist churches have been reluctant to accept one standard code of ethics for all ministers.

However, a growing number of church leaders believe a ministerial code of ethics is possible and necessary. Christian psychologist Archibald Hart notes that unlike mental health professionals, ministers are only loosely bound by a commonly understood moral code that is subject to differing interpretations. Clearly articulated boundaries for ministry relationships would

help to prevent many problems arising in the minister’s sexual relationships.<sup>20</sup>

Defeating the demons of clergy sexual abuse is no easy battle. The war of prevention will have to be waged on many fronts. Denial is deadly. As long as the church ignores the problem or cajoles victims to remain silent, the problem persists. Ignorance compounds the issue and augments the damage sexual abuse perpetrates. To minimize clergy sexual misconduct is to become a colluder, one who joins the perpetrator in victimizing the vulnerable and their families. Prevention, therefore, is the responsibility of us all. ■

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### ENDNOTES

1 Joe E. Trull & James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Being A Good Minister In A Not-So-Good World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 81.

2 Read her story in *How Little We Knew: Collusion and Confusion with Sexual Misconduct* (Lafayette, LA: Prescott Press, 1983), available from the author at 613 Frank St., Council Bluffs, IA 51503.

3 Dee Miller, “Moving Beyond Our Fears,” 1998, an unpublished article used by permission..

4 Jack Balswick and John Thoburn, “How Ministers Deal With Sexual Temptation,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 1991, 285.

5 Dee Miller, “How Could She?” 1998, an unpublished article used by permission.

6 Cited by Greg Warner in “With sexual misconduct, all suffer in blame game,” *Associated Baptist Press*, 23 December 1993, 6-8.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Stanley J. Grenz & Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 132.

9 Warner, 4.

10 Miller, “How Could She?”

11 Peter Rutter, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989), 223.

12 Karen Lebacqz and Ronald Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 107-8.

13 *Ibid.*, 65.

14 Warner, 6. See also Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 106-7 and 148-53.

15 Grenz and Bell, 145.

16 Balswick and Thoburn, 280, 270.

17 Fortune, 106.

18 Marie Fortune closes her book *Is Nothing Sacred?* with a model of procedure developed by the American Lutheran Church for responding to complaints of unethical behavior by clergy, 135-153.

19 For a full discussion of the pros and cons of a Code of Ethics for ministers, see Trull and Carter, 182-215, as well as numerous sample denominational codes, 220-256.

20 Richard Blackmon and Archibald Hart, “Personal Growth for Clergy” in Richard Hunt, John Hinkle, Jr., and H. Newton Malony, eds., *Clergy Assessment and Career Development* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 39.



# A Covenant of Clergy Sexual Ethics

[A representative group of Texas pastors signed this Covenant as part of the Christian Life Commission report on Clergy Sexual Abuse before the messengers attending the Baptist General Convention of Texas meeting in El Paso in 1999]

## Introduction

This covenant calls Baptist ministers to commit to God and the congregations they serve to be faithful to the biblical sexual ethic of fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness. Because sexual integrity is foundational to Christian life and ministry, we encourage ministers and congregations to discuss this or similar ethical covenants in the context of the theological foundations and definitions expressed below, and we urge ministers to sign and adhere to a covenant of sexual ethics. We suggest that signed covenants be kept by ministers with copies given to church officers.

## Theological Foundations

Human sexuality is a good gift of God through which we become partners with God's creative intent for humanity (Gen. 1:27,28,31). Faithful sexual practice expresses the loving commitment of marriage and embodies the mutual intimacy between husband and wife (Gen. 2:18-25).

When we misuse our sexuality, God's creative intent is supplanted by destructive consequences. Raised to the status of idol, the good gift of sexuality mutates into the power of exploitation, selfishness, anger, and domination.

When sexual sin and abuse occur, Christian practice calls us to engage the work of justice, reconciliation, and healing. The work of justice involves repentance, restitution, and restoration. Justice builds the foundation for reconciliation by establishing conditions in which alienated and injured parties have the opportunity to heal. Healing can occur when the possibilities of justice and reconciliation are realized.

The relationship between ministers and congregants is based upon trust. In difficult times, church members turn to ministers for comfort, support, guidance, and assurance, expecting the minister to act as a pastor, shepherd, counselor, and friend. Church members trust ministers never to take advantage of them or to manipulate them, especially when they are most vulnerable.

The purposes of a covenant of sexual ethics for ministers are threefold: (1) to provide a framework for upholding sexual integrity among ministers; (2) to support and protect ministers by defining ethical norms; and (3) to establish a process for achieving justice, reconciliation, and healing.

## Definitions of Sexual Misconduct By Ministers

- sexual relations outside of marriage;
- unwanted or inappropriate physical contact;
- all other sexually oriented or suggestive behaviors, such as overt and covert seductive speech and gestures;
- the use of pornography.

## Preamble

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, called by God to proclaim the gospel and gifted by the Spirit to minister to the church, I dedicate myself to conduct my ministry according to the ethical guidelines and

principles set forth in scripture and this covenant, in order that my ministry may be acceptable to God, my service beneficial to the Christian community, and my life a witness to the world.

## Covenant

As a minister called to serve God and God's people, I commit myself to the following norms of ethical conduct, for which I am accountable to God, to my colleagues in ministry, and to the church in which I serve.

- I will demonstrate sexual integrity in ministry by understanding, respecting, and observing the boundaries of sexual misconduct as defined above.
- I will nurture my physical, emotional, and spiritual health, maintain enriching friendships and build strong relationships with my spouse and family.
- I will develop relationships with God, my spouse, and close friends who encourage accountability and protect against temptation.
- I will recognize the special power afforded me in the pastoral office by never abusing that power in ways that violate the personhood of another human being, by assuming responsibility for maintaining proper boundaries in church staff/church member relationships, and by acknowledging that the congregant is always in a vulnerable position.
- I will avoid all forms of sexual exploitation and/or harassment in my professional and social relationships, even if others invite such behavior or involvement.
- I will not seek or accept sexual favors.
- I will exercise good judgment in professional and private conduct by avoiding situations, which create the appearance of sexual misconduct.
- I will assume responsibility to report any reliable evidence of sexual misconduct by another minister to the appropriate person or committee.
- I will submit to the policies and procedures of the church when an allegation of sexual misconduct has been made, recognizing the importance of justice and due process procedures. \*

## Conclusion

As I seek to fulfill my responsibilities as a minister, I will strive to embody servant-leadership in all my relationships and to pattern my life and ministry after the example of Jesus Christ.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Further information on how local churches may respond to allegations of clergy sexual abuse is available from the

**Christian Life Commission**

333 N. Washington, Dallas, TX 75246-1798, 214-828-5190

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# A Lesson In Humility

By Hal Haralson,

Attorney in Austin, Texas

Trinity Baptist Church of San Antonio has always been a creative congregation. Buckner Fanning, the pastor, was constantly trying new ways of getting people to become involved in the church.

One Sunday night in 1964, Buckner announced from the pulpit that there would be a group of Episcopalian laymen leading all who were interested in “small group” worship. To be a part of this you had to commit to be there for eight Tuesday nights.

Judy and I talked about this that night. It would be interesting. I never had *seen* an Episcopalian much less been in a worship service led by one. Pretty far out for a lifelong Baptist. Also, the term “small group” was a new concept to us. And so we went.

The leader, Keith Miller, an oilman from Oklahoma, was introduced. He had recently moved to Kerrville, Texas. The men he brought with him were new Christians and each shared his story with the entire group. We heard Dan Bacon (surgeon), Chick Chaulk (dentist), Al Plummer (owner of a funeral home) and a jewelry maker who was operating out of his garage. He was just getting started. His name was James Avery.

These men were open, honest, and hilarious at times, and their stories touched us all. They were all Episcopalians.

Keith kept us in one group (about 60) and talked of his own experience. He told of searching for peace in his own life and finding it only after turning himself over to Jesus Christ. This story eventually became Keith's first book, *The Taste of New Wine* — one of the best selling religious books of all time.

While we were in the circle, Keith asked if anyone wanted the group to pray for them. Judy (my wife) raised her hand. “Alright,” said Keith, “let's all pray for Judy.” She was really embarrassed because of being singled out in this manner. She didn't know Keith meant here and now . . . and in public.

We moved on, divided into groups of eight. Keith had us go around our “small group” and answer the following questions. (He called them the “Quaker Questions” because he got them while attending Earlham College, a Quaker institution.) We were told we could pass if we didn't want to answer a question. The questions were:

1. Where did you live between the ages of 7 and 12?
2. How did you heat your home then?
3. What was the place of greatest warmth then (in the house or the surrounding area)?
4. What person had the greatest influence on your life then? Tell about that person and what influenced you?

5. At what point in your life did God become more than just a word to you?

The questions were unthreatening and simple in the beginning. As we gave our own answers and listened to others, a bond of trust began to form. I told of heating our home with butane gas in West Texas. When the butane truck came, my brother Dale and I were each given a penny. Tater Thompson drove the truck to our farm from the store at China Grove. He had a toolbox full of “penny candy” in the front seat. We would take the entire time Tater was there making our selection.

Someone spoke of using coal to heat their home. I thought coal went out with the cavemen. I'd never seen coal. There were stories of tree houses, space in the attic, and a cave that had been dug over a pasture. The cave was about three feet deep and covered with cedar posts, tin and dirt—sacred territory where boys smoked cedar bark and talked about girls.

It took weeks to get through all the questions and answers, and we were so impressed with the small group process that we formed one of our own, a Baptist couple, an Episcopal priest and his wife, and a Methodist couple. The Episcopalians were really influencing us Baptists.

Keith Miller, the Episcopalian who introduced me to small groups, was named director of Laity Lodge, the Butt Foundation Retreat Center near Leaky, Texas. He invited Judy and me to participate in a weekend and asked me to speak. It was one of the first times I had told of leaving the ministry, my suicide attempt and dealing with manic depression.

We developed a close friendship with Keith and participated in a number of “teams” in churches that had asked him to lead conferences. This usually meant I would speak and Judy would have a smaller part in the program.

After publishing *The Taste of New Wine*, Keith left Laity Lodge and spent his time speaking and writing. Bill Cody was named director at Laity Lodge. Our friendship with Bill and Betty Ann Cody covers many years.

St. David's Episcopal Church (there we go associating with the Episcopalians again) asked Bill to lead a Faith at Work conference at their church in Austin. Bill asked Judy and me to be on the team. We were honored to be on the program and looked forward to being with Bill again.

St. David's is a large church and there would be a large group of people there to hear me speak. I began working on my remarks before we got to Austin.

The team met with Bill prior to each session and talked about what had happened in the last session and who was to speak on the next program. We were building toward the final

session that would be the largest number of people. Bill had not called on me yet, so that meant he was saving me for the last and most important gathering.

At the team meeting, Bill looked at Judy, "Judy, I would like you to speak at the final session."

That was it! I wasn't called on for anything.

Judy made notes on the back of a couple of napkins. Bill introduced her and she read:

### "Woman's World"

My world is made up of Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays,  
Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, Mondays  
Washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning, churching,

Mending clothes, turning down radios,  
wiping noses and bottoms

Answering telephone rings and doorbells

Letting dogs in and letting dogs out

Taking children to and bringing children from

Fixing food, making beds, mopping floors

Rejoicing, crying, listening

Rejoicing with Jill when her cat had kittens

Crying with Brad when his kite string breaks

Listening to David's tales of Sesame Street

I must communicate with my husband

Share with my neighbors

Empathize with my friends

Organize myself, my home, my children, my husband, and  
the women at the church

On and on, endlessly, my world goes

Then Jesus steps into the uttermost parts  
of my world and speaks

He speaks through little mouths,  
teary eyes, hurting looks

He speaks through closed doors, trusting hands,  
unuttered wishes

He speaks through David as we make a cake,  
"Me help, Mommy, me help"

"David, if you wouldn't help so much I could  
get it done a lot  
better in half the time"

Then I listen as the great God says to me  
"Judy, if you just wouldn't help so much I could get it done  
better in half the time"

There was a stunned silence when she finished and sat  
down. It was the high point of the weekend.

My ego was bruised. My wife had upstaged me. No one  
got to hear me speak.

My ego was repaired as time passed.

My pride in my wife and my respect for her ability has  
continued to grow through the years.

So has my respect for Episcopalians. ■

## "If Gold Rusts, . . ."

(continued from page 2)

dane, but as the bookkeeper I am acutely aware of the various expenses of the Journal. *If you move, please send a change of address.* The post office charges \$1.50 each for returns—we will spend about \$100 this month just for address changes.

3. *If you can help us financially, please do.* For our 2500 subscribers, the Journal costs about \$10,000-\$12,000 per issue—about \$4-5 per copy, or \$24-30 per year. Every gift is deeply appreciated. More than ever before, your financial support is "greatly needed, urgently solicited, and genuinely appreciated."

### Coming in December

- The issue of Capital Punishment: a sermon, a biblical study, and a critique;
- Chuck Colson's classic speech on "Ethics" to the Harvard Business School;
- A young Alabama minister speaks on "Core Values for the Family";
- Rebecca Groothuis debates the "Equal in Being, Unequal in Function" argument;
- Church historian George Marsden updates "Christ and Culture";
- A complete Subject/Author Index for Issues 1-31. *Selah.* ■

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# Keeping Sabbath: Christian Ethics for the 21st Century

## Hebrews 4:9-16

By Molly T. Marshall

Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation  
Central Baptist Theological Seminary

[This sermon was delivered at the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission annual conference on February 28, 2000, at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas]

The first time I gathered with the Texas CLC was in 1984 when we met at Gambrell Street Baptist Church. I had been a professor of theology for all of nearly a month at that time, and I was more than a little frightened. It was quite a gathering; in the words of Darrell Adams, it was the world's "religious zoo." Ken Medema, Bill Pinson, Howard Hovde, C.W. Brister, and a very conservative woman whose name I have repressed. We focused on the family; I offered a paper that decried the subordinationist model of Christian marriage. I certainly resolved that issue for all Baptists, didn't I? As I recall, we had some lively conversation! It is a foundational memory for me.

The second time I was invited, we met at Broadway Baptist Church—that would have been 1994. The CLC sponsored a women's gathering on "Making Peace" prior to the larger gathering. The annual conference focused on congregational ethics, as I recall. I remember it as a time of hope (as well as pain).

Now we are here once again. It is a jubilee year—a year to consider the past and contemplate the future. I am grateful that the CLC is observing its five decades of ministry, serving as moral conscience for thousands of Texas Baptists, and beyond.

Joe [Haag] gave me a great deal of freedom in choosing what to speak on this afternoon. I must confess that it has been a struggle to decide. The theologian in me wanted to lecture on the renewal of trinitarian theology or the burgeoning interest in pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit) or how to resacramentalize Baptist theology; the prophet in me wanted to articulate the demonizing of institutional life in America—even, or most especially, the church. (Dilday was right, you know).

It is a more personal note you will hear this afternoon as I call us to an ethic of sabbath-keeping. This is my jubilee year also; so I speak out of my own heart's need to be attentive to the spiritual discipline of sabbath. Perhaps this can be God's invitation to you as well: receive the Sabbath. Heaven knows we need it, for we are the tired, the battle weary, the earnest, and yes, the aging. Jubilee is for weary, exhausted people who want to enter a new chapter in their lives, as Maria Harris has suggested.<sup>1</sup> I think most of us can fit this description!

We find the first mention of Jubilee in Leviticus 25, where

God instructs the people to observe a Sabbath for the Lord when they enter the land given to them by God. In this passage lies the professor's favorite text: In the seventh year "there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard" (v. 4).

The rhythm of work and rest in the seven days, the seven years, and seven weeks of years culminates in a year of Jubilee. The best we can tell, this was never celebrated fully in the life of the people of Israel. The fullness of *shalom*, sabbath-rest is yet to come, which is the focus of our text in Hebrews.

### Background of Hebrews

The preacher who wrote the sermon, which we call Hebrews, is speaking to a small congregation, perhaps located near Rome. This house church of Jewish Christians, which has already endured considerable suffering, is encountering an even more severe threat. In CE 49, they had been expelled from Rome by the emperor Claudius and, according to Acts 18:1-2, Priscilla and Aquila were among this group. (This may be one of the reasons Priscilla has been linked to Hebrews. I will resist the temptation of trying to make a case for her authorship). Now, about 15 years later, this church is facing another crisis; while we are not told explicitly what it is, the language of the whole text suggests that martyrdom may be looming on the horizon. The Preacher thus focuses on the cost of discipleship as these Christians may be targeted for arrest and their lives placed in peril.

The year CE 64 is remembered for the great fire in Rome. In the dim recesses of our memories we connect this devastation with Nero, and rightly so. Blamed for his own negligence or culpability in the disaster, he sought to shift the blame onto the Christians who remained in the city, gathering in house-churches. "To suppress this rumor," the Roman historian Tacitus wrote, "Nero fabricated scapegoats, and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called)" *Annals of Rome*, 15.44.<sup>2</sup> Thus the threats were real and near; no wonder many Christians fled to the catacombs as places of sanctuary. No wonder their faith was

being severely tried.

The Preacher reminds them of the faithfulness of Jesus and exhorts them to follow his example. They could be confident that they would not be abandoned to a hostile or indifferent world because of the fidelity of their high priest; thus, they can remain faithful too, and not turn back.<sup>3</sup> Tom Long observes that the congregation is threatened then and now with “discouragement because they cannot see anything past their own role, their own moment in history.”<sup>4</sup> We Baptists have similar fears and wonder about our future, hence the words of the ancient writer can reassure us also.

### Invitation to Perseverance and Rest

Our Scripture offers us an invitation to perseverance and to rest. It is an interesting combination. Chapter four begins with the reminder that the exodus generation was disobedient, sinful, rebellious, and lacking in faith. You remember the story. Camped at Kadesh-Barnea (Numbers 13-14), a point of entrance into the Promised Land, the people lose faith. The report from the spies was negative, they “seemed like grasshoppers” compared to the strength of the people and their cities. The minority report from Joshua and Caleb was ignored. Numbers 14:10 puts it starkly: “the people responded to the Lord with hardness of heart.” God’s wrath—which we prefer never to mention—was kindled against them, for they had treated God with contempt. Exasperated that after all the miraculous provision during the desert crossing the people still would not trust, God prevents them from entering the land of promise. Only those who believed could go forward. We know that only too well in the reconfiguring of Baptist life. The best days are not behind us!

“Hardness of heart” is a serious condition in Scripture; in the words of New Testament scholar William Lane, “it is choosing to listen to human voices of despair rather than listening to the voice of God.”<sup>5</sup> All of us have done far too much of that!

The promise of entering God’s rest was left unfulfilled for them; now, in this lengthy sermon, the Preacher warns a fragile congregation not to repeat their forebears’ mistake and fail to persevere. God continues to offer the promise of Sabbath rest for the people of God, “for whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from...labors as God did...” (Heb. 4:10). “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience” (v. 11). The Preacher goes on to speak of the significance of listening to the word of God—that they might be discerning about the truth of their spiritual condition. God knows the “thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Nothing about our lives is hidden from God; this can both give comfort and discomfort. Yet it is a calm reassurance that God is concerned about the whole of our lives. It is a warning to keep one’s heart supple, open to God. God has not just spoken in the past; God speaks and is addressing them in their time of need. Sometimes God’s word to us is to “remember” what God has already done; sometimes it is a new word such as has been spoken through the Son (Heb. 1:2). God’s word stirs both

memory and hope.

Now we need to back up a bit. It is important for us to try to understand the idea of “God’s rest” and how it relates to “Sabbath-rest.” Whereas in the story of Israel in the wilderness, it related directly to the “land,” in its larger biblical sense, it has to do with the hallowing of time that goes back to the beginning story. Too often in our teaching of creation, we separate the six days from the seventh, as if they are unrelated. We are used to thinking of humans as the “crown of creation” finished on the sixth day. Actually, in the thought of Jürgen Moltmann, it is Sabbath toward which the whole of creation moves.<sup>6</sup>

The words of Genesis 2:2, “On the seventh day God finished God’s work,” seem strange. We are used to thinking of the seventh day as the day God rested. In Exodus 20:11 it says: “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth.” The ancient rabbis puzzled over this seeming contradiction and, according to Abraham Heschel, could only draw one conclusion: “obviously . . . there was an act of creation on the seventh day. Just as heaven and earth were created in six days, *menuha* was created on the Sabbath.”<sup>7</sup> *Menuha* “rest” is what completed the creation. The Hebrew word *vayinafosh* means “God took a breath.” The rabbis related this to God’s earlier work of breathing *nephesh* soul into the world. This is a way of acknowledging the degree to which humans participate in the life of God.

God hallowed and sanctified the seventh day; this is the first time we have a concept of the Holy in scripture. (Amazingly it had to do with time, not with nature.) Sabbath is known in the ancient tractates as the “day when God came in.” Even today in the streets of Jerusalem you will hear the words “*shabbat* comes into Jerusalem.”

We are not used to celebrating God’s rest; we want God to be quite busy, creating and redeeming. And we try to pattern our lives after this perception. Moltmann suggests that if we neglect the biblical teaching about the rest of God we will find the meaning of human life in our work and busy activity; “and rest, the feast, and their joy in existence are pushed away. . . .”<sup>8</sup> Anything non-utilitarian is devalued. Rest is God’s gift; and it is not relegated to when we fall exhausted between the sheets at night.

The Exodus commandment to “remember” the Sabbath day is grounded in the story of creation. The human pattern of six days of work and one of rest follows God’s pattern as creator. God’s people are to rest on one day because God did. In the words of Dorothy Bass, “In both work and rest, human beings are in the image of God.”<sup>9</sup> “To act as if the world cannot get along without our work for one day in seven is a startling display of pride that denies the sufficiency of our generous Maker.”<sup>10</sup>

### Sabbath as Practice

So what does keeping Sabbath mean for us today? Does the true “rest” only lie beyond death, as some interpreters have read the Hebrews text,<sup>11</sup> or can we build its hallowing rhythm into our lives now? I think we can, but not without great intentionality. Perhaps the first thing we need is to understand more

about Sabbath before we can understand our deep need for it. Heschel writes: “Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in this world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come.”<sup>12</sup>

While I was a doctoral student, I had the good fortune to spend the better part of a summer studying in Israel at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. While there, I attended the lectures of Rabbi Pinchas Peli, a remarkable scholar and man of faith. (He was the 25<sup>th</sup> generation of his family to produce a rabbi). I found his lectures on Sabbath captivating.<sup>13</sup> He taught us that Sabbath allows us to enter a sanctuary of time; all week long we *do*; on Sabbath, we *are*; this is the meeting point of the holy between God and humanity; we must not continue creating without communing with the Creator. Sabbath speaks of freedom and redemption; freedom to “feel as if your work is completed.” This would be a revolutionary idea for a people who were once slaves in Egypt, who had no control over their pattern of work. Wendell Berry’s poem, *Sabbaths*, captures this idea: “the field is tilled and left to grace. . . .”<sup>14</sup>

Work and rest are intimately related. When we work well, offering it up to God, we are then led to rest well in the time where God meets us. In Judaism the rabbis did not believe you could automatically move from one mood to another, to make room for God within life required attentiveness. Thus there were distinctive practices that led from the six days of work into the seventh day of rest. Shabbat began with a woman lighting the candles, bearing light as did God in the beginning of creation. In Hebrew the days of the week have no name; it is the first, second, third day of Shabbat; we are to live all week with what we observed on the Sabbath. “The more you enjoy yourself the more you’ve fulfilled the Sabbath,” said Peli. This is a wonderful balm for many of us with Puritan penchants who think that enjoying ourselves too much is a sure way to perdition!

What practices might we undertake to shape Sabbath rest? In a sense we find ourselves in the same place as the early Christians who sought to hallow the Lord’s Day after a long day of work; it is not a day protected from encroachment from life’s other obligations, as was the Jewish Sabbath. We may remember an earlier day of blue laws when commerce and amusement were carefully regulated. Stores were closed, shopping ceased, and only the vilest sinners dared go to the movies on Sunday. (I still can’t do it!) These prohibitive approaches may have inculcated a legalism that we are still trying to exorcise. We must see Sabbath as grace, not law. Again Bass is helpful to us. She writes: “As the new century dawns, the practice of Sabbath keeping may be a gift just waiting to be unwrapped, a confirmation that we are not without help in shaping the renewing ways of life for which we long.”<sup>15</sup>

The specific help is the presence of God. As the rabbis say, God comes in the Sabbath. God promises to meet us in the time made holy by our encounter. Once again Heschel offers wisdom: “All week we think: The spirit is too far away, and we succumb to spiritual absenteeism, or at best we pray: Send us a

little of Thy spirit. On the Sabbath the spirit stands and pleads: Accept all excellence from me. . . .”<sup>16</sup>

All of us long to hear God clearly; we desire specific guidance on difficult moral issues and have trouble not confusing the voice of God with the loudest voices of our day. We long to hear the blessed reassurance that we are loved and delighted in for who we are, not what we have accomplished in the past week. Our frenetic activity usually serves our own interests of power or control, not the One in whose name we say we are acting. Perhaps we do not hear because we do not place ourselves in a “posture of receptivity” in the words of Richard Foster. Sabbath can cultivate such attentiveness.

Recently I have been writing curriculum for *Journeys*, the American Baptist Sunday School quarterlies. It is a daunting assignment. I have been working on the Advent texts. As I wrote on the story of the Annunciation, it dawned on me that the reason Mary was able to hear the words of God’s messenger was because she had practiced hearing God all of her life through the practices of Sabbath: in worship, scripture reading, prayer, song, and quiet contemplation.

The Sabbath preserves created things from being slaves to work, and, as Moltmann puts it, “fills their restless existence with the happiness of the presence of the eternal God. On the Sabbath all creatures find their own place in the God who is wholly present.”<sup>17</sup> In a sense, it is a rehearsal for life, as Don Hustad has described it. Sabbath points toward how God means for us to live all the while.

### Sabbath as Anticipation

In an 8<sup>th</sup> century mystical book, *The Book of Creation*, the writer notes that Sabbath has to do with all the dimensions that define our lives: time, space, and the personal. Every human relationship must consist of these three. Thus, our practice of keeping Sabbath must be attentive to who we really are.

- **Time.** Heschel says this is where we have the most problem. “Indeed we know what to do with space but do not know what to do about time, except to make it subservient to space. Most of us seem to labor for the sake of things of space. As a result we suffer from a deeply rooted dread of time and stand aghast when compelled to look into its face.”<sup>18</sup> Sabbath time gives meaning to all the other time of our life. Sure, the minutes and hours tick by at the same pace, but time has a depth, a richness, forged in communion with God. Overworked Americans need rest; it might help us all to think about a Sunday afternoon nap as a way of honoring God. Even better, we need to find short sabbaths all the while—times when we shut the door and just breathe! (Martin Marty recommends two naps a day!) We need to be reminded that we “do not cause the grain to grow and that their [our] greatest fulfillment does not come through the acquisition of material things.”<sup>19</sup>

So what about the minister? The healthy ones find time for sabbath-keeping; it is the keeping of their own souls. The practice of self-care: walking, reading to nourish the heart—not to

prepare a sermon, gathering with friends, listening to good music . . . all of these can allow one to “receive the day” as gift.

- **Space.** It is helpful for us to recall that Sabbath is spent both in the space of worship and at the table, focal places of community. The time spent singing, praying, listening, and hearing the word of Scripture in worship is rightly completed by the shared meal. The Sabbath and Jubilee traditions always found a place for the stranger. Providing welcome in worship naturally leads to setting another place at the table. We may not be able to break bread “with glad and generous hearts” until we learn to put our feet under the same table with those whom we might consider “strangers.” We must receive all as Christ, in the words of St. Benedict. And this leads us into the third dimension, personal relationship.
- **Personal.** A Christian Sabbath should be concerned about communion with the risen Christ and with all the members of his Body. I fear that we overlook those closest to us as we try to keep hectic schedules. Keeping Sabbath has to do with strengthening our family relationships as well as widening the circle of our concern. Acts of charity are always acceptable on Sabbath, as Jesus’ ministry clearly taught us.

Indeed, in this time characterized by relationship to God, we can come to value all those relationships that make us whole. Perhaps our lack of Sabbath has to do with our paltry efforts to build and strengthen community.

You may find it odd that I have spent so much time focusing on Sabbath, quoting rabbis, when we as Christians observe a different day for worship. Yet they have much in common, and it is important to preserve the link between the Christian feast-day, Sunday, when we celebrate the resurrection, and Israel’s Sabbath which prefigures the consummation of time, when God moves us from this temporal sphere into the eternal. And this is their link: Sabbath points toward the fullness of relationship with God and all others in the creative work of the world; Easter enacts the new creation in the raising of Jesus. They are drawn together in the world to come. Sabbath comes; God comes, inviting all into the feast of eternal joy.

“So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from labors . . . as God

did . . .” as did our high priest, Jesus Christ the Lord.

May it be so in our day and forevermore, Amen. ■

1 *Jubilee Time: Celebrating Women, Spirit, and the Advent of Age* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), xv.

2 Cited in William L. Lane, *Call to Commitment: Responding to the Message of Hebrews* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 24.

3 *Ibid.*, 56.

4 Thomas Long, *Hebrews, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 60.

5 Lane, 64.

6 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 6.

7 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1951), 22.

8 Moltmann, 276-277.

9 Dorothy C. Bass, “Keeping Sabbath,” *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 79.

10 *Ibid.*, 86.

11 F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 78.

12 Heschel, 74.

13 Notes from Rabbi Pinchas Peli, Ben Gurion University, Lectures at Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Summer 1980.

14 Cited in Bass, 77.

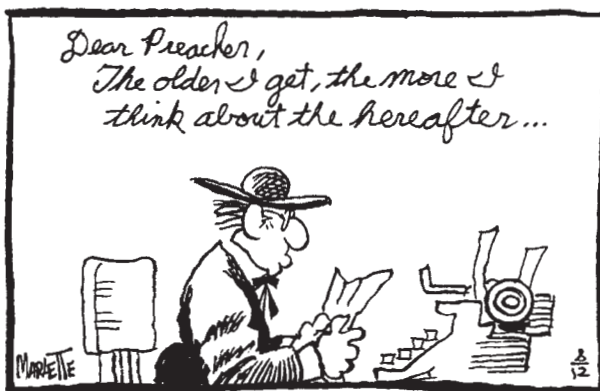
15 Bass, 76.

16 Heschel, 18.

17 Moltmann, 287.

18 Heschel, 5.

19 Bass, 88.



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# Commencement Address

## The University of Texas — May 20, 2000

*By Bill Moyers, Public Affairs Television, Inc.*

I'm very fortunate to be here tonight for the first millennial class ever to graduate from the University of Texas. It's an honor to be part of this historical occasion. And I intend to repay you by being brief. I know you are eager to get out of here because on Monday morning each of you has to select a board of directors by 10:00, issue an IPO by noon, and open a bank account by 3 with your first million. In that endeavor nothing I say will be of much help to you, but I wish you well.

I must seem an alien to you. I come from the old country, the past. You can't get there from here. Our generations hardly speak the same language. When I was here fifty years ago bunnies were still small rabbits and rabbits were not Volkswagens. A 'chip' was off the old block, hardware meant a hammer and nails, and software wasn't even a word. We didn't know of FM radio, tape decks, artificial hearts, word processors, or dot.coms. Fast food was what the Catholics on campus ate during Lent, and 'making out' referred to how we did on our exams. Grass was mowed, Coke was a cold drink, and pot was something you cooked with. I come from a foreign country; I come from the past.

But although you and I are separated by half a century of experience, we do have in common this university, which others built for us. I say it every time I come back — perhaps I keep coming back just to say it: This university is a living thing. All the men and women who have been part of this campus — student and faculty, security guard and secretary — breathed something of themselves into it. The Tower soars above us tonight because all those before us secured its foundation on solid ground. That may be the most important thing I learned here — that nothing lasts that isn't well grounded: Love, marriage, friendship, sanity, knowledge, institutions, democracy — without deep roots, they perish.

I graduated from the university just about at midpoint between your millennial class of 2000 and the first centennial class of 1900. This place was a frontier 100 years ago. The entire enrollment consisted of 582 students, wearing coats and ties or long dresses down to their ankles. They arrived here by train or on horseback to a campus that was a thicket of trees and wild weeds crisscrossed by cattle trails. Some carried guns. When one student missed his homework assignment because of illness, his professor insinuated that he was lying. The student promptly pulled his pistol and demanded the professor take it back. He did.

Like you, the class of 1900 graduated with great expectations. The turn of the century crackled with optimism. It was, as one writer describes it, 'the heyday of a liberal civilization that had seemed to spread steadily and grow stronger for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its articles of faith were that science and technology were the sources of a prosperity without limits, that the free market would spread the new abundance across boundaries and nations, that liberty and democracy were gaining ground everywhere.' (*Jonathan Schell, Harper's Magazine, January 2000*).

Sure enough, the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought extraordinary progress. Between the class of 1900 and yours, the life span of Americans increased by more than 30 years. Only a third of bachelor's degrees went to women in 1900, compared to well over a half today. No one in that class had heard of Alcoholics Anonymous, Dr. Seuss, Earth Day, hot running water, Amnesty International, Gay and Lesbian Pride, paperback books, transatlantic air traffic, Rocky and Bullwinkle, sticky note, the zipper or the personal computer.

But just look at us now. Roughly three out of four American homes have air conditioning, and none did then. Over half of our homes have dishwashers, and none did then. Ninety-eight percent have television and two-thirds have cable. Nearly half of our homes have one or more computers, and more than 40 percent of American adults use the Internet. Impressive.

Of course this is not the whole story. If the class of 1900 couldn't peer into a crystal ball and see the coming achievements of science and technology, neither could they see what else the future had in store. They couldn't see the mass extermination ahead — the blood and muck of the first Great War when a million men would die in a single battle. They couldn't see the smoke of human fodder rising from the ovens of Buchenwald and Dachau. They couldn't see Dresden lighted at night by incendiaries falling from the sky like sparkles from a fairy wand. And they couldn't see the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The future is a blank. We never know if it's going to turn out a fit place to be, because we can't be sure how humans will fill it in. The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought an epidemic of life; it also brought a plague of death. During my time at the university in the 50s, one of my English teachers told us that if we learned nothing else, she hoped we would learn from the poet Rilke "To assume our exist-



tence as broadly as we can, in any way we can. Everything, even the unheard of, must be possible in this life. The only courage demanded of us is courage for the most singular and the most inexplicable that we may encounter.”

Right now our encounter is with an explosion of technology and wealth that boggles the mind. Records are broken and new milestones reached every day. Dot.com billionaires sprout like bluebonnets in the hill country, and in just one decade the number of millionaires has quadrupled from two million to eight million. (*Robert Reich, The American Prospect, May 2000*).

You begin to think it will last forever, lifting the boats on Lake Austin and the yachts on the ocean to one height after another. But every now and then a message arrives unexpected, like a bottle washing up ashore, and we're suddenly startled by the unthinkable.

**B**ill Joy sent us one message the other day. Bill Joy is a giant of the computer revolution – the cofounder and chief scientist of Sun Microsystems. Beginning as a graduate student inventing new worlds inside machines, he moved from workstations and personal computers to the creation of advanced microprocessor technologies and Internet techniques such as Java and Jinni. This man is no Luddite. He values the scientific search for truth and the ability of engineering to improve life. But in a remarkable article this spring in *Wired* magazine, Bill Joy confesses to deep concerns over the unintended consequences of 21st century technologies. He acknowledges that the most compelling of them – robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotechnologies – can significantly extend our average life span even further, conquer diseases, and increase crop yields. But robots, engineered organisms, and nanobots also share a dangerous and amplifying factor. They can replicate themselves. One can become many, and the many take on a life of their own, leaping beyond our control.

Look at the history of antibiotics, he says – with the emergence of antibiotic and much more dangerous bacteria that go on reproducing themselves despite our efforts to kill them.

Earlier in his career Bill Joy doubted we could create an intelligent robot that can evolve copies of itself and function on its own. No longer. Now he believes that by the year 2030, when you are still younger than I am now, we are likely to be able to build machines, in quantity, a million times more powerful than the personal computer of today. Such machines, operating according to their own nature, could lead to our extinction, he says: “We may well not survive the encounter with a superior species of machines that occur when we download ourselves into our own technology.”

Moreover, these 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies are so powerful that they can spawn whole new classes of accidents and abuses. Most dangerously, these accidents and abuses will be widely within the reach of individuals or small groups. They will not – unlike atomic and nuclear weapons – require large facilities or rare raw materials, or

be under the control of nation states. Knowledge alone will enable the use of them. Thus, “we have the possibility not just of weapons of mass destruction but of knowledge-enabled mass destruction hugely amplified by the power of self-replication. I think it is no exaggeration to say we are on the cusp of the further perfection of extreme evil, an evil whose possibility spreads well beyond that which weapons of mass destruction bequeathed to the nation-states, on to a surprising and terrible empowerment of extreme individuals.”

The thrust of his message is this: The nuclear, biological, and chemical technologies used in 20<sup>th</sup> century weapons of mass destruction were and are largely military, developed in government laboratories. In sharp contrast, the 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies – with science as their handmaiden – are delivering a series of almost magical inventions that are the most phenomenally lucrative ever seen, have clear commercial uses, and are being developed almost exclusively by corporate enterprises. We are aggressively pursuing the promises of these new technologies within the now unchallenged system of global capitalism and its manifold financial incentives and competitive pressures. Instead of our course being determined by our collective values, ethics, and morals, we are being propelled forward with no plan, no control, and no brake. The 21<sup>st</sup> century – your century – will be, he says, “the century of danger.”

That's the message from Bill Joy. What a challenge to democracy!

The Love Bug sent another message. “I Love You,” said the message on my computer. But it could have been the inscription our pilots and bombardiers used to scribble on the nose of the bombs they dropped in Europe and Asia. “I Love You” – BOOM! As we have since learned, the bug that brought some of the world's most sophisticated computer networks to a halt was apparently hatched in a noisy inner city neighborhood in the Philippines where residents live under corrugated steel roofs in grubby concrete apartments and students go to a computer school in an old warehouse without flush toilets. As the *New York Times* put it, “The fact that the world's most infectious computer virus to date could have such origins illustrates how vulnerable the Internet's global sprawl has made it to disruption coming from even the most remote technological backwaters.” (*NYT, May 17, 2000*)

You and I don't think much about the world that spawned the love bug. But a few days after the virus hit, a friend, who used to live in Austin, sent me an e-mail which he said more-or-less put things in perspective. It contained a model of the earth's population shrunk to a village of precisely one hundred people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same. Of the hundred people, 57 would be Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 would be from the Western Hemisphere (North and South), and eight would be from Africa. 52 would be female, 48 would be male. 70 would have skin of color, 30 would be

white. 70 would not be Christian, 30 would, and 80 of the 100 would live in substandard housing. 70 would be unable to read. 50 would suffer from malnutrition. Only one – yes, one – would have a college education. Only one would own a computer. Finally, of the 100 people in our single global village, six would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth, and all six would be from the United States.

Astonishing, isn't it? So much wealth – in the hands of so few? It got me to thinking about some other things that should be astonishing but seem not to shock us.

More children are growing up poor in America than in any other industrial nation.

Millions of workers are actually making less money today in real dollars than they did twenty years ago, and can't afford homes where middle class families once thrived

This should astonish: More than two million people work in nursing homes – bathing and feeding frail elderly people, cleaning their bedsores, lifting them out of bed and into wheelchairs, changing their diapers – for a salary, on average, between seven and eight dollars an hour. (*Reich*)

And this: Over two million Americans work in childcare centers or as nannies. They feed the children, calm their fears, and bandage their bruises. Sing and read to them – for a median wage of \$6.60 an hour, usually with no benefits.

And this: More than 700,000 social workers attend to individuals and families suffering from alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness. They make between \$8 and \$15 an hour.

Forty-three million Americans have no health insurance. One million people have lost their coverage every year for eight straight years now – during the most prosperous decade in our history. And medical expenses have become the major cause of personal bankruptcy. Why doesn't that astonish us?

Some of you may have seen our documentary on PBS last month called "Surviving the Good Times." We filmed it over ten years in the lives of two families in Milwaukee...the Stanleys and the Neumanns...one white, one black. The breadwinners in each family were laid off in the first wave of downsizing in 1991. We reported then on how they were coping with the wrenching changes in their lives, and we stayed with them over the next ten years as they tried to find a place in the new global economy. We used to call these people "the salt of the earth." They love their kids, care about their communities, go to church every Sunday, and work hard all week. Both mothers took full-time jobs to make ends meet. Though

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*Our generation has  
left you with  
unfinished business.  
America needs a new  
politics of justice and  
you have to lead it.*

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they've been running hard they've been falling behind. During our time with them the fathers in both families became seriously ill. One had to stay in the hospital for two months. When he got out the family was \$30,000 in debt because they didn't have adequate health care. If you watched the film you saw the bank starting to foreclose on the modest home of the family that couldn't meet the mortgage payments after the dad lost his factory job. Like millions of Americans, the Stanleys and the Neumanns play by the rules and still get stiffed.

What turns their personal travail into a political tragedy is that they are patriotic. They love this country. But they no longer believe they matter to the people who run the country. When our film opens both families are watching the inauguration of Bill Clinton on television in 1992. They wouldn't do that today. They don't believe their concerns will ever be addressed by the political, corporate, and media elites who make up our political class. They are not cynical. They are deeply religious people with no capacity for cynicism. But they know the system's rigged. And they're right.

You would think a rich, dynamic nation with the most powerful economy in the world would be putting its house in order – making sure we are not only a prosperous society but a just, good, and fair society. It's not happening. And it's not happening because money has a stranglehold on democracy. Politics has become an arms race, with money doing the work of missiles. Federal elections cost \$2.2 billion dollars in 1996 and could double this year. Most of that money comes from a relative handful of wealthy individuals, organizations, and interests. Dominant among them are the financial and corporate elite who want no rules to govern the social and economic behavior of investors and multinational corporations, including those that will control the technologies described by Bill Joy; who want government to serve only as the protector of their power and privilege; who want to hold to the barest minimum the wages and salaries of people who should otherwise share in the profits of industry; who seek subsidies and tax breaks they want you to pay for; who fight tooth-and-nail against universal health care; who pour money into both parties in order to deprive voters of any real political choice. These are the people whose money largely determines who runs, who wins, and how they govern.

Some of them we don't even know. The Washington Post reported last week that huge sums of cash are pouring secretly into politics from groups and individuals seeking to influence the elections without disclosing their identity. Some of these slush funds are controlled by members of Congress – including powerful members of your own Texas delegation who take your votes and do their donors'

bidding. They – your elected officials – are benefiting from huge donations from those who want favors from them. And you have no way of knowing who they are. Our politicians are selling us out and we can't hold them accountable because they are doing it in the dark.

Remember Roger Tamraz? He should have been your commencement speaker. He could really tell you how the system works. Roger Tamraz is the wealthy oilman who paid \$300,000 to get a private meeting in the White House with President Clinton. He wanted help in securing a big pipeline in Central Asia. This got him called before congressional hearings into the financial excesses of the 1996 campaign. If you watched those hearings on C-Span you heard him say he didn't think he had done anything out of the ordinary. When the senators pressed him he told them; "Look, when it comes to money and politics, you make the rules."

One senator then asked if Tamraz had registered and voted, and he was blunt in his reply. "No, Senator, I think money's a bit more than the vote."

You may find this is hard to swallow. They don't teach it in your political science courses. You didn't get it in high school civics (if you even got high school civics). But this is how the system works, and it's why we can't put things right for the people who don't share in America's prosperity. The great Justice Learned Hand said it well: "If we are to keep our democracy there must be one commandment: Thou shalt not ration justice." But justice is rationed today. You get it if you pay for it. Your political worth is now determined by your net worth.

The private and now secret financing of public officials has made a mockery of the whole notion of "one person, one vote." It is so pernicious and pervasive that if left unchallenged it will ultimately destroy our democracy. Rich people should be able to buy more homes than anyone else. They should be able to buy more cars, more vacations, and more gizmos than anyone else. But they shouldn't be able to buy more democracy than anyone else.

This isn't a partisan issue. Senator John McCain – the conservative Republican – said during his campaign (before he was overwhelmed by money) that both parties are selling our elections to the highest bidders. And just listen to Barry Goldwater. That's right – Barry Goldwater, patriarch of the conservative movement in the Republican Party. Here is what Senator Goldwater said ten years ago:

"The fact that liberty depended on honest elections was of the utmost importance to the patriots who founded our nation and wrote the Constitution. They knew that corruption destroyed the prime requisite of constitutional liberty, and independent legislature free from any influence other than that of the people. To be successful, representative government assumes that elections will be controlled by the citizenry at large,

not by those who give the most money. Electors must believe their vote counts. Elected officials must owe their allegiance to the people, not to their own wealth or to the wealth of interest groups who speak only for the selfish fringes of the whole community."

Why am I haranguing you about this on your day of your graduation? Because you've got to do something about it. Our generation has left you with unfinished business. America needs a new politics of justice and you have to lead it. I know, I know: your generation has other fish to fry; you have other things on your mind. I've just finished reading a new book by a bright young woman in her 20s who says your generation considers politics to be "something our parents did. As for our generation, we are going to make it where it counts – not in creed or controversy but in shares and silicon, venture cap, options, startups, hedge funds, broadband, plug-ins, 401(k)s – those are our buzzwords. The 'Bill' we love is Gates, not Clinton. Our centers of power are where Madison Avenue meets Silicon Valley and Wall Street bumps into Hollywood – what does politics have to do with me? I'm smart, I'm educated, and I'm mobile. If the nation goes to hell, I can pack up my laptop and move to New Zealand, where the taxes are low and the climate temperate. Right?"

Perhaps. New Zealand is certainly a beautiful country. But the Stanleys and the Neumanns can't go there. Nor can the millions of people like them who are lost in America. And frankly, while all of you are indeed smart, educated, and mobile, New Zealand would bore you. You belong here, fighting the good fight. Surely they taught you here that life is not just about you – it's about all of us. The world doesn't end at the border of the self. Let me read you a letter from a woman – a Czech woman – who survived the concentration camps under the Nazis, only to watch in increasing dismay as the postwar communist government, hailed with such hope, degenerated into corruption and brutality. "Still," she wrote, "I did not feel like getting involved in politics; I kept saying to myself, 'All I want is an ordinary, quiet life.' But I came to realize that a quiet, simple life is to raise children, to enjoy the small and great joys life can offer, you must not only find the right partner, choose the right occupation, respect the laws of your country and your own conscience but, most importantly, you must have a solid social foundation on which to build such a life... You cannot build a happy private life in a corrupt society anymore than you can build a house in a muddy ditch."

So there's your task, my young Texas friends. There's the unfinished business. Go to it!

Thank you for enabling me to be here with you tonight, to share the happiness, excitement and high hopes of this moment. In the words of that old Transcendentalist benediction: "May God keep you safe until the word of your life is fully spoken." ■

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# A More Excellent Way

## Race and Gender Reconciliation through Christ

By Brenda Salter McNeil

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Staff and President of Overflow Ministries, Inc.

[This article was adapted from the plenary address to the 1999 International Conference of Christians for Biblical Equality and originally appeared in *The Pricilla Papers* and is reprinted with the permission of CBE.]

I am from Chicago where a white supremacist shooter went on a rampage in July of 1999. He killed Ricky Birdsong, a friend and member of my church, whom we called Coach. Coach was loving, jovial, very committed to reconciliation, and deeply devoted to his family. He lived in an affluent neighborhood and he was doing great work with his life. Coach was walking home from the playground with his two kids. The white supremacist had just shot at five Jewish people in the neighborhood where I used to live, and then drove to another Jewish neighborhood. My guess is he went looking for a Jewish person, just happened to see my friend Coach walking down the street with his kids, and decided a black man would do.

None of the other victims died, and I could not understand when I was told that Coach hadn't made it. I knew I would have a hard time making sense of a senseless situation, but then I read the obituary written by Ricky's wife:

The violent act that took my husband's life is yet another clarion call to our Nation. It is time to wake up America. God is crying out to us the words of Ephesians 5:14—"Wake up old sleeper and arise from your sleep and Christ will shine upon you and give you light." God is giving us yet another wake-up call. Wake up America! It is time to turn back to God, to read and obey His word, to put prayer and the Bible back into our schools and daily family living. Listen, this is not a gun problem, this a heart problem, and only God and reading his Word can change our hearts.

I agree that violence is a heart problem and that only God can change our hearts. I further believe that God has entrusted to his people the message of reconciliation. At Coach's funeral I wanted to be bitter, but my church, which is called The Worship Center, has a reputation to uphold. I was having a hard time worshipping because I really wanted to go into the depths of my grief. Yet as I watched Ricky's wife and others worship God, I witnessed a testimony to the Gospel. When reporters asked what we thought and how we felt, one after another answered that we would not allow hatred and evil to overcome the love of Christ. Non-believers watched a grieving community exalt Jesus and left the funeral stunned, wondering what kind of God stands people up straight, keeps them from hate and causes evil to be overcome by good. I left the funeral and said, "God recommit me again to

the ministry of reconciliation and help me not just to talk about it but help me to help your people know what it looks like."

Second Corinthians 5 says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, so whenever we look at Jesus we are looking at *the* model of reconciliation. By looking at the life of Jesus, the one who came to reconcile the world to himself, we can extrapolate several principles and requirements for reconciliation. One of my favorite stories demonstrating these principles of reconciliation is that of Jesus and a Samaritan woman.

### **A God-Idea**

*Now he had to come through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.* (John 4:4-5)

John says that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. Is that geographically true? No, Jesus did not have to go through Samaria either politically, geographically, or socially. So why does the text say he had to go? No other self-respecting Jew had to go. In fact, every other Jew avoided Samaria, taking the long way around. It was a neighborhood through which one dared not travel. It was socially unacceptable for Samaritans and Jews to associate. In fact, even if a Samaritan's shadow crossed a Jew's shadow, the Jew was made unclean.

This racial hatred was deep, the same kind of racial hatred that possessed the man who shot my friend Coach. God had given a law in the Old Testament that Jews were not to intermarry. Samaritans were the result of intermarriage between the Israelites left behind when the northern kingdom was conquered and colonized, and Gentiles brought there by the Assyrians. Samaritans were a half-breed, bi-racial people. Just looking at them made the untainted Jews feel justified in their racism. As the years went by the divisions grew greater

So why did Jesus *have* to go to Samaria? The first thing required for reconciliation across any line—gender, race, denomination, or political affiliation—is a *divine mandate*. Reconciliation begins not with a *good* idea but with a *God* idea. It begins with something inside of you that says *you* have to do what your peers and your contemporaries don't have to do. Reconciliation starts with God and not with you. When we hear the truth, we must bear witness to it, for there will be a day when people will be hard-pressed to find a witness. Today it takes courage to be involved in the ministries to which we are called, and it takes courage to stand up and bear witness.

## Are We Thirsty?

*"You don't have a bucket and the well is deep."* (John 4:11)

A second requirement of reconciliation is *real need*. John 4:6 says that Jesus sat down by a well, tired. The woman's observation in verse 11 was sarcastic, though accurate: "You don't have a bucket and the well is deep." Jesus had walked a far distance and it was the sixth hour, twelve o'clock noon. The sun was hot and it was a desert climate. He sat down by a well and he really *was* thirsty. So when a woman came to the well and he asked her for a drink of water, he wasn't just making idle conversation.

Sometimes when it comes to reconciliation we don't really *need* the other person, so the best we can do is have conversations based on curiosity. When I go and speak in other places, folks will ask, "How can we get more Filipinos in our group?" Generally, I'll stop and say, "Tell me why you need them. What would make your group better because they are there?"

Part of what happens is that we believe that we *ought* to have folks, so we go out there to get us some! But I can tell when I am really needed because I change things. When I am just nice to have around, nothing is going to change as a result of my being there. To know that I am not only nice but also *necessary* means that my worldview is taken into account when decisions are made and things are done.

We don't generally change our constructs—instead we try to make others fit into our constructs. We say, "It's nice to have you, but you'll have to accommodate, assimilate, become like us, because your ideas are nice but not necessary." When something is necessary, I am willing to make whatever changes I have to make because I am *thirsty*. I don't think we're thirsty enough yet for reconciliation as a church.

I attended Fuller seminary and it was one of the best experiences of my life. But I know if all the black people had pulled out while I was there, Fuller would not have closed down. Not a thing would have changed in the curriculum, in the financial aid office, or with the faculty. I had some wonderful experiences and people liked me. But I also know that I was not *needed* in a way that would make the whole organization have to adjust to my presence or lack thereof. How much do we really *need* people who are different?

I am sensing a real need in CBE and I am praying that the need grows because when the thirst gets greater, we'll do the things we have to do and make the adjustments we have to make. We *are* really thirsty, it *is* really hot and that person really *does* have the water we need to drink!

## Going to Samaria

*Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.* John 4:6

Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman was quite intentional. Jesus sat down by a well in Samaria. Women drew the water. Chances were great that if he sat there long enough he would meet a Samaritan woman. So Jesus intentionally put himself in a situation where he would interact with someone different from himself.

The third requirement of reconciliation is *intentionality*. Often we desire reconciliation, but we want it on our turf. We will welcome folks if they come to *our* group, *our* conference, *our*

party or *our* church. But Jesus stands that notion on its head. He didn't invite the outsiders to his conference and he didn't get them to come to his church or even his neighborhood. *He went to Samaria*. He went where nobody else would go, where it wasn't politically correct to go. He intentionally placed himself in a neighborhood where he knew he would meet someone different. I suggest that if we really want to take reconciliation seriously, then we must find the Samaria near where we live and make a conscious decision to go there.

## A Risky Business

*This Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink, for Jews do not associate with Samaritans?"* John 4:9

*Risk-taking* is the fourth requirement of reconciliation. It is a difficult thing to put yourself in a place where you are going to meet people who are different from you, where you don't know the language, where you are not the head honcho, where your cultural norms are not those everyone else observes. It is risky business to pursue reconciliation. I wish I could tell you that everyone you meet in Samaria was going to be happy to see you, that they were going to kiss you and smile and be *so* glad. I wish I could tell you that nobody is going to curse you in Samaria. I wish I could tell you it would be safe and comfortable every time you try to bridge a gap and cross over a void, but those of us who take it seriously understand that it's a risk.

Jewish laws about Samaritans and about women caused their self-esteem to be extremely low. One of these laws was that Samaritan women menstruated perpetually and were therefore perpetually, ritually unclean.

Imagine living in a society where people thought of you as dirty and defiled every single day of your life, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, from the time you were a child until you were an old gray-haired woman. Never could someone else drink from your cup. Never could someone else sit on something you had sat on. Never could your skirt brush against someone without defiling him or her. Can you imagine what that must do to a person's sense of worth?

That is the situation of the woman in John 4, and Jesus represents the people who have made that decree about her. He is male, he is Jewish, he is all those things that people have said to her: dirty, filthy, and vile. And now he is in *her* neighborhood, sitting at *her* well, asking *her* for water. The Samaritan woman would have put her hand on her hip, noticed that nobody else was looking, spit in her little bucket and said to Jesus, "How dare you, Jew boy, come up in my neighborhood demanding something! You and your people always think you can get whatever you want."

Today, somebody might not like you coming in their neighborhood and they might not rise up and call you blessed. It may not even be your fault because it might not have been something you did, but what the people you come from represent. Sometimes we get the hurt of hurt people. If you are a minority in a society that discriminates against you, you are a hurt person and sometimes you take that hurt out on people who don't deserve to be hurt.

Perhaps you have gone someplace to volunteer and the kids

didn't treat you right, the people didn't think you were wonderful, or called you "white," or questioned your motives, or worse. I remember once I was in Londale, a community in Chicago. I was hanging out with college students and when I left, all four of my hubcaps had been stolen. I looked around and thought, "Now that ain't right! I'm a sister—you're not supposed to steal my hubcaps!" There are times that sin does not discriminate and just because you love Jesus doesn't mean bad things won't happen to you. Ask my friend Coach.

### **Just You and Me**

*His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.* John 4:8

Fifth, reconciliation is best-achieved *one on one*. John says Jesus' disciples had gone into town to buy food. I think Jesus was strategic in waiting until they were gone, because when they came back they "were surprised to find him talking with a woman, but no one asked what do you want or why are you talking with her."

The Pharisees had already heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John. They were already questioning whether Jesus was a real rabbi or not, and now he was sitting in Samaria, at a well, with a woman. The disciples were probably thinking, "Bad move. Not good for the theological circle, and you are not going to get respect. They are going to debunk you. They are not going to be pleased with this. Rabbis don't talk to women. Jesus, you're messing up here. Why are you talking to *her*?"

Sometimes it is better not to try reconciliation in a big group or when you are with your church. Those events we do where the whole church goes over to fellowship with the First and Second Baptists are nice, but real reconciliation won't happen that way. Don't confuse fellowship with reconciliation. Reconciliation is when two people meet eye to eye when other folks are not around.

Something happens in a crowd—there is a certain censure that comes when you are with people you know even though you are trying to be yourself. Something happens when you feel the disapproving looks behind the back of your head. You can sense when people are saying, "That's not good, my friend. It's not a wise move for you to do that." There are people in your church who would advise you against going into Samaria because they would want you to be safe.

My mother, bless her heart, was very upset when I accepted my call to ministry. Not because she didn't believe in ministry—she wanted me to preach all over the place just so long as it was near Trenton, New Jersey. When I decided that a seminary 3,000 miles away was my next move, she was not a happy woman.

There will be some things that Jesus will call you to do in reconciliation that might take you away from people who are trying to protect you. You might have to decide that this is an individual decision that calls for an individual commitment. You might want to try reconciliation with one other person with whom you can make a covenant. Reconciliation is best-achieved one on one. Try putting a person at ease in your presence where you can be honest and vulnerable and they won't have to feel the stares of the people who come with you.

### **Relinquishing Power**

*When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to*

*her, "Will you give me a drink?"* John 4:7

A sixth requirement of reconciliation is a *power exchange*. I believe that this is the "standstill place" of the church.

Jesus approached the relationship with the Samaritan woman with all the cards on his side. He was male, he was Jewish, he was a Rabbi. He came with knowledge, a certain amount of affluence, friends, and the privilege afforded to him as a result of being part of the dominant culture.

The woman had been divorced from five different husbands. Keep in mind that women didn't divorce men—men divorced women. So five times she had been rejected. Five times a man said to her, "I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you." It is no wonder that she was living with someone—perhaps she didn't believe that anybody would marry her again.

Jesus comes with power on his side. The Samaritan woman comes with no power except the right to refuse. Jesus asks her, "Will you give me a drink of water?" Helping seems to be such a humble thing to do; yet it is even more humbling to be the one who is helped. *The helper has more power.*

The number one question I am asked when I travel the country speaking on reconciliation is, "What can I do?" This question doesn't come out of a sinful heart. It comes out of a heart that really wants to do something. But it is a powerful question because it assumes there is something you can do to help.

Jesus doesn't start as the helper. He comes to the relationship with a woman who is clearly inferior to him socially. He comes with the power on his side. But instead of saying right away, "I'm so glad you came to the well, I knew you were coming, you've been married five times," Jesus waited. He held back the Messiah card and the prophet card and said to the woman, "All you know about me is that I'm a thirsty man without a bucket and I need your help." In his one question he changed the power dynamic—he made her the helper and he became the recipient.

I don't believe there are enough people willing to receive in the church. Most of us want to be the helper. Most of us assume we can help. Jesus decreased his own power and he empowered the woman, putting them on equal footing so they saw eye to eye. She could have said, "No, I will not give you water." She was given the power to make a decision.

I believe reconciliation will not happen unless people who have power give some up. People who are powerless are empowered when they see themselves as mutual in a relationship. When is the last time you have been in a relationship with someone that society says is inferior to you and you have put yourself in their debt because they had something they could give you? There is somebody without a high school education that could teach you something. There is somebody who knows more about raising kids that you do. But we don't sit ourselves under those we don't respect.

A power exchange in the church would mean that when a brother from a different race comes to lead worship, we don't just tolerate him. Instead, we let him take us into the very presence of God. We let go enough to say, "Teach us how to worship. There is something God is doing in your life. I don't know how to do it and so you are not just entertaining me, you are not

merely a prelude to the speaker. Those who worship God must do so in spirit and in truth. I don't know how to fully engage God like that, but take me behind the veil. I am a baby, but would you slowly show me how to go into a deeper place with God? I will follow your instruction even if it makes me feel uncomfortable."

Organizational structures would change because different people would be included in the group. We might even step back and say to someone unlike us, "You run it." That is risky and scary and we don't like it because we want to do it exactly the way we planned it. But if we truly need what someone else has to offer, then we are willing to let go and allow change to happen.

### **God's Puzzle**

*Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."* John 4:10

After Jesus asks the Samaritan woman for help, he doesn't go into the "I'm so sorry I am a Jewish man . . . Please forgive me for being Jewish . . . I wish I were born another race . . ." thing. Neither does he say, "I didn't do anything to you, so just get over it." Reconciliation is *mutually affirming and empowering*.

Jesus doesn't apologize or defend. Instead, he says to the woman, "If you knew who this was and what I have to offer, you would ask me and I would give you living water." I believe that every single person, male and female, because of our differences, has a unique piece of the puzzle of God. We do not do the conversation of reconciliation any justice by going into "Poor me, I am so sorry." It is self-serving navel-gazing and it is not helpful.

We need enough courage to say, "If you would like, I have something I would love to offer you." For example, I was helped through InterVarsity Christian fellowship. I am so glad they didn't say to me, "We don't have anything to offer you, Brenda. You're just so gifted and so wonderful." Instead they said to me, "We do a thing called manuscript study and we would love to show you how we do that." In doing so, they enriched my study of Scripture.

Reconciliation brings all pieces of the puzzle to the table. You don't do anyone a service if you take your piece away.

### **The Blessers**

*Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come see a man who told me everything I*

*ever did. Could this be the Christ?"* John 4:28-29

Finally, reconciliation requires people who serve as *bridge builders* in their community. The Samaritan woman goes back to her people and says to them, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Do you think this guy could be who he says he is?"

Reconciliation needs blessers, folks who say to the people they represent, "I think you should hear her out, even though she doesn't do it our way." We need a blesser who says, "I think God is using her and I think there is something you might need to hear her say." And if you came to Samaria you might need a person to say, "He is really a nice guy. I know you'd never be able to tell by looking at him, but he has a heart of gold."

The movie *Do the Right Thing* is about one of those changing communities in New York where everyone is black except for one Italian pizzeria owner and his two sons. The father wanted to move but couldn't afford to. One son absolutely hated being there and every day he asked, "Why, don't you sell this place?" The other son, Vinnie, decided to get down with the people, so he started hanging out with Mookie, who delivered pizzas for Vinnie's father.

One day Mookie and Vinnie were walking down the street when three black guys came toward them. "Yo, Mollie man, what you doin' with this white boy?" Mookie said, "Man, don't bother him, he's down." One guy's name was Buggin Out, and he said, "No man! What you doin' walking down our street? You don't be with him, he needs to go back, man." (When you don't have much, even your street feels like your property, so you're trying to claim your territory.) Mookie said, "Buggin Out, look man, don't mess with Vinnie because he's down."

In that moment Mookie became a blesser. What Mookie was saying to Buggin Out was, "I can't vouch for every white person but I can vouch for Vinnie. Don't mess with him because this brother's authentic. Don't bug him because this man is who he says he is. Don't bother him and lump him in with all white people because I have tested his heart, I've seen who he is. You can trust this guy and he's worthy to be in our neighborhood."

May it be that when someone says to me, "What are you doing over here talking about reconciliation?" Somebody would stand up to my defense and say, "Yo man, don't bother her, she's down!" ■



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# The Female of the Species

*By Charles Wellborn*

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One Sunday morning several months ago I visited a small church located near where I live. The church met in a simple building, and less than a hundred people were present for the service.

I felt comfortable and much at home. The hymns were familiar, and the congregation sang enthusiastically. After the offering was collected, we stood and sang the Doxology. The minister preached a clear, concise sermon dealing with a basic facet of the Christian gospel, the meaning of the Cross. At the conclusion of the sermon we sang a hymn of invitation. Two people responded to the call for commitment. A woman, already a Christian, came forward to place her membership in the church. A mature man made his profession of faith in Christ as his Savior.

I went away that morning satisfied. I had found what I needed and wanted—a genuine experience of worship and an encounter with the Spirit of God. But I also knew that there had been something strikingly different about the service, something that after years of church going I was largely unaccustomed to. The preacher (and pastor) that morning was a gray-haired, sprightly woman. With fire in her bones and conviction in her voice, she had preached the Gospel—but, still, she was a female. And, for me, that was different.

I left that service, musing, somewhat sadly, on the undeniable fact that many of our contemporary Christian denominations are violently divided on the issue of women in the pulpit. My own denomination, Southern Baptists, has adopted a statement of faith that bars such women as I heard that day from the pastorate. She, and her congregation, would be anathema.

The issue of women in the pulpit is not a new one. It has bedeviled the Christian community for centuries. I have been involved in discussions about this question with Christian friends over many years. I have been present with fellow pastors where there have been condescending remarks about the abilities of women in the pulpit. I have been reminded of the tongue-in-cheek comment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century polymath, Dr. Samuel Johnson, who is reported to have said, “A woman’s preaching is like a dog’s walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.” I dare say that Dr. Johnson, who was not a stupid man, might well have altered his opinions if he had attended with me the service to which I alluded earlier in this article.

Inevitably, when I discuss this matter with my fundamentalist Christian friends, they will point to biblical passages, which they believe support their point of view. I deeply respect that approach. Like them, I am a Bible-believing Christian. I

accept the teachings of the Bible as an authoritative guide in matters of Christian faith and practice. But there is a basic difference between us.

While I understand and accept the Bible to be the written revelation of God’s character and will, I do not give final or infallible authority to any human or organizational interpretation of the meaning of those Scriptures, whether that interpretation be the idea of any individual or the pronouncements adopted by a majority show of hands in any assemble or convention. Christians do not, or should not, worship a particular method of biblical interpretation; they worship the God who is revealed in the Bible—and the difference is important. The Scriptures are the written word, but the meaning of words must always be understood and interpreted, and, in this task, there is a more important Word. The Apostle John declares at the beginning of his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). John is not speaking here, obviously, of the written word, but of the Logos, the living Word, the Christ. It is that Living Word which is our final authority when it comes to matters of meaning and interpretation. Jesus said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). All of our scriptural exegesis must be undertaken in the shadow of the Logos, and we are not entitled to interpret particular passages of Scripture in ways that are inconsonant with the character and message of the Christ. Every passage of Scripture must be viewed through a singular prism. That prism is the Christ, as revealed to us in the Scripture.

In the recent Southern Baptist gathering, which adopted a resolution excluding women from the pulpit and the pastorate, one of its leaders is reported to have said, “If a woman claims she has been called to the pastorate, she is simply wrong. She has not been called. God does not contradict Himself.” While I disagree profoundly with the first part of that statement, I give my hearty “Amen” to the second part. God does not contradict Himself. It is precisely for that reason that I find the exclusion of women from pastoral ministry impossible to accept.

When I was a young student in a conservative Baptist seminary, many years ago, I was taught certain basic principles of exegesis—the discipline of scripture interpretation. Men like Ray Summers, Robert Daniel, Stewart Newman, and T.B. Maston—names that will ring a bell with some of my readers—instructed me in ways of understanding Scripture that have served me well for over fifty years. I see no reason to desert those principles now.

One basic exegetical principle is that for a particular inter-



pretation of a passage of Scripture, one must look at the whole of Scripture and its portrait of the character of God. In applying this principle we must take account of the fact that there is nothing in the Gospels, recounting the ministry of Jesus, that supports the idea that females are second-class participants in the Kingdom of God. Indeed, in his treatment of the women, Jesus never discriminated in any way. It is quite clear that women were then, as they always have been, key figures in the Jesus movement. This is especially true in Luke's Gospel where the female followers of Jesus receive particular mention—Joanna, Susanna, and Mary Magdalene, women who traveled with Jesus and the male disciples, fully incorporated in the group.

Of course, Mary Magdalene is the most important of the female disciples, and in John's Gospel she is presented as a model for discipleship. She is, in a real sense, the apostle to the apostles for she is the first to witness the resurrected Jesus at the tomb on Easter morning, and she is commissioned by the risen Lord to tell the other male disciples that she has seen him (Jn. 20). Long into the Middle Ages, Mary Magdalene was revered as "apostolorum apostola," apostle to the apostles. Jesus accepted and treated males and females equally, and in this respect He clearly reflects the character of the Father God.

The Apostle Paul reinforced this understanding of the character of God in one of his most forthright declarations, a passage of Scripture not often cited by those who wish to exclude females from the pulpit. In the Epistle to the Galatian church, Paul emphatically avers that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Jesus Christ" (Gal.3: 28). What the Apostle says here is absolutely consistent with the nature of God as revealed through Jesus Christ.

The God revealed to us through the Living Word is one who makes no distinctions on the basis of gender. We often address God as "Our Father," and I have no objection to that, because it rightly emphasizes the caring concern of God. But that address implies in no way that God is a male sexual being. God transcends any sexual differentiation. In the same way that God is not white, black, yellow or red, nor American, Russian, Chinese, or African, God is neither male nor female. Medieval (male) artists pictured God as an old man with a long white beard, but that is a totally inadequate presentation. By tradition, we use the male pronoun for Him, but in the fundamental sense God wipes away all gender discrimination.

In the basic matter of salvation God certainly does not make such distinctions. Without regard to gender, or any other human difference, we are all equally invited to come to Him. Indeed, it is this refusal on the part of God to make such distinctions, reinforced by the identical characteristics in the teaching of Jesus that has enabled the Christian faith to make such a significant contribution to the ongoing struggle in the secular society about us, against unfair discrimination on the basis of such factors as race and gender.

It is ironic that some Christians should uphold, within the church, a dictum that in effect makes females second-class cit-

izens of the Kingdom of God. The Christian affirmation that there can be no gender distinction has been a prime factor in the advance of our secular culture to the position the majority of that culture holds today: males and females alike are entitled to equal treatment in every part of our society. I do not believe, though I cannot know for sure, that my Christian friends who disagree with me on this issue would support unfair discrimination against women in the market place. I do not think they would countenance unequal pay for equal work on the basis of gender, or the exclusion of women from positions of leadership in government or business simply because they are female. Yet, do they not realize that when the Christian church endorses this kind of gender discrimination within its own ranks it unwittingly, perhaps, under girds those in the secular society who would carry on such practices?

My teachers taught me a second basic principle of exegesis. This was the principle of consistency. If one is to interpret Scripture correctly, one must at the very least be consistent. If, for instance, one approaches Scripture with the conviction that every admonition of the Apostle Paul in the Epistles establishes a permanent and unchanging pattern for church practice, one is not entitled to pick and choose, selecting those parts of Scripture which are seen to be lasting definitions of Christian practice and those which are not. I cannot make this principle of exegesis fit the kind of interpretation that seems to be ordinary among my disagreeing Christian brethren. One of the most frequently cited Scripture passages by my friends to support their position is I Corinthians 14:34. In that passage Paul says, "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak." That seems to settle the matter for my friends. But if we are to be consistent, do we not have to remember that in that same letter Paul instructs his hearers, just as clearly, that "every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head?" (1 Cor. 11:5).

Can we ignore the fact that the Apostle in his first letter to Timothy instructs the people to whom he was writing, that the "women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or costly array" (2:9)? In my long life in the church I have heard numerous sermons in which the preacher declared that women were not fit to be pastors or preachers, but I have never heard a sermon in which the preacher ordered his female listeners, on the basis of the Bible, to wear hats when they came to church, or to throw away the gold wedding rings their husbands had given them, or to discard the pearl necklaces given to them in love by their children, or not commit the sin of coming to church with braided hair. Where is the consistency here? Why pick out one admonition and ignore the rest?

At this point my friends argue that, because God has assigned individuals differing roles in the church because of basic gender differences, his instructions concerning women must be understood in a different way from this other pronouncement. I can understand that argument up to a point. There are obvious physical and genetic differences between males and females, as God has created us. Males sire children;

females bear children. That is undeniable. But, for the life of me, I have been unable to find any genetic or biological difference between males and females, which supports the idea that men are, by virtue of their maleness, better preachers or pastors than women.

In my life I have known good male preachers and poor ones. I am sure there are good female preachers and poor ones, but the difference is not genetic or sexual. Our individual calling from God to vocation is a matter of our individual talents and the degree of our surrender to the will of God. Some (both male and female) are called to preach, others are called to be missionaries, and others are called to be lay witnesses. The call of God extends to all human beings. It seems to me the height of spiritual arrogance for some male preacher to say that, if a pious, dedicated woman understands the call of God to her to be that of the ministry, he, in his male role, has the right to say that she is mistaken and wrong.

The third basic principle of exegesis I learned was one must always look at a particular passage of Scripture within its context. It is important to know when the passage was written and to whom it was written. It is important to understand its purpose. Paul wrote his epistles to particular Christian communities, operating within their own cultural context. Much of the body of the Epistles deals with fundamental issues in the understanding of Christian doctrine, but also much of Paul's writing is pastoral and practical advice on the special problems which each of these communities faced. In approaching the exegesis of these passages we must always keep in mind Paul's primary purpose—the effective witness to the central truths of the Gospel.

Perhaps the most instructive passage in this regard is Paul's advice to the Corinthian church regarding the eating of meats that had been offered to idols. Clearly, this was a problem peculiar to the Corinthians. Paul first makes it clear that there is no sin in eating such meat (1 Cor. 8:8), then he gives his practical advice, "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak" (8:9). His final counsel is, "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat" (8:13).

If we apply our understanding of this passage to the interpretation of other such passages in the Epistles, certain things are clear. First, in dealing with secondary matters of practice within the church, Paul's governing concern is what will further the cause of Gospel witness. Second, in dealing with such matters Paul was willing, in his own day and time and in consideration of the pagan culture around him, to advise that the church adopt certain practices, not because there was any sin involved nor, I think, to lay down patterns for the future church, but to avoid offending unnecessarily that particular culture.

It is from this standpoint that I think we can better understand many of Paul's other admonitions to particular churches. Writing to another church in a somewhat different cultural situation, as I have previously mentioned, Paul advised the women in the Corinthian church not to appear in church with

their heads uncovered, not wear gold ornaments or jewelry, and not to braid their hair. Clearly, these practices, though morally neutral in themselves, would, in Corinth, have been hindrances to their witness. It must be remembered that it is in that same letter that Paul advises that women should keep silent in church.

When we seek to understand the cultural situation of the New Testament church, we must realize that the radical beliefs and practices of the church created a tremendous tension in its relation with the pagan—predominantly Roman—culture in which it operated. The deeply egalitarian teachings of Jesus (the promise of salvation for all) totally contradicted the values of a hierarchical society, economically based on the labor of slaves. A vital part of that pagan society's structure was the subjugated and inferior position of women.

Christianity decisively challenged those pagan values. The Christian church not only allowed, but also positively encouraged all human beings—slave and free, Jew and Gentile, educated and uneducated, men and women—to worship, live and love together. It was especially this facet of the new faith that drew the scorn of Celsus, a prominent second-century pagan critic, who poured vitriolic scorn on Christians for such practices.

Dr. Jane Shaw, a widely respected church historian, in her McCandless Lecture in March 2000, at Georgetown College (Baptist) in Kentucky, pointed out:

"Roman society had very distinct ideas about how a virtuous woman should behave: submissively, and certainly not speaking in public. Roman law held that women were by nature the weaker sex, they lacked seriousness, and they therefore required the authority of men (husbands and fathers) over them.

It is surely with an awareness of these pagan surroundings that a sensible exegesis of Paul's strictures against women must be seen. Remembering always the Apostle's primary concern with effective Gospel witness, it is not surprising that, as with eating of meat offered to idols, he would advise particular church congregations not to offend unnecessarily the overwhelmingly male-dominated society in which they operated.

The biblical, historical, and archeological evidence suggests that women held the principal leadership offices, alongside men, for the first three centuries, at least, of Christianity. In many early Christian communities, women as well as men were deacons, presbyters (priests), bishops (episkopi—overseers), apostles (missionaries), teachers and prophets. Throughout the New Testament, we get tantalizing glimpses of this reality. When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, it is deacon Phoebe who carried his letter to them and thereby introduced Paul to them. She was his patron. He concluded his letter to the Romans by greeting the leaders in the Christian community there, amongst whom there were many women. Ten out of the twenty-eight whom he greets are women: Prisca, Mary, Tryphena, Persis, Julia, Olympas, the mother of Rufus, the sister of Nercus, and Junia. Especially prominent amongst these women was Junia, 'prominent amongst the Apostles,'

with her husband Andronicus, whom Paul had known when he was in prison.”

Dr. Shaw continues, “Paul says . . . in his first letter to Timothy in which he describes a bishop or overseer as being like a householder—he must manage his household well . . . for if someone does not know how to manage his household, how can he take care of God’s church? In this letter, Paul assumes that the householder is male, but his own travels and missionary activities had in fact shown him otherwise. For example, when he arrived in Philippi, as recounted in Acts 16, he preached to a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, a woman of reasonably substantial means and a householder. When she converted to Christianity, so the rest of her household was baptized too (Acts 16:15). And when Paul was released from prison, recounted at the end of chapter 16 (verse 40) it was to Lydia’s house that he went, so that he could meet and worship with other Christians before he left the city.”

Actually, this pattern of essential female involvement in the church has continued through the centuries, despite great pressure from the male-dominated society in which it has existed. I know from my own experiences as pastor that no modern church could function without the efforts of dedicated Christian women. We have traditionally trusted them to teach our children in Sunday School the fundamentals of the Christian faith. They have been the bulwarks of Baptist missionary effort through the Women’s Missionary Union. They have volunteered by the thousands to be missionaries on the home and foreign fields. True, Paul advises the Corinthian church, not only that women should keep silent in churches, but that, if women want to learn anything, they should “ask their husbands at home” (1 Cor. 14:35)—incidentally, in fifty years, I have never heard a sermon on that text. In actual fact, several of the finest Bible teachers and expositors I have heard in my years have been women, including a marvelous woman who taught for many years a mixed Bible class of men and women in the church I pastored. The arbitrary exclusion of females from the offices of preacher and pastor does not, for all

these reasons and many more, make any sense to me.

I think the final, and perhaps most decisive point to be made in this argument is to go back to the Apostle Paul himself. As I have repeatedly pointed out, Paul was governed in all his actions by one decisive consideration: the effective witness to the Gospel. Paul lived and wrote in the midst of a male-dominated society. He was willing, for the sake of the Gospel, to make certain concessions to that culture.

We live today in a totally different cultural surrounding. The secular culture, with which we have to deal as Christians, is one that is, at least in its majority opinion, committed to sexual and gender equality. Christians have helped greatly to bring that situation about. Now, if we apply Paul’s guiding principle, we must decide what will most effectively serve the cause of Gospel witness. To maintain the stance of gender discrimination within the church, it seems to me, seriously harms our witness. On this basis, I dare say that the counsel of Paul to the Corinthian church would be very different from the counsel he would give to the church at Nashville or Atlanta or Dallas.

I cannot close without another reference to the worship experience I described in the opening paragraphs of this article. When the Gospel is preached and when the Holy Spirit evidently blesses that proclamation with the salvation of a soul, who is it that will label that experience “unchristian” simply because the preacher was a woman?

Baptists do not, unlike their Catholic brethren, pick out particular individuals in their history and designate them as “saints.” But if Baptists did have saints, I think the list would certainly include Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong, for whom annual mission offerings are named. I should imagine that, if by some miracle, Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon were to return to us in the flesh, it would be a brave and, I think, foolish pastor who would deny them his pulpit to tell their stories and give their witness, even though they are, quite clearly, “females of the species.” ■



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# New Vistas:

## Dreams for the Center for Christian Ethics

By Robert B. Kruschwitz, Director

I have one little window in my office here in Waco, high up on the fourth floor of Pat Neff Hall. But it is a beautiful window – round and set deep, like a porthole, into the massive wall. The early morning light, through its flower-patterned grillwork, throws a striking shadow across my desk.

It's my porthole out to an incredible place.

This morning two lawn mowers grumble around over the yard. Mourning doves coo on a ledge, just out of view, around the corner of the building. As the day heats up, summer campers and incoming freshmen, here for orientation, splash in the pools of the big, angular fountain below – the one that our students have nicknamed “the rocket launcher”.

Concrete pads form little islands across the fountain's pool. A few folks, enjoying their pad-hopping shortcut to and from assignments, are congregating on an island for a moment, just to visit. Two children race from pad to pad; the little fellow is winning.

Crepe myrtles show off their gaudy white blooms (except for a few, sneaky red species that managed to slip past the careful landscapers). Live oaks and cedars frame the fountain and then the grass mall, stretching north to the university library.

Hidden just beyond the library and trees is the River Brazos, before the ridges of Bellmead. Then, beyond those ridges ...



“The rocket launcher.” That tag fits this whole place. Baylor University.

Here folks, young people mainly, gather for years to study, pray, and reflect – but not to stay. From here they are launched on amazing journeys of service to the church and to society. Launched toward Texas, the new American southwest, other regions of North America, and, increasingly, the entire world. Beyond the ridges of Bellmead...

Texas Baptists and their friends have done a fine thing here. Baylor's quite a launching pad. It is one of the largest Christian universities in North America and the largest Baptist university in the world. This is a wonderful place for the Center for Christian Ethics to be located.

Just down my hallway is the Center for Ministry Effectiveness. The good folks in the Religion and the Philosophy Departments work in the Tidwell Bible Building just across Speight Avenue. George W. Truett Theological Seminary is here. Fine professional schools are on campus: Hankamer School of Business, Baylor Law School, and the School of Education, for instance.

The J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, the

Center for Family and Community Ministries, the Institute for Faith and Learning, and the Center for American and Jewish Studies are in this university. Probably I missed a few – like I said, it's a big launching pad.

These will be great new working partners for the Center for Christian Ethics.



Just the way Foy Valentine dreamed it ... as its guiding Board nurtured it ... and as it grows now through the aegis of Baylor University, the Center is all about shedding Christian light on the ethics of everyday life. The Center's resources, communications, and research will serve a wide audience of Christian people, and leaders in our society.

But before I – and, I hope, *you* – get carried away in dreaming about future projects for the Center, let's talk about what is going on right now. This summer brings new staff and new offices, and planning for a new journal.



Please visit the Center in Pat Neff Hall, Room 408, or give us a call. When you do, the first face you'll see, or voice you'll hear, is Julie Bolin's. We are fortunate that she is the Center's face and voice for most folks! Julie surely brings a lot of creativity, energy and friendliness to us as the Administrative Associate. She developed these assets over the years in an honest way – as a wife and mother and elementary school music teacher!

Julie enjoys singing in the sanctuary choir at First Baptist Church, Waco (which is a good thing, because her husband, Rev. David Bolin, directs the church's music program!) and she is an avid reader. Rachel, their daughter, studies music education at Baylor and their son, Daniel, is a senior at Midway High School.

You must “excuse our mess” when you come to visit us this fall. Hammers and nails and paint will be flying around as the Center gets new carpet and doors, and even moves a wall out of the way. We will try to be as quiet as we can during construction, so as not to disturb Winfred Moore and the rest of the crew in the Institute for Ministry Effectiveness – they on the other end of our suite, up here on the fourth floor of Pat Neff Hall.



Planning begins this summer for the Center's new journal of Christian ethics. Designed for a wide audience of Christians “in the pew”, this new quarterly will debut in September 2001.

The new journal will offer a mix of short articles, inspira-

tional segments, worship aids (new hymns and songs, prayers and responsive readings), interviews, reviews of books, and Christian art (some classics, but others newly-commissioned). Most issues of the journal will focus on a specific topic – so each issue can be saved on your shelf and used in small group study.

I will say more about the topics for the new journal in just a moment, but first let me introduce to you three editors. They are talented and exciting individuals. And they are excited about this journal.

Dr. David Garland, one of our best-known New Testament scholars and now Professor of Christian Scriptures at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, is editor for proclamation and worship. David is a wonderful preacher himself, and he will bring together writers and musicians to produce the worship aids.

Frederick Buechner got it right when he said:

Phrases like Worship Service and Service of Worship are tautologies. To worship God means to serve him. Basically there are two ways to do it. One way is to do things for him that he needs to have done – run errands for him, carry messages for him, fight on his side, feed his lambs, and so on. The other way is to do things for him that you need to do – sing songs for him, create beautiful things for him, give things up for him, tell him what's on your mind and in your heart, in general rejoice in him and make a fool of yourself for him the way lovers have always made fools of themselves for the one they love. [Quoted by William H. Willimon, *The Service of God: How Worship and Ethics are Related* (1983), p. 8]

Let's fess up. Too often we wrongly separate worship and ethics: our praying and praising and singing are not very humble or ethically insightful, and our social action not very worshipful. We'll work on doing better.

Art and ethics – now here is another wrongly divorced pair. Putting the visual inspiration and guidance back into our moral lives will be a challenge. Our art editor, Dr. Heidi Hornik, is just the person to help us here. An Assistant Professor of Art History at Baylor, Heidi directs the university's Martin Museum. She is also art editor for the forthcoming Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary Series.

Dr. Norman Wirzba will edit book review articles. Norman, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown College, is an experienced reviewer for *Christian Century* magazine. Wendell Berry, the well-known poet-philosopher, environmental essayist and farmer recently recruited Norman to edit his work for new themed anthologies.

I will be editing the articles for the journal and working with David, Heidi, and Norman to develop topics for each issue. Some journal issues will address a moral concern (such

as aging, capital punishment, church discipline and restoration, consumerism, ethics of missionary work, pornography, or world hunger). Sometimes they will focus on an aspect of Christian character (like confession, forgiveness, stewardship, suffering, or vocation/calling). Other topics will be people or movements (perhaps Augustine, John and Charles Wesley, Clarence Jordan, early church ethics, Islamic ethics, or popular movies and stories) and Biblical themes (such as creation ethics, law and gospel, Psalms, or the love command).

Which topics would you like to see addressed in the journal? What topics are we not talking to one another about, but we *should be*? For what topics do we need more helpful resources for church members – resources that are solid in content, expressed more clearly and more carefully?

We are working with focus groups – that's a technical term for a gang of people who are toting #2 pencils – to see what topics are most helpful. For instance, at our workshop at the CBF General Assembly in Orlando a number of people shared their preferences with us. We have canvassed church groups and Baylor students too.

I will not tell you what topics others have recommended – yet. First, you should have a chance to tell us your own favorites. So, please email, phone or write to us. We will be happy to send a copy of our topic preference sheet to you. Just tell us how you want us to send it – electrons (email or fax) or paper. We have both.



What will the Center for Christian Ethics be doing in the next few years? Enter, for a moment, into my dreams ...

I dream of a place where a minister and church members receive encouragement and financial support to study a local moral concern, like the roots of homelessness in their town, and then they construct an innovative ministry plan for the church. Or, a new seminary accepts a grant allowing it to host a leading Christian ethicist, and then to build up its Christian ethics studies.

I dream that a church member downloads (from an attractive new website) lessons and worship resources to nourish her Sunday school topics class. While online, she orders inexpensive copies of back issues of the new journal for class members. (I'm dreaming she received her first copy of the journal as a free gift from the Center!)

I imagine a lawyer has just read the most interesting Christian discussion of prison reform in the new journal and now she is composing an email letter to the authors. She will receive a response in a CCE on-line forum. Or, a public school teacher returns from a conference on teaching as Christian vocation. He has met new friends in other towns whom he will email, and an education student at the university whom he will mentor.

I dream that a third-world Christian receives support to study and write about Christian ethics – for our benefit in North America. We all begin to see more clearly as we look at the world with the help of this Christian mind informed by another culture.

I imagine solid commentaries for newspapers and maga-

zines, and position papers that enlighten public leaders on a range of ethical issues.

I see a pastor in the third world searching a CCE web-based information bank on Christian ethics – a web address that was recommended by his CCE-provided visiting instructor. The instructor is back home in Arkansas now – eyes wider open after that oversees study/teaching opportunity. The instructor's church is connected more personally to that third-world pastor and his ministry.



Part of my task is to seek financial support for these projects: producing creative ethics-related resources for church people, in print and online; providing study opportunities for undergraduates, Christian laypersons and ministers; creating places for Christians to gather respectfully and to confront the moral concerns in our culture; and supporting the teaching of Christian ethics in churches and in the new seminaries.

I hope that you will be dreaming with me, and praying for me and for the Center for Christian Ethics. Many of you have supported the Center with your money and prayers for a decade. Now that we are poised on the launching pad, your support is needed more than ever. ■

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Dr. Robert B. Kruschwitz is the new Director of the Center for Christian Ethics. He comes to the Center this summer from Georgetown College, Georgetown, KY, where he chaired the philosophy department. He received the George Walker Redding Faculty Award for Outstanding Christian Service from Georgetown College in 1997 for his leadership in integrating Christian faith with teaching and research.

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*“Whatever things are . . . lovely . . . think on these things.”*

*Philippians 4:8*

## The Shade at the End of the Row

*By Foy Valentine*

This is a cheerful word about cemeteries. Actually it is mostly about a special cemetery. I've been there a hundred times.

Just visiting of course.

I speak of the graveyard by the meeting house of my home church, the Pleasant Union Baptist Church in East Texas about five miles north of Edgewood and a mile or so this side of the Sabine River.

The great old post oaks around the back of the meeting-house, extending out over the cemetery, are probably well over two hundred years old. They are the very ones my deacon Daddy used to tie our team to when we pulled up our wagon and got out to go to the church services where my Mother taught Sunday School and he led the singing. (You might very well have found yourself in a fistfight if you had called him a Minister of Music or, heaven forbid, a Worship Leader. For crying out loud!) After our car was sold and our family settled into the grinding poverty of the Great Depression, that narrow-tired wagon and those two mules, Red and Steve, were our only means of getting around. Otherwise we walked. Like everybody else.

But I digress.

The cemetery never was a depressing place to me. It's still not. It was part of life. A part of church. A part of community. A part of family. Buried there are grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, early settlers, scalawags, bootleggers, heroes and heroines, godly old men and saintly old women, folks who would certainly have been candidates for beatification if dyed-in-the-wool Baptists and Methodists had dabbled in such a popish practice. And buried there are my parents and, next to them our blue-eyed and blond five-year daughter.

When I walk those grounds, as I often do, I do so in profound sobriety.

I nearly always stop in solemn retrospection by the grave of Clarence Spradlin. Clarence got religion in his mature years, and he used to come faithfully to the stated services held in the one-room frame church house not thirty yards from where he is now resting. He faithfully carried a big, black Bible. He always wore high-mileage blue overalls. He never wore shoes. Summer and winter he never wore shoes. He didn't have any shoes. Trapping for mink and lesser game through those rugged creek and river bottoms, his bare feet got so calloused that you could easily strike a match on the bottom of either bare heel. I've done it lots of times. No "reed shaken by the

wind," never cumbered with "soft raiment," not even remotely near being "gorgeously attired" (Matthew 11:8; Luke 17:24-28), Clarence Spradlin was the nearest man to John the Baptist I have ever known. With his kind of nerve, style, and smarts, he might well, under more fortuitous circumstances, have been an Amos, a Governor, a Senator, a rocket scientist, or an astronaut. He died when he was not yet forty.

Then I seldom fail to stop a while at the grave of Kenneth Jackson, a grand and godly old deacon whose words of encouragement and blessing spoken to me privately and with palsied deliberation right after I, as a boy, had publicly professed my faith in Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, still lodge in my mind after nearly seventy years.

The grave of a neighbor and an old family friend, Charlie Waggoner, is made special by a loving tribute, likely posted there by a grateful and caring daughter. The message is carried in a neat little sign by a blue plastic telephone, "Jesus Called Daddy Home." No, it is hardly on the same website as Shakespeare's Sonnets. But it is light years ahead of the Beatles or what your average Rapper might produce. Moreover it is a quintessentially Van Zandt County kind of manifesto, not to be denied, denounced, or denigrated.

There are gravestones, of course, that speak of wasted years, trashed talents, broken promises, crippling addictions, inhuman cruelties, deferred dreams, debilitating diseases, and blood violence. Many of these came to rest here no doubt feeling like Socrates, unjustly condemned to death by lesser men, who told his friend, Crito, to sacrifice a rooster on the morning after he had drunk the hemlock to celebrate his release from "terrible life."

I will not linger in telling you of our young daughter's white marble marker with its somber words from Job 1:21, "The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Nor will I wallow in maudlin sentimentality over the graves of my parents whose Texas red granite tombstone carries carvings of the irises that bloomed around our house, along with the proper names and the proper dates. They started married life together not a mile from here, Josie Helen Johnson and John Hardy Valentine; and after nearly sixty years together, they now rest here together side by side, and they will be rising together on that great Waking Up

Morning. Is this shouting ground, or what!

All in all, this graveyard is a lovely place.

And it is not unlike untold thousands of other such places.

I think of Huntsville's secluded bower in a patch of dense East Texas woods where Sam Houston rests in peace by a Sidney Lanier poem carved in stone, "Into the woods my Master went. Clean forspent . . ."

Stratford on Avon comes to mind with William Shakespeare's modest marker in a little graveyard by a small Anglican church, saying simply, "Good friend for Jesus' sake forebare, to dig the dust enclosed here. Blest be the man that spares these stones, and curst be he that moves my bones."

I admire an old, old cemetery in old Mobile where giant live oaks laden with centuries-old accumulations of Spanish moss shelter the last resting places of the city's early settlers.

Secluded little hollows in the Great Smoky Mountains also come to mind, places on narrow dirt roads where little white church houses are twinned with neat little cemeteries on green hillsides with markers bearing old Anglo-Saxon names on stones long since so weathered and lichened that God only knows who they were, or when they were born, or when their travails ceased and their impossible dreams were put on hold.

A few hardy souls are still around who know the rigors of hard labor over row crops of cotton and corn, who experienced the broiling heat of the summer sun as backs were bent under the undulating heat waves that old folks called Lazy Lawrence, and who toiled at the tiresome task of chopping and hoeing which row crops demand. Those who remember that work will remember even more clearly the blessed relief that came when the work could be laid down for a few minutes and rest could be found in the shade at the end of the row. How delicious it is to sit in the shade for a little while, hat off, with a slight breeze blowing in the face, a long drink of cool water, and respite from the burning of the noonday heat and the burden of the day. Shade at the end of the row. It is a special dispensation of grace.

Is not the graveyard, for its occupants, this world's ultimate shade at the end of the row?

So, until death is finally swallowed up in victory for the people of God, it seems to me that it is not going to get any better than this, to rest in peace in the shade at the end of the row. ■



# CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

## A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

### PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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

From the beginning *Christian Ethics Today* has been sent without charge to anyone requesting it, six times per year, “as money and energy permit.” A new editor brings added energy to the mission. But more than ever before, your financial support is “greatly needed, urgently solicited, and genuinely appreciated.”

The Christian Ethics Today Foundation is a non-profit organization and has applied for a 501 (c) (3) from the Internal Revenue Service.

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