Technological Challenges of the 21st Century

We live in historic times. And we will face new challenges as we enter the 21st century, especially in the area of technology. The fields of biotechnology and information technology have the capacity to change the social landscape and even alter the way we make ethical decisions. These are not challenges for the faint-hearted. We must bring a tough-minded Christianity into the 21st century.

We are reminded in 1 Chronicles 12:32 (NIV) that the men of Issachar "understood the times and knew what Israel should do." Likewise, we must understand our times and know what we should do. New ethical challenges await us as we consider the moral issues of our day and begin to analyze them from a biblical perspective.

We should also enter into the task with humility. Over a hundred years ago, Charles Duell, Director of the U.S. Patent Office, was ready to close his office down because he believed that "Everything that can be invented has been invented."{1} We should not make the mistake of thinking that we can accurately see into the future. However, we can analyze trends and look at new inventions and begin to see the implications of these remarkable changes. Our challenge will always be to apply the timeless truths of Scripture to the quickly changing world around us.

How should Christians analyze the technological changes taking place? First we must begin by developing a theology of technology.

Theology of Technology

Technology is really nothing more than the systematic

modification of the environment for human ends. This might be a process or activity that extends or enhances a human function. A telescope extends man's visual perception. A tractor extends one's physical ability. A computer extends a person's ability to calculate.

The biblical mandate for developing and using technology is stated in Genesis 1:28. God gave mankind dominion over the land, and we are obliged to use and manage these resources wisely in serving the Lord. God's ideal was not to have a world composed exclusively of primitive areas. Before the Fall (Gen. 2:15) Adam was to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden. After the Fall the same command pertains to the application of technology to this fallen world, a world that "groans" in travail (Rom. 8:22). Technology can benefit mankind in exercising proper dominion, and thus remove some of the effects of the Fall (such as curing disease, breeding livestock, or growing better crops).

Technology is neither good or evil. The worldview behind the particular technology determines its value. In the Old Testament, technology was used both for good (e.g., the building of the ark, Gen. 6) and for evil (e.g., the building of the Tower of Babel, Gen. 11). Therefore, the focus should not be so much on the technology itself as on the philosophical motivation behind its use. Here are three important principles that should be considered.

First, technology should be seen as a tool, not as an end in itself. There is nothing sacred about technology. Unfortunately, Western culture tends to rely on it more than is appropriate. If a computer, for example, proves a particular point, people have a greater tendency to believe it than if the answer was a well-reasoned conclusion given by a person. If a machine can do the job, employers are prone to mechanize, even if human labor does a better or more creative job. Often our society unconsciously places machines over man. Humans become servants to machines rather than the other way

around.

There is a tendency to look to science and engineering to solve problems that really may be due to human sinfulness (wars, prejudice, greed), the fallenness of the world (death, disease), or God's curse on Adam (finite resources). In Western culture especially, we tend to believe that technology will save us from our problems and thus we use technology as a substitute for God. Christians must not fall into this trap, but instead must exhibit their ultimate dependence on God. Christians must also differentiate between problems that demand a technological solution and ones that can be remedied by a social or spiritual one.

Second, technology should be applied in different ways, according to specific instructions. For example, there are distinctions between man and animal that, because we are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27), call for different applications of medical science. Using artificial insemination to improve the genetic fitness of livestock does not justify using it on human beings. Christians should resist the idea that just because we *can* do something, we *should* do it. Technological ability does not grant moral permission.

Third, ethics, rather than technology, must determine the direction of our society. Jacques Ellul has expressed the concern that technology moves society instead of vice versa.{2} Our society today seems all too motivated by a technological imperative in our culture. The technological ability to do something is not the same as a moral imperative to do it. Technology should not determine ethics.

Though scientists may possess the technological ability to be gods, they nevertheless lack the capacity to act like gods. Too often, man has tried to use technology to become God. He uses it to work out his own physical salvation, to enhance his own development, or even to attempt to create life. Christians who take seriously human fallenness will humbly admit that we

often do not know enough about God's creation to use technology wisely. The reality of human sinfulness means that society should be careful to prevent the use of technology for greed and exploitation.

Technology's fruits can be both sweet and bitter. C. S. Lewis writes in the *Abolition of Man*, "From this point of view, what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be power exercised by some men over men with Nature as its instrument. . . . There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man's side. Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car."[{3}]

Christians must bring strong biblical critique to each technological advance and analyze its impact. The goal should be to liberate the positive effects of technology while restraining negative effects by setting up appropriate constraints against abuse.

The Challenge of Biotechnology

The age of biotechnology has arrived. For the first time in human history it is possible to completely redesign existing organisms, including man, and to direct the genetic and reproductive constitution of every living thing. Scientists are no longer limited to breeding and cross-pollination. Powerful genetic tools allow us to change genetic structure at the microscopic level and bypass the normal processes of reproduction.

For the first time in human history it is also possible to make multiple copies of any existing organism or of certain sections of its genetic structure. This ability to clone existing organisms or their genes gives scientists a powerful tool to reproduce helpful and useful genetic material within a population.

Scientists are also developing techniques to treat and cure genetic diseases through genetic surgery and genetic therapy. They can already identify genetic sequences that are defective, and soon scientists will be able to replace these defects with properly functioning genes.

Gene splicing (known as recombinant DNA technology) is fundamentally different from other forms of genetic breeding used in the past. Breeding programs work on existing arrays of genetic variability in a species, isolating specific genetic traits through selective breeding. Scientists using gene splicing can essentially "stack" the deck or even produce an entirely new deck of genetic "cards."

But this powerful ability to change the genetic deck of cards also raises substantial scientific concerns that some "sleight-of-hand" would produce dangerous consequences. Ethan Singer said, "Those who are powerful in society will do the shuffling; their genes will be shuffled in one direction, while the genes of the rest of us will get shuffled in another."{4} Also there is the concern that a reshuffled deck of genes might create an Andromeda strain similar to the one envisioned by Michael Crichton is his book by the same title.{5} A microorganism might inadvertently be given the genetic structure for some pathogen for which there is no antidote or vaccine.

The potential benefits of gene splicing are significant. First, the technology can be used to produce medically important substances. The list of these substances is quite large and would include insulin, interferon, and human growth hormone. The technology also has great application in the field of immunology. In order to protect organisms from viral disease, doctors must inject a killed or attenuated virus. Scientists can use the technology to disable a toxin gene, thus producing a viral substance that triggers production of antibodies without the possibility of producing the disease.

A second benefit is in the field of agriculture. This technology can improve the genetic fitness of various plant species. Basic research using this technology could increase the efficiency of photosynthesis, increase plant resistance (to salinity, to drought, to viruses), and reduce a plant's demand for nitrogen fertilizer.

Third, gene splicing can aid industrial and environmental processes. Industries that manufacture drugs, plastics, industrial chemicals, vitamins, and cheese will benefit from this technology. Also scientists have begun to develop organisms that can clean up oil spills or toxic wastes.

This last benefit, however, also raises one of the greatest scientific concerns over the use of biotechnology. The escape (or even intentional release) of a genetically engineered organism might wreak havoc on the environment. Scientists have created microorganisms that dissolve oil spills or reduce frost on plants. Critics of gene splicing fear that radically altered organisms could occupy new ecological niches, destroy existing ecosystems, or drive certain species to extinction.

A significant question is whether life should be patented at all. Most religious leaders say no. A 1995 gathering of religious leaders representing virtually every major religious tradition spoke out against the patenting of genetically engineered substances. They argued that life is the creation of God, not humans, and should not be patented as human inventions.{6}

The broader theological question is *whether* genetic engineering should be used and, if permitted, *how* it should be used. The natural reaction for many in society is to reject new forms of technology because they are dangerous. Christians, however, should take into account God's command to humankind in the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28). Christians should avoid the reflex reaction that scientists should not tinker with life; instead Christians should consider how this

technology should be used responsibly.

One key issue is the worldview behind most scientific research. Modern science rests on an evolutionary assumption. Many scientists assume that life on this planet is the result of millions of years of a chance evolutionary process. Therefore they conclude that intelligent scientists can do a better job of directing the evolutionary process than nature can do by chance. Even evolutionary scientists warn of this potential danger. Ethan Singer believes that scientists will "verify a few predictions, and then gradually forget that knowing something isn't the same as knowing everything. . . . At each stage we will get a little cockier, a little surer we know all the possibilities."{7}

In essence biotechnology gives scientists the tools they have always wanted to drive the evolutionary spiral higher and higher. Julian Huxley looked forward to the day in which scientists could fill the "position of business manager for the cosmic process of evolution."{8} Certainly this technology enables scientists to create new forms of life and alter existing forms in ways that have been impossible until now.

How should Christians respond? They should humbly acknowledge that God is the sovereign Creator and that man has finite knowledge. Genetic engineering gives scientists the technological ability to be gods, but they lack the wisdom, knowledge, and moral capacity to act like God.

Even evolutionary scientists who deny the existence of God and believe that all life is the result of an impersonal evolutionary process express concern about the potential dangers of this technology. Erwin Chargaff asked, "Have we the right to counteract, irreversibly, the evolutionary wisdom of millions of years, in order to satisfy the ambition and curiosity of a few scientists?"{9} His answer is no. The Christian's answer should also be the same when we realize that God is the Creator of life. We do not have the right to

"rewrite the fifth day of creation."{10}

What is the place for genetic engineering within a biblical framework? The answer to that question can be found by distinguishing between two types of research. The first could be called genetic repair. This research attempts to remove genetic defects and develop techniques that will provide treatments for existing diseases. Applications would include various forms of genetic therapy and genetic surgery as well as modifications of existing microorganisms to produce beneficial results.

The Human Genome Project has been able to pinpoint the location and sequence of the approximately 100,000 human genes.{11} Further advances in biotechnology will allow scientists to repair these defective sequences and eventually remove these genetic diseases from our population.

Genetic disease is not part of God's plan for the world. It is the result of the Fall (Gen. 3). Christians can apply technology to fight these evils without being accused of fighting against God's will.{12} Genetic engineering can and should be used to treat and cure genetic diseases.

A second type of research is the creation of new forms of life. While minor modifications of existing organisms may be permissible, Christians should be concerned about the large-scale production of novel life forms. That potential impact on the environment and on mankind could be considerable. Science is replete with examples of what can happen when an existing organism is introduced into a new environment (e.g., the rabbit into Australia, the rat to Hawaii, or the gypsy moth in the United States). One can only imagine the potential devastation that could occur when a newly created organism is introduced into a new environment.

God created plants and animals as "kinds" (Gen. 1:24). While there is minor variability within these created kinds, there

are built-in barriers between these created kinds. Redesigning creatures of any kind cannot be predicted the same way new elements on the periodic chart can be predicted for properties even before they are discovered. Recombinant DNA technology offers great promise in treating genetic disease, but Christians should also be vigilant. While this technology should be used to repair genetic defects, it should not be used to confer the role of creator on scientists.

A related issue in the field of biotechnology is human cloning. It appears that the cloning of a human being will no doubt take place some time in the future since many other mammals have been cloned. Proponents of human cloning argue that it would be a worthwhile scientific endeavor for at least three reasons. First, cloning could be used to produce spare parts. The clone would be genetically identical to the original person, so that a donated organ would not be rejected by the immune system. Second, they argue that cloning might be a way to replace a lost child. A dying infant or child could be cloned so that a couple would replace the child with a genetically identical child. Third, cloning could produce biological immortality. One woman approached scientists in order to clone her deceased father and offered to carry the cloned baby to term herself.{13}

While cloning of various organisms may be permissible, cloning a human being raises significant questions beginning with the issue of the sanctity of life. Human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:2728) and therefore differ from animals. Human cloning would certainly threaten the sanctity of human life at a number of levels. First, cloning is an inefficient process of procreation as shown in cloning of a sheep. Second, cloning would no doubt produce genetic accidents. Previous experiments with frogs produced numerous embryos that did not survive, and many of those that did survive developed into grotesque monsters. Third, researchers often clone human embryos for various experiments. Although the National

Bioethics Advisory Commission did ban cloning of human beings, it permitted the cloning of human embryos for research. Since these embryos are ultimately destroyed, this research raises the same pro-life concerns discussed in the chapter on abortion.

Cloning represents a tampering with the reproductive process at the most basic level. Cloning a human being certainly strays substantially from God's intended procedure of a man and woman producing children within the bounds of matrimony (Gen. 2:24). All sorts of bizarre scenarios can be envisioned. Some homosexual advocates argue that cloning would be an ideal way for homosexual men to reproduce themselves.

Although this would be an alternative form of reproduction, it is reasonable to believe that human clones would still be fully human. For example, some people wonder if a clone would have a soul since this would be such a diversion from God's intended process of procreation. A traducian view of the origin of the soul, where a person receives both body and soul from his parents rather than an act of special creation by God, would imply that a cloned human being would have a soul. In a sense a clone would be no different from an identical twin.

Human cloning, like other forms of genetic engineering, could be used to usher in a "brave new world." James Bonner says "there is nothing to prevent us from taking a thousand [cells]. We could grow any desired number of genetically identical people from individuals who have desirable characteristics."{14} Such a vision conjures up images of Alphas, Betas, Gammas, and Deltas from Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World* and provides a dismal contrast to God's creation of each individual as unique.

Each person contributes to both the unity and diversity of humanity. This is perhaps best expressed by the Jewish Midrash: "For a man stamps many coins in one mold and they are

all alike; but the King who is king over all kings, the Holy One blessed be he, stamped every man in the mold of the first man, yet not one of them resembles his fellow."{15} Christians should reject future research plans to clone a human being and should reject using cloning as an alternative means of reproduction.

The Challenge of Information Technology

The information revolution is the latest technological advance Christians must consider. The shift to computers and an information-based society has been swift as well as spectacular. The first electronic digital computer, ENIAC, weighed thirty tons, had 18,000 vacuum tubes, and occupied a space as large as a boxcar.{16} Less than forty years later, many hand-held calculators had comparable computing power for a few dollars. Today most people have a computer on their desk with more computing power than engineers could imagine just a few years ago.

The impact of computers on our society was probably best seen when in 1982 *Time* magazine picked the computer as its "Man of the Year"—actually listing it as "Machine of the Year."{17} It is hard to imagine a picture of the Spirit of St. Louis or an Apollo lander on the magazine cover under a banner "Machine of the Year." This perhaps shows how influential the computer has become in our society.

The computer has become helpful in managing knowledge at a time when the amount of information is expanding exponentially. The information stored in the world's libraries and computers doubles every eight years.{18} In a sense the computer age and the information age seem to go hand in hand.

The rapid development and deployment of computing power however has also raised some significant social and moral questions. People in this society need to think clearly about these issues, but often ignore them or become confused.

One key issue is computer crime. In a sense computer fraud is merely a new field with old problems. Computer crimes are often nothing more than fraud, larceny, and embezzlement carried out by more sophisticated means. The crimes usually involve changing address, records, or files. In short, they are old-fashioned crimes using high technology.

Another concern arises from the centralization of information. Governmental agencies, banks, and businesses use computers to collect information on its citizens and customers. For example, it is estimated that the federal government has on average about fifteen files on each American.{19} Nothing is inherently wrong with collecting information if the information can be kept confidential and is not used for immoral actions. Unfortunately this is often difficult to guarantee.

In an information-based society, the centralization of information can be as dangerous as the centralization of power. Given sinful man in a fallen world, we should be concerned about the collection and manipulation of vast amounts of personal information.

In the past, centralized information processing was used for persecution. When Adolf Hitler's Gestapo began rounding up millions of Jews, information about their religious affiliation was stored in shoe boxes. U.S. Census Bureau punch cards were used to round up Japanese Americans living on the West Coast at the beginning of World War II.{20} Modern technology makes this task much easier. Governmental agencies routinely collect information about citizens' ethnic origin, race, religion, gross income, and even political preference.

Moreover, the problem it not limited to governmental agencies. Many banking systems, for example, utilize electronic funds-transfer systems. Plans to link these systems together into a national system could also provide a means of tracking the actions of citizens. A centralized banking network could

fulfill nearly every information need a malevolent dictator might have. This is not to say that such a thing will happen. It does mean, however, that societies that want to monitor their citizens will be able to do so more efficiently with computer technology.

A related problem arises from the confidentiality of computer records. Computer records can be abused like any other system. Reputations built up over a lifetime can be ruined by computer errors and often there is little recourse for the victim. Congress passed the 1974 Privacy Act which allows citizens to find out what records federal bureaucracies have on them and to correct any errors.{21} But more legislation is needed than this particular act.

The proliferation of computers has presented another set of social and moral concerns. In the recent past most of that information was centralized and required the expertise of the "high priests of FORTRAN" to utilize it. Now most people have access to information because of increasing numbers of personal computers and increased access to information through the Internet. This access to information will have many interesting sociological ramifications, and it is also creating a set of troubling ethical questions. The proliferation of computers that can tie into other computers provides more opportunities for computerized crime.

The news media frequently carry reports about computer "hackers" who have been able to gain access to confidential computer systems and obtain or interfere with the data banks. Although these were supposed to be secure systems, enterprising computer hackers broke in anyway. In many cases this merely involved curious teenagers. Nevertheless computer hacking has become a developing area of crime. Criminals might use computer access to forge documents, change records, and draft checks. They can even use computers for blackmail by holding files for ransom and threatening to destroy them if their demands are not met. Unless better methods of security

are found, professional criminals will begin to crack computer security codes and gain quick access into sensitive files.

As with most technological breakthroughs, engineers have outrun lawmakers. Computer deployment has created a number of legal questions. First, there is the problem of establishing penalties of computer crime. Typically, intellectual property has a different status in our criminal justice system. Legal scholars should evaluate the notion that ideas and information need not be protected in the same way as property. Legislators need to enact computer information protection laws that will deter criminals, or even curious computer hackers, from breaking into confidential records.

A second legal problem arises from the question of jurisdiction. Telecommunications allows information to be shared across state and even national borders. Few federal statutes govern this area and less than half the states have laws dealing with information abuse.

Enforcement will also be a problem for several reasons. One reason is the previously stated problem of jurisdiction. Another is that police departments rarely train their personnel in computer abuse and fraud. A third reason is lack of personnel. Computers are nearly as ubiquitous as telephones or photocopiers.

Computer fraud also raises questions about the role of insurance companies. How do companies insure an electronic asset? What value does computer information have? These questions also need to be addressed in the future.

Technology and Human Nature

These new technologies will also challenge our views of human nature. Already medical technology is challenging our views of what it means to be human. A key question in the abortion debate is, When does human life begin? Is an embryo human?

What about a developing fetus? Although the Bible provides answers to these questions, society often takes its cue from pronouncements that do not square with biblical truth.

Biotechnology raises yet another set of questions. Is a frozen embryo human and deserving of a right to life? Is a clone human? Would a clone have a soul? These and many more questions will have to be answered. Although the Bible doesn't directly address such issues as genetically engineered humans or clones, key biblical passages (Ps. 139, Ps. 51:5) certainly seem to teach that an embryo is a human created in the image of God.

Information technology also raises questions about human nature in an unexpected way. Researchers believe that as computer technology advances, we will begin to analyze the human mind in physical terms. In *The Society of Mind,* Marvin Minsky, professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says that "the mind, the soul, the self, are not a singly ghostly entity but a society of agents, deeply integrated, yet each one rather mindless on its own."{22} He dreams of being able ultimately to reduce mind (and therefore human nature) to natural mechanism. Obviously this is not an empirical statement, but a metaphysical one that attempts to reduce everything (including mind) to matter.

Will we some day elevate computers to the level of humanity? One article asked the question, Would an Intelligent Computer Have a "Right to Life?"{23} Granting computer rights might be something society might consider since many are already willing to grant certain rights to animals.

In a sense the question is whether an intelligent computer would have a soul and therefore access to fundamental human rights. As bizarre as the question may sound, it was no doubt inevitable. When 17th century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz first described a thinking machine, he was careful to point out that this machine would not have a soul—fearful

perhaps of reaction from the church. Already scientists predict that computer intelligence will create "an intelligence beyond man's" and provide wonderful new capabilities.{25} One of the great challenges in the future will be how to manage new computing power that will outstrip human intelligence.

Once again this is a challenge for Christians in the 21 st century. Human beings are more than just proteins and nucleic acids. Human being are more than bits and bytes. We are created in the image of God and therefore have a spiritual dimension. Perhaps this must be our central message to a world enamored with technology: human beings are created in the image of God and must be treated with dignity and respect.

Notes

1. Memo from Charles H. Duell, Director of the U.S. Patent Office, 1899.

2. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964).

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 6869, 71 (italics his).

4. Ethan Singer, cited in Nicholas Wade, "Gene Splicing: Congress Starts Framing Law for Research," *Science*, 1 April 1977, 39.

5. Michael Crichton, *The Andromeda Strain* (New York: Dell, 1969).

6. Kenneth Woodward, "Thou Shalt Not Patent!" *Newsweek*, 29 May 1995, 68.

7. Testimony by Ethan Singer before the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Hearings*, 15 March 1977, 79.

8. Julian Huxley, cited in Joseph Fletcher, *The Ethics of Genetic Control* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1974), 8.

9. Erwin Chargaff, cited in George Wald, "The Case against Genetic Engineering," *The Sciences*, May 1976, 10.

10. Nancy McCann, "The DNA Maelstrom: Science and Industry Rewrite the Fifth Day of Creation," *Sojourners*, May 1977, 2326.

11. Philip Elmer-Dewitt, "The Genetic Revolution," *Time*, 17 January 1994, 49.

12. Skeptics sometimes argue that fighting disease is the same as fighting against God's will. Albert Camus poses this dilemma for Dr. Reux in *The Plague*. Christians should follow the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28) and use genetic technology to treat and cure genetic disease.

13. Sharon Begley, "Little Lamb, Who Made Thee?" *Newsweek*, 10 March 1997, 55.

14. James Bonner, quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, 17 May 1971, 1.

15. N. N. Glazer, *Hammer on the Rock: A Short Midrash Reader* (New York: Schocken, 1962), 15.

16. Philip Elmer-De-Witt, "A Birthday Party for ENIAC," *Time*, 24 February 1986, 63.

17. "Machine of the Year," *Time*, 3 January 1983, 1324.

18. "Harper's Index," *Harper's*, October 1984, 9.

19. Ted Gest, "Who Is Watching You?" *U.S. News and World Report*, 12 July 1982, 35.

20. David Burnham, *The Rise of the Computer State* (New York: Random House, 1983).

21. Martha Farnsworth Riche, "The Rising Tide of Privacy

Laws," *American Demographics*, March 1990, 24.

22. Richard Lipkin, "Making Machines in Mind's Image," *Insight*, 15 February 1988, 812.

23. Robert Mueller and Erik Mueller, "Would an Intelligent Computer Have a 'Right to Life?'" *Creative Computing*, August 1983, 14961.

24. Danny Hillis, "Can They Feel Your Pain?" *Newsweek*, 5 May 1997, 57.

25. Robert Jastrow, "Toward an Intelligence beyond Man's," *Time*, 20 February 1978, 59.

Partial Birth Abortion — From a Biblical Perspective

A Commitment to Gruesomeness

This year is the twenty-seventh year of legal abortion, and the only thing that appears to have changed in the debate is the addition of newer and more gruesome abortion procedures. At the top of the list is partial birth abortion.

The first legislative debate on partial birth abortion took place back in 1995 when Representative Charles Canady introduced a bill to ban this unknown procedure. Congressional testimony revealed that a fetus was delivered feet first, up to the head, so that the skull could be pierced and the brain suctioned out.

Canady's bill was a response to a paper delivered by Martin Haskell, a doctor from Dayton, Ohio, at the National Abortion Federation. At the time, reaction to Haskell's practice ran high in Ohio and eventually nationwide. The state of Ohio became the first state to prohibit the procedure and Canady's bill began to focus the issue on a national level.

Who would have predicted that such a long and protracted battle would take place over the last five years? And perhaps that shows how extreme the abortion lobby has become by its willingness to defend any abortion procedure no matter how far advanced the pregnancy might be. It also demonstrates the judiciary's willingness to defend abortion at every turn.

Although Charles Canady's bill was passed by both the House (288 to 139) and Senate (54 to 44), it was vetoed by President Clinton in April of 1996. Meanwhile, pro-life advocates were turning their energies to state legislatures. Partial birth abortion bans spread like wildfire through the legislatures. Today nearly three out of every five state legislatures have passed a ban, and some of these bans have been passed over gubernatorial vetoes. Unfortunately, liberal judges in various judicial jurisdictions have overturned many of these bans, alleging that they are vague or could threaten the life of the mother.

Congress has also reconsidered the issue again. Senator Rick Santorum reintroduced the ban in January 1997. A month later the newspaper *American Medical News* published an interview with Ron Fitzsimmons, executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers. He admitted that he lied on national television regarding the number of partial birth abortions performed and the reasons for them. This was a stunning revelation that thousands of such abortions had been performed and usually for no medical indications. The momentum for a ban on partial birth abortions seemed to be growing. And the bill again passed both houses of Congress with a larger margin. But the Senate vote (64 to 36) was still not quite

large enough to ensure an override of the expected veto by President Clinton.

Currently Congress is considering the issue again. And there are many political commentators who wonder if the margin may grow again since this is an election year. Also, as we will discuss in more detail, the Supreme Court seemed poised to act on the issue as well. While that does not insure that a federal ban on partial birth abortion will pass this year, it does raise the stakes over this controversial and gruesome procedure. Will Congress or the courts eventually ban this procedure? That seems more likely now than at any time in the past. Certainly the next few months will tell. But how will that take place?

The Current Climate

Publicity over the partial birth abortion procedure has helped build momentum. During the debate in October of 1999, Senator Rick Santorum and Senator Barbara Boxer engaged in the following exchange.

> *Santorum:* But, again, what you are suggesting is if the baby's toe is inside the mother, you can, in fact, kill that baby.

> *Boxer:* Absolutely not.

> *Santorum:* Okay. So if the baby's toe is in, you can't kill the baby. How about if the baby's foot is in?

> *Boxer:* You are the one who is making these statements.

> *Santorum:* We are trying to draw a line here.

> *Boxer:* I am not answering these questions.

> *Santorum:* If the head is inside the mother, you can kill the baby.

Discussion and dialogue like this has helped solidify and bolster public opposition to partial birth abortion. Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has called this procedure "near-infanticide." Opinion polls show that he is not alone in his assessment. Even citizens and politicians who are sympathetic to abortion rights are repulsed by partial birth abortion.

Throughout this year the battle against partial birth abortion will be fought on two fronts: Congress and the courts. Pro-life advocates point out that vote counts in the Senate show they are getting very close to a veto-proof margin. Key senators forced to vote on this measure during an election year might make the difference.

Meanwhile, federal courts have forced the Supreme Court to deliberate on the issue. This fall federal judges in Wisconsin and Illinois found the partial birth abortion bans in their states to be constitutional. Before the laws could be implemented, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens issued a stay that holds the two state laws in limbo until the high court disposes of the appeals.

Legal experts say that the order is written in such a way as to force the court to directly consider the constitutionality of partial birth abortions, or else the court must leave these state laws in place. In either case, this appears to be a pro-life victory.

Last summer in Arizona, an abortionist was performing a partial birth abortion on what he thought was a twenty-three week old. Suddenly he realized the baby was actually thirty-seven weeks old. He stopped the abortion and delivered the baby. The police said that, "At this point it doesn't appear that anybody will be charged with anything." The reason? Nothing illegal was done.

President Clinton continues to veto congressional bans on this

procedure, and judges continue to overturn state bans on this procedure. But it appears that in the year 2000 that is about to change.

The Biblical Perspective

Before we continue this discussion I wanted to focus on the biblical perspective of abortion. A key passage in this discussion is Psalm 139, where David reflected on God's sovereignty in his life.

The psalm opens with the acknowledgment that God is omniscient; He knows what the psalmist, David, is doing. God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. Wherever David might go, he could not escape from God, whether he traveled to heaven or ventured into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. David then contemplated the origin of his life and confessed that God was there forming him in the womb.

> For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Here David wrote of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. The Bible does not speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. This is not a piece of protoplasm that became David. This was David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

Verse 13 speaks of God as the Master Craftsman, weaving and fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14-15 David reflected on the fact that he was a product of God's creative

work within his mother's womb, and he praised God for how wonderfully God had woven him together.

David drew a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he referred to his life before birth when "I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth." This poetic allusion hearkens back to Genesis 2:7, which says that Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

David also noted that "thine eyes have seen my unformed substance." This shows that God knew David even before he was known to others. The term translated "unformed substance" derives from the verb "to roll up." When David was forming as a fetus, God's care and compassion were already extended to him. The reference to "God's eyes" is an Old Testament term connoting divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or a group of people.

While there are certainly other passages in the Old and New Testament that speak to the sanctity of human life, I believe that Psalm 139 is sufficient to show why Christians must oppose abortion, especially partial birth abortion. The unborn baby is a human being that God cares for. It should not be sacrificed in the womb for convenience or even for fetal parts that might improve the medical condition of another person. The unborn must be protected at every stage of development.

Partial birth abortion is a controversial and gruesome procedure. It is also against the will of God. Christians must speak out against the horror of this procedure and do whatever they can to make the procedure illegal.

Fetal Tissue Trafficking

I would like to turn our focus to a related issue: the traffic of fetal tissue parts. In the fall of 1999, a pro-life group by the name of Life Dynamics published their two-year

investigation of the traffic of fetal body parts. They produced copies of brochures, protocols, and price lists that document the interstate commerce of fetal body parts. One brochure touts "the freshest tissue available." A price list provides a grim picture of the trafficking in cannibalized body parts: eyes are $50 to $75 depending on the age of the fetus, skin is $100, a spinal cord is $325.

The investigation provided new insight into why the fight against partial birth abortion has been so tough. Partial birth abortion, after all, is a difficult procedure that involves turning the fetus in the womb and removing it feet first. This complicates the abortion and therefore poses more risk to the mother. So why do abortionists do it? Fetal tissue parts. Quite simply, if you want an intact brain, spinal cord, or limbs, partial birth abortion will provide that in ways that other abortion techniques will not.

Essentially scientists who need human body parts for research have found a loophole in the federal law that prohibits the sale of body parts. Abortion clinics provide these companies with whole or dismembered aborted fetuses for a service fee. This is listed as a "site fee" which is "rental on the space" that a body parts company employee occupies within the clinic. The company can, therefore, argue that they are donating the parts, but charging reasonable costs for retrieval which the federal law does allow. As long as the retrieval fees are higher than the site fee, they can make a profit.

Just one look at the "Fees for Services Schedule" can be chilling. Prices for every conceivable body part are listed. But it's important to notice that an intact embryonic cadaver costs $600. Why should there be a retrieval fee for that? Why not just list the cost of shipping? This discrepancy illustrates how the body parts companies are trying to circumvent the law.

Gene Rudd, an obstetrician and member of the Christian Medical

and Dental Society's Bioethics Commission, said: "It's the inevitable logical progression of a society that, like Darwin, believes we came from nothing. . . . This is the inevitable slide down the slippery slope." He is appalled by this "death for profit" scheme that takes the weakest of the species to satisfy our desires.

Apparently women who come into an abortion clinic are asked to sign a document allowing the clinic to donate their aborted baby to research. No fetus may be used without permission. Then the clinic receives orders (usually from their fax machine) for parts that will be retrieved and shipped. Many of the protocols require that the specimens be obtained within minutes after the abortion and frozen or preserved.

Life Dynamics' two year investigation clearly documents what many of us suspected all along. The fight against partial birth abortion was so tough because a lot of money and fetal tissue was a stake. This procedure has little to do with providing women with choice and everything to do with the interstate trafficking of fetal body parts.

A technician identified as "Kelly" came to Life Dynamics with this story of the traffic of fetal body parts.

The doctor walked into the lab and set a steel pan on the table. "Got you some good specimens," he said. "Twins." The technician looked down at a pair of perfectly formed 24-week-old fetuses moving and gasping for air. Except for a few nicks from the surgical tongs that had pulled them out, they seemed uninjured. "There's something wrong here," the technician stammered. "They are moving. I don't do this."

She watched the doctor take a bottle of sterile water and fill the pan until the water ran over the babies' mouths and noses. Then she left the room. "I would not watch those fetuses moving," she recalls. "That's when I decided it was wrong."

Back in the fall of 1999, Life Dynamics published its two-year

investigation of the traffic of fetal body parts. They produced copies of brochures, protocols, and price lists that document the interstate commerce of fetal body parts.

I believe their investigation provided new insight into why the fight against partial birth abortion has been so tough. This procedure provides fetal tissue parts that are intact and thus available to research labs for a profit. And these are respected, tax-funded laboratories pursuing laudable goals like treating diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

"Kelly" says that it was her job to go to abortion clinics to procure tissue "donations." She would get a generated list each day of what tissue researchers needed and then look at the particular patient charts to determine where the specimens would be obtained. She would look for the most perfect specimens to give the researchers "the best value that we could sell for."

Fetuses ranged in age from seven weeks to 30 weeks and beyond. Typically, "Kelly" harvested tissue from 30 to 40 "late" fetuses each week. These are delivered using the partial birth abortion procedure.

"Kelly" and others like her would harvest eyes, livers, brains, thymuses, and especially cardiac blood. Then they would pack and freeze the tissue and send them out by standard couriers (UPS, FedEx) to the research laboratories requesting the material. Life Dynamics has produced copies of forms for fetal parts from researchers. They contain the names of researchers, universities, pharmaceutical companies, and more.

Proponents of the research argue that the goal justifies the means. After all, these babies would have been aborted anyway. Why not use the discarded parts to further science and improve the quality of living of others? Christopher Hook, a fellow with the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity calls this exploitation of the unborn "too high a price regardless of the

supposed benefit. We can never feel comfortable with identifying a group of our brothers and sisters who can be exploited for the good of the whole." He believes that, "Once we have crossed that line, we have betrayed our covenant with one another as a society and certainly the covenant of medicine."

This is the sad legacy of partial birth abortion and the international traffic of fetal body parts. Christians must stand up against this gruesome practice and reassert the sanctity of human life and work for the banning of these procedures.

The Littleton Shootings: Looking for the "Why"

Amidst the discussion of the gruesome details of the Columbine High School shootings, the question of "why?" inevitably comes up. People have talked about the killers' identification with the Trench Coat Mafia, with Nazi values, with an obsession with violence in music and entertainment. They point to the boys' experience with violent video games, the easy access to guns, and parents who were distant enough to not notice teenage boys building bombs in their garage.

But all of these things, contributing to the total picture that produced the worst school shooting in American history, are all components of the "how."

People who have studied shame{1} think they understand a big part of the "why."

Shame isn't talked about very much, because, well, it's shameful. We don't discuss it, but we all experience it. Shame is the feeling that I am defective, unacceptable, unworthy. Guilt, someone has said, is the awareness that I did something bad; shame is the horrible feeling that I *am* bad. We fear that at our core, something has gone terribly, terribly wrong, and that wrong is me. And we fear being exposed, that others will find out our dirty little secret—that I am a deficient, damaged human being.

Everyone carries around shame baggage, starting with Adam immediately after the Fall. And since we are all burdened by this invisible coating of "shame slime," we are vulnerable to the further shaming messages that others send us or which we perceive. Shame slime is sticky, and shame messages stick.

When asked how others related to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, students at Columbine High School report that most kids didn't pay any attention to them, and some kids made fun of them. Both of these are perceived as shaming messages: "You're so worthless you're invisible," and "You're so worthless and weird that you deserve to be ridiculed."

What makes high school seniors go on a killing rampage? There is a strong link between unbearable shame and rage. Those who fly into violent rages do so because they fear they can't take any additional shame. Something happens one otherwise normal day when the painfully tolerable becomes the unbearable, and the person carrying such awful shame crosses a line. A switch is tripped. Some people act on their rage immediately, pulling out guns or knives or fists, or screaming hurtful words. Other people, apparently Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold among them, channel their rage into a plan for later revenge.

This is where another dimension comes into play, I suggest: spiritual warfare. It took Eric and Dylan a good amount of time to prepare for April 20. As a result of their decision to do something so horrendously evil, they were especially

vulnerable to the lies of the Enemy. Those lies fueled them: "They're not going to get away with this." "They deserve to die." "I'm justified in meting out revenge for the way they treated me." "This is a good thing to do." "Suicide is the only way to finish this off." "This will solve everything." Two kids planned, and demons cackled.

But when rage is expressed, it changes things. People who fly into rages end up with greater rejection and more shame, the very thing they couldn't bear in the first place. So it makes sense that these two bright young men would decide that they couldn't—and wouldn't—handle the consequences of their hurtful, unrecoverable decision to hurl pain and violence at the school, and they planned to take their own lives during the rampage. CNN reported that one of them left a note saying, "This is the way we planned to go out."

There is a significant difference between the Jonesboro junior-high killers, and these high school seniors in Littleton. Children are still mainly shaped by their family. 17- and 18-year-olds, on the other hand, have spent several years traveling through the stage of adolescence where their family no longer has as much impact on them as their peers. What other students think about a person is more important, and more powerful, than what his family thinks. This is a normal part of growing up and getting ready to be an adult, but it makes young people exceptionally vulnerable to those who often don't understand the power they wield. And sometimes, unfortunately, the popular and accepted kids very much do understand their power, and they use it as a weapon against those who don't fit the mold by ridiculing and ostracizing them.

Perhaps this is what happened in Colorado.

Students who appeared on ABC's *Nightline* the night of the shooting reported that the two boys strode into the school, shouting "Now you're gonna pay for what you did to us!" They

were especially interested in targeting jocks, who were evidently the source of at least some of the ridicule and put-downs. Earlier this year, the two boys are reported to have made a video for a school project, which featured the two of them in trench coats with guns, mowing down jocks in the halls.

The diary of one of the killers was found, giving insight into the reasons behind their desire for revenge.

> *We want to be different, we want to be strange and we don't want jocks or other people putting (us) down….We're going to punish you.*{2}

Shame is everywhere in this awful tragedy. Why would students make fun of other students in the first place? Their own shame. Putting down others is a time-honored and unfortunately effective way of battling one's own sense of inadequacy and incompetence: "I'll step on you to make myself higher." People who accept themselves, who are content with who they are, usually don't feel any need to bash others. Unfortunately, the teenage need to feel the approval of one's peers can inspire people who ordinarily wouldn't insult or degrade others to do so simply to look good in their friends' eyes.

There is no question that the ultimate responsibility for this tragedy lies squarely at the feet of the two students who chose to inflict pain and suffering on others. They made a conscious decision to choose an evil and hurtful path. Still, that choice was not made in a vacuum and without provocation. In order to understand the bigger picture, we need to look beyond the two boys whose own shame cost them their own lives and the lives of at least 13 others, not to mention the wounds of other students and the damage to the building. What students do and say to each other is immensely important. Our personal power to hurt and to build must never be underestimated. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but

names will never hurt me" is one of the most grievous lies ever told. Bones heal; insults maim the soul for a long, long time.

It's helpful to ask ourselves, What if we could rewrite history? What could we have done to change things, so it never got to this point? What can we learn from this tragedy that can prevent it from happening somewhere else?

The antidote for shame is love and grace. Those who feel loved and accepted, validated for their differences instead of ostracized for not fitting in, don't have to be crippled or controlled by shame. It is the privilege of those who know God to be able to communicate the truth about how He has created people in His image, as beautiful, worthy, and acceptable because of what Christ did for us on the Cross. That's the grace part. We need to tell each other the truth, in love, just as the Bible commands us. We need to reach out and touch people to communicate "You're valuable. You matter. I'm glad God made you."

Regrettably, those were messages that Eric and Dylan apparently didn't get.

Notes

1. Donald L. Nathanson, *Shame and Pride* (New York: W.W. Norton &Co.), 1992.
2. http://www.freep.com/news/nw/qshoot25.htm

West Africans to African-Americans: "We Apologize for Slavery"

Rusty Wright presents a contemporary example of a new Christian offering repentance for past sins committed by his people and reconciliation through Christ in moving forward in the forgiveness of God. This is an excellent example of how those with a Christian worldview can work to bring healing to those wounded by past, grievous sins.

The president of the West African nation of Benin has a message for African-Americans: His compatriots are sorry for their ancestors' complicity in the slave trade. During December, he's going to tell them that at a special Leadership Reconciliation Conference on his soil.

An often-overlooked facet of slavery's ugly historical stain is that black Africans sold other black Africans into slavery. When rival tribes made war, the victors took prisoners and made them indentured servants, often selling them to white slave merchants. Tribal animosity seethed.

Benin president Matthieu Kerekou says intertribal hostility over the slave trade still exists. Many of his people have never seen descendants of their forebears who were shipped off to the Americas.

Kerekou attended the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington last February and sought African-American church leaders to whom he could apologize. The pastors offered forgiveness. As a result, 125 Western leaders will gather with tribal chiefs from across Benin for the reconciliation event. U.S. Senator James Inhofe (R, Oklahoma) and Congressman Tony Hall (D, Ohio) will participate along with pastors, athletes, celebrities and representatives of European (former) slave-trading nations.

Brian Johnson, an African-American living in Virginia, heads a U.S. sponsoring group COMINAD (Cooperative Missions Network of the African Dispersion) and works with many black churches. Johnson says the infamous "Gate of No Return" that stands on the Benin beach where slaves embarked will be renamed the "Gate of Return" and/or destroyed. African-Americans will be granted Benin citizenship.

Plans exist for a larger reconciliation event in 2000. A ship will sail the old slave route from the Canary Islands to Benin and business leaders will host an international business exposition to help stimulate trade.

Johnson says President Kerekou's mission has a spiritual flavor motivated by the president's own recent commitment to Christ. "In the same way that God offered forgiveness by presenting His Son, who was offended first," Johnson notes, African-American church leaders want to offer forgiveness to the descendants of their ancestors' captors. Both the president and the pastors hope to effect reconciliation and to provide an example to help ease global racial tensions.

Johnson says the realization that blacks sold other blacks into slavery has been hard for many African-Americans to handle. "This made it difficult to just hold the white man responsible," he notes. "This creates some problems in our own psyche. We have to deal with another angle to this and it makes it difficult. It's not [merely] a black/white thing."

He says the problem is in human hearts. " 'All have sinned,'" he claims, quoting the New Testament. "All of us need to confess our wrong and appeal to [God] for forgiveness."

Former Senator George Aiken of Vermont once said that if we awoke one morning to find everyone were the same race, color and creed, we'd find a new cause for prejudice by noon. Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy lamented that "Everybody thinks of changing humanity, but nobody thinks of changing himself."

Perhaps Johnson's and President Kerekou's prescription is worth considering.

Pokemon

Former Probe staffer Russ Wise provides a conservative Christian assessment of the Pokemon character and games.

Pokemon, also known as pocket monsters, has become the biggest game phenomenon among pre-adolescents in modern history. It has not only won the hearts of young boys, but young girls as well.

Pokemon has not only captured the game and collecting market among young people; it has also captured the financial market. Pokemon began in Japan as a Nintendo *Game Boy* game, and now encompasses television with a cartoon program by the same name, plush toys, posters, coloring books, T-shirts, comics, audio CD's, strategy books, hats, and a growing list of other possibilities. *Mewtwo Strikes Back*, a full-length motion picture, will be out November 10th.

And Who Is Pokemon?

In *The Land of Pokemon* there are dozens of exotic little monsters who have magical powers. They come in all shapes and sizes and have both strengths and weaknesses. However, they can be trained. The goal of the trainer is not only to have the right Pokemon for the event but also to have properly trained the Pokemon. Thus, the trainer can ultimately capture

them all and become a master.

Pokemon have more working for them than having strengths and weaknesses; they also have the ability to evolve into "higher forms" by making a conscious choice rather than evolving as a matter of, —oh well!— evolution. Pokemon can either evolve or *devolve* depending on the trainer's needs. Pokemon also has characters that are psychic or ghostly, thereby giving them advantages by displaying supernatural powers.

Problems in the Land of Pokemon

As mentioned earlier, Pokemon has captured the minds and hearts of our youth, not to mention their pocketbooks. The game has become so competitive that parents have begun to make purchases while their young players are in school. A recent *Dallas Morning News* editorial, written by a Dallas-area mom, bemoaned the fact that parents have ruined Pokemon for children because they have purchased unfairly and taken the fun out of the game for children in general. It seems that parents have become over-zealous in their desire to give their children every advantage.

Another problem that Pokemon raises is that young peole cannot make good decisions about when to play and "not" play. A growing number of schoolteachers and schools have banned Pokemon from their schools and classrooms. Students have difficulty leaving playtime at the classroom door, thereby not giving the teacher their full attention during class.

Students also have difficulty dealing with their emotions after making a "bad" trade or purchase. It is not uncommon for a student to become depressed after a bad deal literally ruining his day.

There have been reports of young people having their valuable cards stolen on campus or in the clssroom. You can imagine the trauma of having your card collection of several hundred

dollars disappear.

Eric, a thirteen-year-old enthusiast, said, "It's highly addictive and I think it's fun that there's a world out there with imaginary creatures that you can control and are highly powerful."

Another problem, and one that the Christian cannot ignore, is the occultic influence that comes with the game. Pokemon who have psychic abilities and are able to evolve or devolve introduce an occultic world that young people may not have the maturity to deal with. The wise parent will oversee this child's activities and playtime, interacting with his child, and instructing his son or daughter in their faith. In a word, it offers the parent a *teachable* moment that may not otherwise occur.
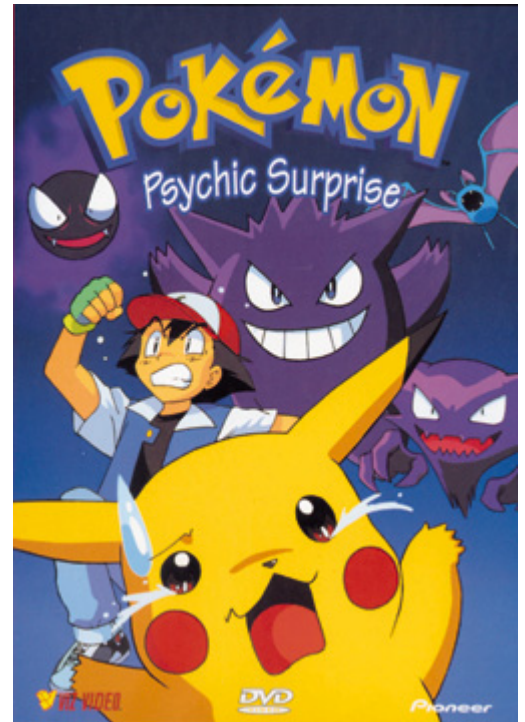
Teachable moments are precious and few. It is not uncommon for Christian parents to overreact and want to protect their children from all negative influences in their lives. However, it may be an opportunity for parents to teach their children a biblical truth, rather than calling for the censors.

The fact that Pokemon opens a door into the realm of the occult and the world of fantasy should concern parents because it can easily lead to a deeper involvement with other games that are more seductive and ultimately deadly.

A concern worth noting is that Pokemon may whet the appetite for more sophisticated fantasy games such as *Magic* and ultimately *Dungeons and Dragons*. Pokemon is primarily played by elementary-aged students, whereas *Magic* is played by junior

high students, and *Dungeons and Dragons* is mostly played by students in high school and older. Each game introduces the player to more and more seductive and occult fantasies and activities.

What is a Parent to Do?

If you have decided that your child will be allowed to play, it would be wise to limit the time he or she can play. Set limitations on when your child can play—after homework is done, chores are completed, etc.

It may be wise to limit the amount of money that will be used for the game. Pokemon, with its addictive potential, can easily become a money pit. It may be instructive to encourage your child to use his own money that he has earned through chores, for example. Learning the value of a dollar is always a good lesson to learn.

We need to ask the question, What is this game teaching me—or my child—about magic, power, God, and spirituality? Do the answers to these questions bring my child or me into a closer relationship with God? If not, why?

Positive Lessons to Be Learned

#118 GOLDY
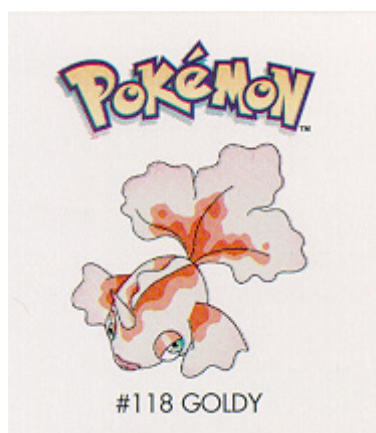
Pokemon has positive lessons to be learned. However, these lessons need to be channeled in a productive manner. Proponents of the game offer several reasons why Pokemon is and can be enriching.

First, the game is a social time for engaging in friendly play.

Second, the game fosters cooperation. It takes the help of one's playmates to capture and train all one hundred and fifty-plus Pokemon.

Third, the game helps the player develop skills in using strategy, thinking, and memorization. The game also encourages a child to develop reading skills so he can achieve mastery.

Fourth, the game promotes negotiation and organization skills that may be useful in life.

Wrapping it Up

Pokemon helps develop positive skills in the life of a young person. However, the game can easily become addictive and disruptive. The introduction of psychic powers and other occultic manifestations are indeed troublesome. We as parents must be proactive in teaching our children how to discern those things that are destructive to their relationship with God.

We must keep our focus on the things of God. Philippians 4:8 tells us to keep our minds on those things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely and of good report. These are the things that we are to dwell on—not on the magical world of fantasy and psychic power.

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Culture Wars

America at (Culture) War

Americans are highly polarized when it comes to issues of

morality and social norms. We feel our collective blood pressure rise as we read the daily paper or watch the news on television. We all feel the tension caused by problems like teen pregnancies, abortion, crime, poverty, and political corruption. Factions from across the political spectrum respond with social programs and ideals that, if instituted, they are sure would make America a better place for all to live. However, the problem is that these programs or ideals are often in direct conflict with each other, presupposing very different assumptions about human nature. To highlight these differences, consider the following events.

In the early '90s the American Civil Liberty Union informed members of the California State Assembly's Education Committee that they were opposed to a bill the committee was considering. The bill, which called for traditional values in school curricula, was offensive to the ACLU because it would mandate that students be taught that monogamous, heterosexual relations solely within marriage is a traditional American value. The ACLU argued that this would be an "unconstitutional establishment of a religious doctrine in public schools."{1} They went on to contend that the bill was an obvious violation of the First Amendment.

More recently, a private school in Georgia asked a student to either change his behavior or leave the school. This, in itself, is not a rare event. However, the student wasn't a discipline problem and he wasn't failing academically. In fact, he was popular and liked by many on campus. The problem was that he was cross- dressing. He dressed and behaved as a woman and was accepted by many students as a female. When the student chose to leave the school instead of changing his attire, the school's drama teacher remarked, "I really think that we all lost something precious that night."{2}

To many Americans, the ACLU's action in the first incident is incomprehensible. It seems reasonable, healthy, and obvious for schools to implement a "traditional values" model for sex

education. Those on the side of the ACLU find it just as incomprehensible that anyone would see their position as unreasonable or unusual. Some might find the expulsion of the cross-dressing student to be grossly unfair, while most parents would wonder why the school took so long to act.

Regardless of your perspective, everyone agrees that Americans find themselves with deep differences on a number of fundamental issues that govern our daily affairs. Unfortunately, these deep differences have led some Americans to bomb a government building, shoot abortion doctors, or burn down a mountain top ski resort in order to further their cause.

This article will spotlight the culture war we find ourselves in and consider what a biblical response might be. Although few Christians fail to see the conflict in our society, particularly in our schools, they are far from united as to what our response should be. However, from a historical perspective, times of cultural disruption are often a great opportunity for the church, if it is being all that God desires it to be.

Orthodox vs. Progressive

Leaders of all political persuasions have taken note of the culture war that is engulfing our nation. To begin clarifying the issue, we will consider the contribution of two books that have helped to define the conflict for many religious and cultural conservatives: James Hunter's *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* and William Bennett's *The De-Valuing of America*. Bennett argues that the battle over our culture is being fought between what he calls the liberal elite and the rest of society. The elite are "found among academics and intellectuals, in the literary world, in journals of political opinion, in Hollywood, in the artistic community, in mainline religious institutions, and in some quarters of the media."{3} He feels that they are more

powerful than their numbers would normally allow because they are looked upon as trend setters and opinion makers. Differing from traditional elite groups in American history, Bennett argues that these people reject the traditional bourgeois emphasis on work, frugality, sexual restraint, and self-control."{4} As evidence for the existence of this elite, he refers to studies done by Stanley Rothman with Robert and Linda Richter. Their work portrays a media aristocracy that votes as a block for liberal candidates and on issues like abortion, gay rights, and the environment.{5}

Bennett adds that this elite is marked by a wholesale rejection of American ideals, a calling into question of what has been known as the American dream.{6} Evidence is not as significant as ideology for the elite. Their approach is "one of vindication, not investigation."{7} If the middle class and the Republicans are for something, this group will instinctively be against it.

Hunter's approach to defining the warring camps is subtler and, I feel, more accurate. He would argue that there is an elite on both sides of the culture war. On the one hand is what he calls the "orthodox" group. They have a commitment to an external, definable, and transcendent authority. From an evangelical perspective this is the God of the Bible. He is a consistent and unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity. Hunter would also include Jews and others who hold to a definable, unchanging, absolute authority.

Opposing this group are the "progressives." Progressives are defined by the ideals of modernism, rationalism, and subjectivism. To these people truth is more a process than a constant authority. It is an unfolding reality rather than an unchanging revelation. What is interesting about the progressives is that they often hold on to the religious heritage of the orthodox, but reinterpret its meaning for modern consumption. For instance, to a gay progressive, Christ

came not to free us from the penalty of sin, but to free gays from the constraints of society. Although many progressives discard religion altogether, those who claim the Christian tradition have usually adopted a liberation theology, liberating the individual from any obligation other than to love each other in a very vague sense. To love each other seems to mean allowing people do whatever is expedient in their lives.

The real difference between the "orthodox" and the "progressives" is at the faith level. Whether a person calls himself or herself a Christian or not is not nearly as important as what kind of reality they place their faith in. Hunter believes that the culture war is a war of worldviews, and that these worldviews cause us to see the world differently. How then should a Christian, one who places his faith in the sacrificial death of Christ as an atoning payment for his sins, respond to this culture war?

The Angry Christian

Unfortunately, in the eyes of the secular world Christians are often seen as angry, intolerant people. At school board meetings, outside abortion clinics, even at the funeral of a homosexual who was murdered because of his lifestyle, Christians are there to angrily condemn sin and it perpetrators. It is almost as if Christians are surprised by sin and feel that their only response is to point people to the law of God. As a result, many outside the church see Christianity as a religion of law, similar to most other world religions. This is a tragedy.

Although understandable, I don't believe that we are called as Christians to respond to the culture war in anger, especially anger directed at people. Although the wrath of God is evident in both the Old and New Testaments, condemnation of human anger is also present in each. Near the very beginning of human culture, God warns Cain about his anger and downcast

face. Instead of seeking to do what was right, Cain was angry with God and his situation (Gen. 4:6-7). The wisdom literature of Proverbs teaches us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger," and "A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated" (Prov. 14:17, 15:1).

In the New Testament, Paul condemns "hatred" and "fits of rage" immediately before listing the spiritual fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. James 1:19-20 is fairly straightforward in arguing that, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." Jesus set an extraordinarily high standard against anger and hatred in His Sermon on the Mount. He taught, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22). Jesus is speaking to the root cause of much evil in any society: an angry, unforgiving heart.

Some may respond that righteous indignation, or anger against sin is merely emulating Christ. After all, Jesus cleared the Temple with a whip and violently overturned the moneylender's tables. Are we not allowed the same righteous indignation? I think not, especially if we take seriously God's admonition to let Him be in charge of judgment and vengeance (Rom. 12:19). In fact, Paul tells us to feed our enemy if he is hungry, give him drink if he is thirsty, and to overcome evil by doing good (Rom. 12:20-21). The difference between Jesus' righteous indignation and our anger is that Jesus, being God, has the right to judge, and being perfectly righteous His judgment is perfect. He knows the hearts of men and has no bias other than holiness itself. On the other hand, we are often most angry when our personal comfort is disturbed. To the watching world,

Christians become the most interested in politics when their personal wealth or comfort is at stake.

I don't believe that God is calling His people to anger in America. We bring a message of grace to the lost, not a message of law.

Apathy

Many Christians have been active in the culture war since the early '80s. With the rise of conservative politics and the family values movement, Christians joined the Republican party in droves and joined numerous organizations in order to help fight against the moral decline of the nation. Given the popularity of the current Democratic President and what appears, in many ways, to be a rejection of the conservative moral agenda, it is tempting for many to simply retreat from activism all together.

Some Christians never did get engaged in a counter-cultural sense. In fact, an early evangelical leader in culture war activity, Francis Schaeffer, warned that most Christians were more concerned with personal peace and affluence than about having an impact in their society.{8} He was concerned that as the Christian- dominated consensus weakened, these two values would grow in their place. The picture of society we are left with is one in which people's lives are consumed by things, buying two SUV's and a nice big house in the suburbs, with a nice tall fence, color TV (a big color TV), and remote. These people do not want to know about the suffering in our urban ghettos or about the plight of Christians in other countries. They want their lives to be unimpeded by the turmoil experienced by less affluent people.

Is it wrong to have a nice house and cars? No, it isn't. But neither is it the ultimate purpose to which our Lord has called us. Gathering nice things should not be motivating our daily activities. When Jesus was asked what the greatest

commandments were, He responded that we are to first, love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37), and second, love our neighbor as ourselves. For Christians, success in this life should be measured against these two goals. The rest of revelation, both the written Word and the life of Christ, gives us a picture of what this means in both the general culture and within the church. Christ gave us the Great Commission, to go into all nations making disciples and teaching what He taught (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul talks about us being living sacrifices and the renewing of our minds so that we will know the will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

To be indifferent about sin is to not love God; this form of apathy is incompatible with true Christian faith. However, to be indifferent about suffering in the world is equally incompatible with our faith. To ignore oppression and hatred reveals a lack of love for our neighbors. Too often Christians only seem to get excited when their rights, whether property or religious, are threatened. This makes a mockery of our Lord's words when He said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). In Romans 12 Paul talks about blessing those who persecute you, and if it is possible, to be at peace with everyone around you.

Hebrews 12 tells us to throw off everything that entangles us, everything that keeps us from running the race marked out for us by Jesus. We are to fix our eyes on Him, who endured the cross because its joyous result would be a redeemed people of God.

Ambassadors For Christ

When thinking about how to respond to the culture war in America, or in any culture, we must ask ourselves, What is it that we are trying to accomplish? In the language of real war, What are our tactical and strategic goals? Some might respond

that we are here to fight sin, to rid our society of the evils of abortion, homosexuality, adultery, drug abuse, political corruption, etc. There are Christians who claim that our primary cultural objective is to reinstate the law of Moses by taking control of the government and using its legal authority to impose a moral society on the population. However, this does not appear to be the plan revealed to us in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians chapter five, Paul details the role we are to play in America or in any country we might live in. We are to be Christ's ambassadors, and our message is one of reconciliation with God. There are many religions pushing a message of law; Islam, Judaism, and most Eastern religions all focus on the works people must do in order to please God or the gods. They focus on how humanity must reform itself to gain God's favor. Christianity's message is grace, and as Christ's ambassadors we proclaim that God has reconciled us to Himself in Christ by making "Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." God is making the righteousness of Christ available to sinners; salvation is the crediting of Christs righteousness to our personal account, thus satisfying the judgment of a holy God against our personal sins.

What about social activism, what about politics? Do we just share the gospel and ignore the problems facing our nation? No, we are to be salt and light in a decaying world. However, our trust is not in politics, which can only change a nations laws and to a lesser degree its peoples behavior. Even if abortion ended tomorrow, if every homosexual became heterosexual, and if drugs and pornography were things of the past, people without Christ would still be lost in their sins.

The role of an ambassador is a complex one. He or she must be intimately familiar with the nature of their sovereign's kingdom. Christians must seek to know God and His message in a way that can be communicated to the culture they live in.

Unfortunately, Christians often know the message, but have a difficult time communicating it in a way that the surrounding culture understands, and in a way that answers the questions being asked by that society. Stating the gospel accurately and in a meaningful manner is central to being an effective ambassador for Christ.

If we are to respond to the culture war by being ambassadors for Christ, then the vitality of the church becomes far more important than controlling the White House or Congress. Understanding how to communicate the gospel of Christ becomes infinitely more valuable than having the most potent political strategy. Being faithful to Christ in this way builds Gods kingdom on earth and results in common grace as more and more believers participate in every aspect of our culture.

Notes

1. James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 310.

2. *Dallas Morning News,* 30 October 1998, 7A.

3. William J. Bennett, *The De-Valuing of America* (Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994).

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Bennett, 12.

7. Ibid.

8. Francis A. Schaeffer, *How then Shall We Live* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976), 205.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer — A Christian Voice and Martyr

Todd Kappelman presents a stirring overview of Dietrich Bonhoffer looking at both his life experience standing against the Nazis and some of his key perspectives on the true Christian life. He was a thought provoking voice for Christianity as well as a famous martyr.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Man and His Mission

Since his death in 1945, and especially in the last ten years, Bonhoeffer's writings have been stirring remarkable interest among Christians, old and young alike. Thus, we are going to examine the merits of reading the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. We will do this by examining the man and his particular place in the canon of Christian writers, his background and historical setting, and finally three of his most important and influential works.

Bonhoeffer's importance begins with his opposition to the Nazi party and its influence in the German church during the rise of Hitler. This interest led him into areas of Christian ecumenical concerns that would later be important to the foundation of our contemporary ecumenical movements. Many denominational factions and various groups claim him as their spokesman, but it's his remarkable personal life, and his authorship of difficult devotional and academic works, which have gained him a place in the history of twentieth century theology.

Bonhoeffer was born on February 4, 1906 in Breslau, Germany (now part of Poland) and had a twin sister named Sabine. In 1933, before Hitler came to power, Bonhoeffer, a minister in the Lutheran church, was already attacking the Nazis in radio broadcasts. Two years later he was the leader of an underground seminary with over twenty young seminarians. That seminary is often seen as a kind of Protestant monastery, and is responsible for many of his considerations about the Christian life as it pertains to community. Later the seminary was closed by the Secret Police. In 1939, through arrangements made by Reinhold Niebuhr, he fled to the United States, but returned to Germany after a short stay. He believed it was necessary to suffer with his people if he was to be an effective minister after the war. The last two years of his life were spent in a Berlin prison. In 1945 he was executed for complicity in a plot on Hitler's life.

During the time that Bonhoeffer was in prison he wrote a book titled *Letters and Papers from Prison.* The manuscript was smuggled from jail and published. These letters contain Bonhoeffer's consideration of the secularization of the world and the departure from religion in the twentieth century. In Bonhoeffer's estimation, the dependence on organized religion had undermined genuine faith. Bonhoeffer would call for a new religionless Christianity free from individualism and metaphysical supernaturalism. God, argued Bonhoeffer, must be known in this world as he operates and interacts with man in daily life. The abstract God of philosophical and theological speculation is useless to the average man on the street, and they are the majority who needs to hear the gospel.

We will examine three of Bonhoeffer's most influential and important works in the following four sections. The first work to be considered will be *The Cost of Discipleship,* written in 1939. This work is an interpretation of The Sermon on the Mount. It calls for radical living, if the Christian is to be an authentic disciple of Christ. The *Ethics*, written from

1940-1943, is Bonhoeffer's most technical theological exposition. It details the problems in attempting to build an ethical foundation on philosophical or theoretical grounds. Then we will examine more thoroughly *Letters and Papers from Prison,* one of Bonhoeffer's most personal and moving achievements.

The Cost of Discipleship

Bonhoeffer's most famous work is *The Cost of Discipleship*, first published in 1939. This book is a rigorous exposition and interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew 9:35-10:42. Bonhoeffer's major concern is *cheap grace*. This is grace that has become so watered down that it no longer resembles the grace of the New Testament, the *costly grace* of the Gospels.

By the phrase *cheap grace*, Bonhoeffer means the grace which has brought chaos and destruction; it is the intellectual assent to a doctrine without a real transformation in the sinner's life. It is the justification of the sinner without the works that should accompany the new birth. Bonhoeffer says of cheap grace:

> *[It] is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.{1}*

Real grace, in Bonhoeffer's estimation, is a grace that will cost a man his life. It is the grace made dear by the life of Christ that was sacrificed to purchase man's redemption. Cheap grace arose out of man's desire to be saved, but to do so without becoming a disciple. The doctrinal system of the church with its lists of behavioral codes becomes a substitute

for the Living Christ, and this cheapens the meaning of discipleship. The true believer must resist cheap grace and enter the life of active discipleship. Faith can no longer mean sitting still and waiting; the Christian must rise and follow Christ.{2}

It is here that Bonhoeffer makes one of his most enduring claims on the life of the true Christian. He writes that "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes."{3} Men have become soft and complacent in cheap grace and are thus cut off from the discovery of the more costly grace of self-sacrifice and personal debasement. Bonhoeffer believed that the teaching of cheap grace was the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works.{4}

Discipleship, for Bonhoeffer, means strict adherence to Christ and His commandments. It is also a strict adherence to Christ as the object of our faith. Bonhoeffer discusses this single-minded obedience in chapter three of *The Cost of Discipleship*. In this chapter, the call of Levi and Peter are used to illustrate the believer's proper response to the call of Christ and the Gospel.{5} The only requirement these men understood was that in each case the call was to rely on Christ's word, and cling to it as offering greater security than all the securities in the world.{6}

In the nineteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel we have the story of the rich young man who is inquiring about salvation and is told by Christ that he must sell all of his possessions, take up his cross, and follow. Bonhoeffer emphasizes the bewilderment of the disciples who ask the question, "Who then can be saved?"{7} The answer they are given is that it is extremely hard to be saved, but with God all things are possible.

Bonhoeffer and the Sermon on the Mount

The exposition of the Sermon on the Mount is another important

element of *The Cost of Discipleship.* In it, Bonhoeffer places special emphasis on the beatitudes for understanding the incarnate and crucified Christ. It is here that the disciples are called "blessed" for an extraordinary list of qualities.

The *poor in spirit* have accepted the loss of all things, most importantly the loss of self, so that they may follow Christ. Those who *mourn* are the people who do without the peace and prosperity of this world.{8} Mourning is the conscious rejection of rejoicing in what the world rejoices in, and finding one's happiness and fulfillment only in the person of Christ.

The *meek,* says Bonhoeffer, are those who do not speak up for their own rights. They continually subordinate their rights and themselves to the will of Christ first, and in consequence to the service of others. Likewise, those who *hunger and thirst after righteousness* also renounce the expectation that man can eventually make the world into paradise. Their hope is in the righteousness that only the reign of Christ can bring.

The *merciful* have given up their own dignity and become devoted to others, helping the needy, the infirm, and the outcasts. The *pure in heart* are no longer troubled by the call of this world, they have resigned themselves to the call of Christ and His desires for their lives. The *peacemakers* abhor the violence that is so often used to solve problems. This point would be of special significance for Bonhoeffer, who was writing on the eve of World War II. The *peacemakers* maintain fellowship where others would find a reason to break off a relationship. These individuals always see another option.{9}

Those who are *persecuted for righteousness' sake* are willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. Any and every just cause becomes their cause because it is part of the overall work of Christ. Suffering becomes the way to communion with God.{10} To this list is added the final blessing pronounced on those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. These will receive

a great reward in heaven and be likened to the prophets who also suffered.

Bonhoeffer's emphasis on suffering is directly connected to the suffering of Christ. The church is called to bear the whole burden of Christ, especially as it pertains to suffering, or it must collapse under the weight of the burden.{11} Christ has suffered, says Bonhoeffer, but His suffering is efficacious for the remission of sins. We may also suffer, but our suffering is not for redemptive purposes. We suffer, says Bonhoeffer, not only because it is the church's lot, but so that the world may see us suffering and understand that there is a way that men can bear the burdens of life, and that way is through Christ alone.

Discipleship for Bonhoeffer was not limited to what we can comprehend—it must transcend all comprehension. The believer must plunge into the deep waters beyond the comprehension and everyday teaching of the church, and this must be done individually and collectively.

Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work *Ethics* was written from 1940-1943. Intended as lectures, this is his most mature work and is considered to be his major contribution to theology.{12} Christian ethics, he says, must be considered with reference to the regenerated man whose chief desire should be to please God, not with the man who is concerned with an airtight philosophical system. Man is not, and cannot, be the final arbitrator of good and evil. This is reserved for God alone. When man tries to decide what is right and wrong his efforts are doomed to failure. Bonhoeffer wrote that "instead of knowing only the God who is good to him and instead of knowing all things in Him, [man] knows only himself as the origin of good and evil."{13} With this statement, Bonhoeffer entered one of the most difficult philosophical and theological problems in the history of the church: the problem of evil.

Bonhoeffer believed that the problem of evil could only be understood in light of the Fall of mankind. The Fall caused the disunion of man and God with the result that man is incapable of discerning right and wrong.{14} Modern men have a vague uneasiness about their ability to know right and wrong. Bonhoeffer asserted this is in part due to the desire for philosophical certainty. However, Bonhoeffer urged the Christian to be concerned with living the will of God rather than finding a set of rules one may follow.{15} And while Bonhoeffer was not advocating a direct and individual revelation in every ethical dilemma, he did believe that man can have knowledge of the will of God. He said that "if a man asks God humbly God will give him certain knowledge of His will; and then, after all this earnest proving there will be the freedom to make real decisions, and [this] with the confidence that it is not man but God Himself who through this proving gives effect to His will."{16}

Perhaps our first response to Bonhoeffer is that he appears to be some sort of mystic. However, it is imperative to understand the time in which he was writing, and some of the specific problems he was addressing. World War II was raging and the greatest ethical questions of the century were confronting the church. Good men, and even committed Christians, found themselves on opposing sides of the war. It would be ludicrous to suppose that right and wrong on individual or national levels was obvious, and that there was universal agreement among Christians. In the midst of all of this confusion a young pastor-theologian and member of the Resistance could only advise that believers turn to Christ with the expectation that true answers were obtainable. Such confidence is sorely needed among Christians who face a world devoid of answers.

The strength of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* lies not in its systematic resolution of problems facing the church, but rather the acknowledgment that life is complex and that all systems

outside of humble submission to the Word of God are doomed to failure. As unsettling as Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* may be, it is a refreshing call to the contemporary church to repent and return to a life characterized by prayer, the traditional mark of the early church.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Prison Correspondence

Our final consideration of the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hanged in 1945 for his part in an assassination attempt on Hitler, will center on his *Letters and Papers from Prison* begun in 1942. These letters represent some of Bonhoeffer's most mature work, as well as troubling observations concerning the church in the turbulent middle years of the twentieth century.

The opening essay is titled *After Ten Years*. Here Bonhoeffer identifies with the evil of the times, and especially the war. He speaks of the unreasonable situations which reasonable people must face. He warns against those who are deceived by evil that is disguised as good, and he cries out against misguided moral fanatics and the slaves of tradition and rules.

In viewing the horrors of war, Bonhoeffer reminds us that what we despise in others is never entirely absent from ourselves.{17} This warning against contempt for humanity is very important in light of authors such as Ernest Hemingway, Jean Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, whose contempt for the war turned into disillusion with humanity. This is a striking contrast between several witnesses to the war who came to very different conclusions. Bonhoeffer's conclusions were the direct result of a personal relationship with Christ. The conclusions of Hemingway, Sartre, and Camus were the pessimistic observations of those without a final hope.

Bonhoeffer faced death daily for many years and came to some

bold conclusions concerning how believers might posture themselves toward this ultimate event. He argued that one could experience the miracle of life by facing death daily; life could actually be seen as the gift of God that it is. It is we ourselves, and not our outward circumstances, who make death potentially positive. Death can be something voluntarily accepted.{18}

The final question posed in this opening essay is whether it is possible for plain and simple men to prosper again after the war.{19} Bonhoeffer does not offer a clear solution, which may be seen as an insight into the true horrors of the war, as well as an open-ended question designed to illicit individual involvement in the problem.

Long before movies like *Schindler's List, Saving Private Ryan,* or *The Thin Red Line*, Bonhoeffer reported on the atrocities of the war. Some of the letters discuss the brutality and horrors of life in the prison camps, and one can certainly ascertain the expectation of execution in many of his letters. The thing that makes these letters so much more important than the popular films is that the letters are undoubtedly the confessions of one who is looking at the war as a Christian. Bonhoeffer was able to empathize with the problems faced by Christians living in such turbulent times.

Bonhoeffer's significance is difficult to assess completely and accurately, but two observations may help as we come to an end of our examination of his work.{20} We must always bear in mind the time of his writings. This explains much that we might at first not understand. Finally, any Christian would do well to read the works of one who gave his life in direct connection with his Christian convictions. There have been many martyrs in this century, but few who so vividly recorded the circumstances that lead to their martyrdom with both theological astuteness and a vision for future posterity.

Notes

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* trans. R.H. Fuller, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 30.

2. Ibid., 53.

3. Ibid., 54.

4. Ibid., 59.

5. Ibid., 87.

6. Ibid., 87.

7. Ibid., 94.

8. Ibid., 98.

9. Ibid., 102.

10. Ibid., 102.

11. Ibid., 102.

12. William Kuhns, *In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*(Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, Image Books, 1969), 130.

13. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics,* trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 19.

14. Ibid., 20.

15. Ibid., 38.

16. Ibid., 40.

17. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison,* ed. Eberhard Bethage, trans. Rehinald Fuller and others, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

18. Ibid., 17.

19. Ibid., 17.

20. An excellent and more thorough consideration of Bonhoeffer's importance can be found in Eberhard Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer.* Another excellent book for those interested in his life is the biography by Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.* These books are full of details about the personal life of Bonhoeffer and offer great insights into his Christian life.

Privacy Issues

The Need to Discuss Privacy Issues

Privacy is something I believe we all take for granted until we lose it. Then we begin to think about how someone invaded our privacy, often by incremental steps. In this article we are going to talk about ways in which we have lost our privacy. Most of the intrusion into our lives comes from government, but not all. Businesses also buy and sell information about us every day. Most of us would be shocked to find out how much personal information is in databases around the country.

As I address this important issue, I will focus on several specific threats to our privacy. I want to begin, though, by discussing how quickly our privacy is being lost and how often it takes place without any debate.

Let's look at the last session in Congress. It's amazing to me that there never was an extended debate on the issue of privacy. Granted there wasn't much debate on a number of issues, but the lack of debate on this fundamental issue shows how far down the road we have gone.

For example, we saw absolutely no debate on issues such as the national ID card, the medical ID number, the Clinton administration encryption policy, the expansion of the FBI's wiretap capability, along with the Clinton administration's Executive Order authority and federal databases.

Some of the proposals were defeated, at least for now. The national ID card was defeated, for example, not because Congress debated the issue, but because thousands of Americans wrote letters and made phone calls. Meanwhile, plans by the Clinton administration to develop a medical ID number are on hold, but could surface at any time.

Most other issues, however, are moving ahead. Congress gave the FBI permission to use "roving wiretap surveillance." That means that the next time you use a pay phone at your local grocery store, it may be tapped merely because there's a criminal suspect within the area. And if you think I am overreacting, look at what has already happened in California. One wiretap order there authorized surveillance on 350 phones for over two years. In another case, five pay phones were tapped, intercepting 131,000 conversations.

Recently, the Federal Communications Commission mandated that cell phones and other wireless telephone companies track the location of the customers from the time the call was initiated until the time it was terminated. By locating the cell site the person was using, the government can pinpoint the location of every citizen who uses a cell phone since the telephone companies must track and log the locations.

Those are just a few of the examples we will discuss on the subject of privacy. Unfortunately, whenever someone cries for privacy, another is sure to ask, "What do you have to hide?" The question confuses privacy and secrecy. I don't really have anything I want to keep secret, but I'm not terribly excited about the government listening to every one of my phone conversations. You may not want your future boss to know that you have a genetic predisposition to breast cancer. You may not want a telemarketer to know what you just recently purchased so that he can call your home number and try to sell you more.

The point is that each day we are losing a bit of our privacy. And we will continue to do so unless we work to establish some limits to these invasions of our privacy.

National ID Card

Issuing internal passports has been one of the methods used by communist leaders to control their people. Citizens had to

carry these passports at all times and had to present them to authorities if they wanted to travel within the country, live in another part of the country, or apply for a job.

The Department of Transportation has recently called for the establishment of a national ID system by the first of October, in the year 2000. Although presented as merely a move toward standardization, this seemed to many as a move toward a national passport to allow the government to "check up" on its citizens.

A little history is in order. Back in 1996, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. This charged the federal Department of Transportation with establishing national requirements for birth certificates and drivers' licenses. Add to this the 1996 Kennedy-Kassebaum health care law that implies that Americans may be required in the future to produce a state-issued ID that conforms to federal specifications.

If all of this sounds to you like Big Brother or even the mark of the beast, then you have company. Congressman Ron Paul believes that the Department of Transportation regulations would adversely affect Americans. He says, "Under the current state of the law, the citizens of states which have drivers' licenses that do not conform to the federal standards by October 1, 2000, will find themselves essentially stripped of their ability to participate in life as we know it."

Congressman Paul adds that, "On that date, Americans will not be able to get a job, open a bank account, apply for Social Security or Medicare, exercise their Second Amendment rights, or even take an airplane flight, unless they can produce a state-issued ID that conforms to the federal specifications."

The law orders the Attorney General to conduct pilot programs where the state driver's license includes a "machine-readable" Social Security number. It also orders the development of a

Social Security card that uses magnetic strips, holograms, and integrated circuits. The law also requires that states collect Social Security numbers from all applicants for various licenses. It requires states to transmit the name, address, and Social Security number of every new worker to a Directory of New Hires.

The good news is that the work by Congressmen Ron Paul and Bob Barr paid off and the attempt to create a national ID card was stopped, for now. But it is likely to surface again.

After all, there has been a push to establish a federal database for Americans and having each person carry an ID card would allow that information to be linked to a federal database. And while it would help the government catch illegal aliens, it could also be used to track law-abiding American citizens.

Tracking down illegal aliens and standardizing licenses are worthy goals. But the ends do not justify the means. That is why so many people wrote Congress to stop this push for a national ID card. Sometimes in the midst of this political debate, citizens must determine how much they value their freedom and privacy.

Congressman Bob Barr says, "Novelists Aldous Huxley and George Orwell have given us countless reasons why we shouldn't trade our privacy for any benefit, no matter how worthwhile it sounds." In the end, we must ask, At what cost? Is it worth trading our privacy for the benefits government promises?

Medical ID Number

While the Department of Transportation is moving ahead with plans for a national ID card, the Department of Health and Human Services is working to assign everyone a lifetime medical ID number.

The purpose of the ID number is to make it easier to keep

accurate records of patients as they change doctors and health plans. The identification was required in a 1996 law that guarantees workers continued access to health coverage even if they change jobs.

One solution proposed is to merely use Social Security numbers. But doing that could give credit card companies and other organizations access to medical records. This would raise a greater concern over privacy of medical records. And that's the point. Even a secure number still could pose a privacy nightmare by potentially giving everyone from insurance companies to computer hackers access to medical histories.

One doctor expressed his concern that a "unique patient identifier could lead to a central database." He fears that "someone without permission could break into those records." But even if the record is secure, doctors fear that patients will withhold embarrassing information if there is a chance someone else might get access to the records.

Robert Gellman, an information policy consultant said at a recent hearing, "Once everyone's required to use a government-issued health identification card, it may become impossible for any American citizen to walk down the street without being forced to produce that card on demand by a policeman."

Why are so many people concerned? Perhaps past history is an indication. One of the features of Hillary Clinton's national health care plan was a federal database of every American's medical records. During one of his State of the Union addresses, President Clinton waved a card with a "unique identifier number" that would give government bureaucrats and health care providers easy computer access to everyone's medical history.

Although the American people rejected that plan back in 1993 and 1994, the government is still moving ahead with a plan to

give every American an "unique identifier number" and to compile medical records into a federal database. Five years ago the argument for a medical card and number linked to a federal database was to aid in health care planning and to eliminate fraud by health care providers. The American people, however, feared it would end medical privacy and increase federal control over health care.

The fear is justified. Just listen to what has already happened in a system without a medical ID number. For example, there is the banker on a county health care board who called due the mortgages of people suffering with cancer. There was a congresswoman whose medical records, revealing a bout of depression, were leaked before primary day. And there are a number of drug store chains that sell the name, address, and ailments of their customers to marketing firms.

The Hippocratic Oath says, "That whatsoever I shall see or hear of the lives of men, which is not fitting to be spoken . . . I shall keep inviolably secret." Current attempts by the federal bureaucracy to standardize and centralize medical information are presented as a way to make health care delivery more effective and efficient, but they also have the potential to invade our privacy and threaten doctor-patient confidentiality. Frankly, I think the administration needs to rethink their current proposal. Or, to put it in medical terms, I think they need a second opinion.

Encryption

As we have been looking at the issue of privacy, we've considered attempts to establish a national ID card and a medical ID number. I want to turn to computers and talk about another important issue: encryption. Now I know that's probably an unfamiliar word. But stay with me. Encryption is big word for a big issue that I think you need to know about.

Encryption is a relatively new technology that enables you to

have private phone conversations and send e-mail messages that are secure. Encryption codes your words so that they cannot be deciphered by people listening in on your conversation or reading your mail.

As you may know, nosy people already can listen in on your wireless phone calls (cellular or cordless phones). And they can intercept and read your e-mail. Sending e-mail without encryption is like mailing a postcard — everyone can read it along the way. And we all know that people will do exactly that. If you have ever had a phone on a party line, you know that people listen in.

What you may not know is that various members of the Clinton administration (like Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh) are demanding the authority to read encrypted messages. Now remember that the Fourth Amendment guarantees citizens be free of unreasonable searches and seizures. Nevertheless, these and other law enforcement officers believe they have the right to open your mail.

What they are asking for is the key to the code. When you send a message in code, you need a key to enable you to send the code and the recipients need the same key to read the code. The Clinton administration is demanding access to all encryption keys. This is like giving the government the power to steam open all the letters we send in the mail. Frankly, you only see this level of surveillance in totalitarian countries. If the government has the key, then it could call up information on you, your family, your medical records, your bank records, your credit card purchases, and your e-mail messages to all of your friends and relatives.

What is even more disturbing is the current attempt by the government to limit an American citizen's access to strong and powerful encryption software. A new study from the Cato Institute says that "People living outside the United States find it amusing and perplexing that U.S. law regulates the

distribution of strong encryption." Critics of the administration's policy point out that true criminals (terrorists, drug dealers, the mafia) are unlikely to use anything less than the strongest encryption for their communication and data storage. The government will unlikely have a key to that level of encryption. Meanwhile, the average citizen must use weak encryption to protect private data and run the risk that the government will have a key to access it.

Everyone wants encryption in the computer age. Citizens want private communication. Businesses want to prevent billing records and personnel records from falling into the wrong hands. Consumers don't want their credit card numbers widely distributed. That is why we need strong encryption software, and that is why government should not be given a key to the messages we send. Most Americans would not like to turn over so much of their privacy to the government, but unfortunately most Americans don't realize that they already have.

Privacy and Your Life

Dave Ballert thought he was being a savvy consumer when he attempted to download a copy of his credit report from a web site. He hadn't checked it recently and thought it was worth paying the eight bucks. But when the report arrived a few minutes later, it wasn't his. It was a report for someone in California. The next thing he knew he received a call from the *Washington Post*, who said they received his report. The web site halted access later, but the damage was already done. How would you like a major newspaper to have a copy of your credit report?

Consider the case of the Social Security Administration. They provided earnings information to individuals via the Internet. After more than a month of virtually unfettered access for disgruntled employees, ex-spouses, and their attorneys, the Social Security Administration pulled the plug.

Such is life in the cyberage. More and more people are seeing their privacy violated and wonder what to do in a time of financial and personal indecent exposure. What used to be called public records weren't all that public. Now they are all too public. And what used to be considered private records are being made public at an alarming rate. What should we do?

First, don't give out personal information. You should assume that any information that you do give out will end up on a database somewhere. Phone solicitors, application forms, warranty cards all ask for information you may not want to give out. Be careful how much information you disclose.

Second, live your life above reproach. As it is written in Philippians 2:14-15, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." 1 Timothy 3:2 says that an elder must be "above reproach," which is an attribute that should describe all believers. If you live a life of integrity, you don't have to be so concerned about what may be made public.

Third, exercise discretion, especially when you use e-mail. Too many people assume they have a one-on-one relationship with someone through the Internet. The message you send might be forwarded on to other people, and the message may even be read by other nosy people. One web site provider advises, "A good rule of thumb: Don't send any e-mail that you wouldn't want your mother to read."

Finally, get involved. When you feel your privacy has been violated, take the time to complain. Let the person or organization know your concerns. Many people fail to apply the same rules of privacy and confidentiality on a computer that they do in real life. Your complaint might have a positive effect.

Track congressional legislation and write letters. Many of the threats to privacy I've talked about started in Congress. Citizens need to understand that many governmental policies pose a threat to our privacy. Bureaucrats and legislators are in the business of collecting information and will continue to do so unless we set appropriate limits.

Sadly, most Americans are unaware of the growing threats to their privacy posed by government and private industry. Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. We must continue to monitor the threats to our privacy both in the public and private sector.

Points of Contact

Making Contact

In 1988 at the Republican National Convention, George Bush called for "a thousand points of light" as a part of his campaign for president. His intention was to encourage the involvement of a small but committed number of people who could make a difference. If only a few would answer the call, a thousand points of light emanating from communities large and small would touch the country. The implications of President Bush's phrase remind me of a phrase designed to instill the same concept in the members of a branch of our military: "The few, the proud, the Marines."

These ideas are not far removed from a concept that should be descriptive of Christian communities. We should be "points of

light" to the surrounding world, even if we are "the few." After all, Jesus said His disciples are "…the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). (Of course He did not say we are to be "the proud," and most of us are not Marines. But I think you get the idea.) Jesus continues with this exhortation: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). How can we shine the light of Christ in the surrounding world? I submit that one response to this question is this: We can be points of light by establishing points of contact.

You may be thinking, "Just what is meant by a point of contact?" Good question! Let me attempt to explain. For our purposes in this series a "point of contact" contains several points (pardon the pun).

1. Its purpose is to activate conversation that leads to evangelism.

2. It stimulates dialogue.

3. It enables you to make a transition from a non-Christian worldview to a Christian worldview.

4. It serves as a "bridge" to someone who might not otherwise respond to the gospel.

5. It encourages you to meet a person where "he lives" mentally and spiritually.

6. It provides a positive challenge to use your God-given creativity, instead of relying on a "canned" approach.

7. It stretches you to converse with non-believers in ways that can be understood by them. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "I have come to the conviction that if you cannot translate your thoughts into uneducated language, then your thoughts were confused. Power to translate is the test of having really

understood one's own meaning."{1} Christians tend to have their own "educated language." We may understand one another. But the non-Christian probably has no idea what we are saying; he is uneducated in our language.{2}

All of these points assume that you are sharing what we will call a "common life" with those around you. What are some of the elements of this common life? You probably share time and space each day with friends, business colleagues, neighbors, sports opponents, people on the train or plane, and a host of other possibilities. But these refer only to the physical portion of your common life. What about such things as the news media, television programming, movies, magazines, sporting events, and many others that are shared, paradoxically, when we may be alone? They too are part of the common life we share, whether Christian or non-Christian. Such things provide points of contact. They can be bridges to the gospel.

Pertinent Points

Have you ever traveled over the Golden Gate Bridge, or maybe the bridge over the Royal Gorge? If so, why were you on such bridges? Usually we assume they have been constructed to transport us from one side of a gap to another. There is a significant gap between you and your destination on the other side. A bridge provides at least one way to get there.

How large is the gap between Christians and non-Christians? Most Christians would reply that the gap is enormous, and in a theological sense they are correct. The Christian worldview is on one side of a chasm, and non-Christian worldviews are on the other. Such a predicament could be left as it is, which is the case for too many Christians. But part of the Christian's responsibility is to "bridge" that gap with the amazing truth of the gospel. Points of contact can provide the raw materials for the building of such a bridge.

Alister McGrath, a great theologian and apologist of our time, has suggested several such points of contact that are shared by all people. These can be useful as you begin to erect a bridge.{3} As we consider such points, use your imagination and think of ways in which you might engage someone in conversation.

First, most people have *a sense of unsatisfied longing.* We are made in the image of God. We have an inbuilt capacity—indeed, an inbuilt *need*—to relate to God. Nothing that is transitory can ever fill this need. Created things are substituted for God, and they do not satisfy.

A major portion of my life includes involvement in the musical world. I have performed a wide assortment of music styles. But in particular, I have developed a great appreciation for what most people call "classical music."

One of the more intriguing aspects of classical music history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a "sense of unsatisfied longing." For example, Gustav Mahler continually composed in order to come to grips with that longing. One of his close friends, the great conductor Bruno Walter, put it like this: "Fundamentally, there never was relief for him from the sorrowful struggle to fathom the meaning of human existence."{4} When I hear Mahler's music, I hear that "sorrowful struggle" and think of how I may have talked with the great composer himself.

Second, most people have a sense of *human rationality.* This resonance of reason with God is a harmony of rationality, hinting that human nature is still marked with the *imago Dei* [image of God]. Given the Christian understanding of who God is and what He is like, our knowledge of both our rational selves and the rational world ties in with belief in His rational and creative existence.

C. S. Lewis expressed this point by focusing on the

probability of a mind. He wrote, "What is behind the universe is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know. That is to say, it is conscious, and has purposes, and prefers one thing to another. It made the universe, partly for purposes we do not know, but partly, at any rate, in order to produce creatures like itself . . . to the extent of having minds."{5}

Third, most people have a sense of *the ordering of the world.* Modern science has demonstrated that the world is ordered. But its disclosure of an intelligible and delicately balanced structure raises questions that transcend the scientific and provide an intellectual restlessness that seeks adequate explanation. Perhaps the most fundamental of these questions can be summarized in a single word: Why?

Think of the newspapers, books, and magazines you read. They consist of ordered arrangements of ink on paper. "Neither the chemistry of the ink nor the shapes of the letters determines the meaning of the text. In short, the message transcends the properties of the medium."{6} The message requires a messenger.

Fourth, most people have a sense of *human morality.* Most humans realize the importance of moral obligation or at least they have an awareness of the need for some kind of agreement on morality.{7}

Perhaps this is noticed most easily when sensational crimes are committed, as when Charles Manson murdered Sharon Tate and her friends. Even though the public may not agree on how justice should be carried out, seldom do we hear that the crime was a good thing. Invariably there is a sense of moral outrage and a cry for justice.

Fifth, many people struggle with a sense of *existential anxiety and alienation.* This reflects a deeply rooted fear of meaninglessness and pointlessness, a sense of the utter

futility of life, even sheer despair at the bewildering things that threaten to reduce us to nothing more than a statistic—ultimately a mortality statistic. While it seems trite to talk about "the meaning of life," it is a question that lingers at the edges (and sometimes squarely in the center) of reflective human existence.{8}

The twentieth century is replete with famous examples of this point. From the philosophical intricacies of people such as Jean-Paul Sartre, to the expletives of punk-rocker Johnny Rotten, many have struggled with anxiety and alienation. Even a German word, *angst,* has entered our vocabulary as a statement of such states of mind. "Man has a sense of dread (*Angst*); he is a being thrust into the world and headed for death (nothingness) with no explanation [that] 'there is something rather than nothing at all.'"{9} Contrary to the openness of those such as Sartre and Rotten, this point of contact is one of the more "quiet" ones, in that it is not openly stated. Anxiety and alienation generally are not easily seen and heard; one has to be sensitive to what lies below the surface.

Sixth, most people have an *awareness of finitude and mortality.* The fear of death, often voiced in terms of a radical inability to cope with the brute fact of human existence, runs deep in human nature. As the writer/director/actor Woody Allen said, "I'm not frightened of dying. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Physical death, perhaps the most universally realized truth, may be the least discussed. It is inevitable, but its mystery so often stirs terror or resignation. Listen to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

> *To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,*
> *Creeps in this petty pace from day to day*
> *To the last syllable of recorded time,*
> *And all our yesterdays have lighted fools*

The way to dusty death.
Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.{10}

If you could talk with people like Charles Manson, Johnny Rotten, Woody Allen, or the fictional Macbeth, how would you respond? Would you consider how these points of contact could be used to engage them in conversation? Would you think carefully about how God may use you to get their attention?

Biblical Points of Contact

Mustard seeds, hidden treasure, vineyards, debtors, fig trees, sheep, money. What do such things have in common? You probably recognize such terms from the parables that Jesus used to teach spiritual principles. We could add many more phrases, because the Gospels contain many instances when Jesus used His favorite teaching device as a point of contact with His listeners.

Just what is a parable? Literally, the word means, "to throw alongside." Parables "…were used by Jesus to teach a truth, illustrate a doctrine, or move His audience to a moral attitude or act."{11} Apparently they were used spontaneously in light of an immediate situation or conflict, and they focused on what was familiar to the audience.{12} These characteristics are indicative of how Jesus was able to get the kind of attention that opened doors to important truths. When we attempt to find a point of contact, we are following Jesus' example. We may not use a parable, but we are responding to an immediate situation spontaneously in a way that is familiar to our audience.

So a parable is one device found in the Bible that can be used as a point of contact. When we read the Gospels they are hard to miss. But Jesus used other devices as well.

One example of this is found in the story of His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Both Jesus and the woman initially were at the well for water, but Jesus quickly engaged her in conversation concerning something beyond physical water. His point of contact was the water, but He quickly used that as a "springboard" that drew her focused attention. He said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10). Imagine if you had heard such a response! Don't you think your interest would have been piqued? This encounter provides an example very different from a parable. Let's call it a "curiosity contact." That is, Jesus raised the woman's curiosity about whom He was and what He had to say. Her life was forever changed as a result.

At this point you may be thinking, "Yes, I see what Jesus did through points of contact. But obviously, I'm not Jesus. I can't do what He did." To a point, you are correct. You certainly are not Jesus, but you can follow His example. The book of Acts contains instances of this. Let's consider two of those.

The eighth chapter of Acts includes Philip's famous dialogue with an Ethiopian eunuch. The Holy Spirit had led Philip to the eunuch, but it appears that Philip creatively and spontaneously addressed the man. He saw that he was reading, so he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30). What a wonderful point of contact! Philip then was given an opportunity to direct their conversation towards the gospel. Such an encounter reminds me of a question most of us have asked: "What are you reading?" In addition to asking that question, today we may ask, "What are you watching?"

Paul's defense of the faith at Mars Hill in Athens provides another illustration of selecting a point of contact. The city was filled with thousands of idols. Paul had noticed one such idol that was inscribed, "to an unknown god" (Acts 17:23). An idol became his point of contact! Thus he began to proclaim the truth in response to their admitted ignorance.

What are some of the points of contact in your daily life?

Contemporary Contacts

You are taking a walk around your neighborhood. As you turn a corner a few blocks from your house, you see an old friend whom you have not seen in a couple of years. She is riding a bicycle in your direction. As she gets closer she recognizes you and stops. The two of you strike up a conversation that revolves around the kinds of things that usually are discussed on such occasions: Have you seen Sally lately? Did you hear about Jim's divorce? How are your children? Then you realize that God's Spirit is encouraging you to guide the conversation toward Christ. You are thinking of a way to do this when you suddenly notice that she is wearing an especially beautiful necklace with a cross. You comment on her jewelry, then you ask, "What does the cross represent?" She responds by saying it's just a nice piece of jewelry that was given to her by her daughter. But it has no "religious significance." You respond to her statement by sharing the true meaning and significance of the cross.

This fictitious story demonstrates how a point of contact can lead to an opportunity to share the gospel. In order to bring this discussion to a conclusion, we will give attention to six ways points of contact can give you an open door for God's truth.

First, be attentive to your God-given imagination. Of all people, Christians should creatively interact with the world around them for the glory of God. This may mean you will need

to practice the habit of "sharpening your focus" on the world around you. Maybe you can begin to see with new eyes and hear with new ears.

Second, be attentive to the things most people have in common. A piece of jewelry was the common element in the illustration that was used to begin this program. Jewelry is something most people have in common. But whether it's jewelry, clothes, houses, cars, children, sports, or a long list of other things, you can find a point of contact among them.

Third, be attentive to those things that are most important to the person with whom you are sharing. For example, most people think of their immediate family as the most important part of their lives. Points of contact abound when you are sensitive to what is most important in a person's life.

Fourth, be attentive to the subjects that occupy someone's conversations. If the person with whom you are conversing talks a great deal about movies, find a point of contact there. If another person is fanatical about sports, find a point of contact there. If a hobby is the center of conversation, find a point of contact there. Such a list virtually is endless.

Fifth, be attentive to areas of greatest immediate need. Some people may dwell on their poor health. Others may concentrate on failures in their lives. Or maybe you will find yourself in conversation with someone who is bitter about something that happened in the past. Again, such a list of possibilities virtually is endless. All of them supply points of contact.

Sixth, and most important, be attentive to what the Spirit of God is telling you. He is not silent; He will bring appropriate things to your attention. Any point of contact will only be effective as the Spirit guides you to respond.

The world around us is starving for contact. People need to hear what God has to say through us. He will guide us to make

contact for His glory. We are God's messengers of hope. I hope we get the point.

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 98.

2. See my article [Christian Cliches](#).

3. Alister McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God & Other Modern Myths* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993),30-47.

4. Bruno Walter, *Gustav Mahler* (New York: Vienna House, 1941), 129.

5. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 31-32. Quoted in McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God*, 35.

6. Stephen C. Meyer, "The Explanatory Power of Design: DNA and the Origin of Information." In *Mere Creation: Science, Faith & Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 135.

7. I recommend that you read the opening portion of C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1943) for a brilliant exposition of this point. Actually, you should read the entire book; you will benefit from it. It has become a classic.

8. See my article [The Meaning of Life](#).

9. Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker,

1980), 48.

10. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Vol. 2, W. G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright, eds. (Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, n.d.), 813.

11. Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 302.

12. Ibid.

Kids Killing Kids

Not so long ago the biggest problem kids faced was getting a flat tire on their bikes or having a mean teacher assign homework over the weekend. How times have changed. Who would have guessed that one of the perennial stories would be kids killing kids?

In this essay we're going to talk about the issue of school shootings and the broader issue of kids killing kids. Why is this happening? What can be done to stem the tide of violence on campus and society? We'll look at such topics as video

games, teenage rebellion, and tolerance. And we'll also look at the spiritual aspects as well.

Each time we hear about gunshots on a high school campus we are once again reminded that we are living in a different world. The body count of students and teachers causes us to shake our heads and wonder what is going on. In some cases the shooters are teenagers with elaborate plans and evil desires. But sometimes the hail of bullets comes from impulsive kids as young as eleven years old.

In the past, when we did talk about kids killing kids, it was in an urban setting. Gangland battles between the Bloods and the Crips reminded us that life in the inner city was hard and ruthless. But the latest battlegrounds have not been Watts, the Bronx, or Cabrini-Green. These violent confrontations have taken place in rural, idyllic towns with names like Pearl, Mississippi and Paducah, Kentucky and Jonesboro, Arkansas and Littleton, Colorado.

We are shocked and surprised. We open our newspapers to see the faces of kids caught up in the occult and we wonder how they were attracted to such evil. We open those newspapers again and we see the faces of Opie and Beaver look-alikes charged with five counts of murder and we wonder if they even understood what they were doing.

The answers from pundits have been many. Young people are desensitized to violence, and they learn to kill by using point- and-shoot video games. Teenagers are rebellious, and they are looking for a way to defy authority. In the past, that was easier to accomplish by merely violating the dress code. Today, in a society that values tolerance, trying to come up with a behavior that is shocking is getting harder and harder to do. And the social and spiritual climate that our kids live in is hardly conducive to moral living.

Kids killing kids, I believe, is the best evidence yet of a

culture in chaos that has turned its back on God's moral law. Do we really believe that children can see thousands of TV murders or play violent computer games and not be tempted to act out that violence in real life? Do we think we can lower societal standards and not have kids act out in very bizarre ways? Do we think we can pull God from the schools and prayer from the classroom and see no difference in the behavior of children? We shouldn't be surprised. Kids killing kids is evidence of a nation in moral free fall.

The Media and Video Games

I would like to begin with a look at the influence of the media and video games. In the past, we have talked about the impact of violent media on our society. We shouldn't be surprised that it is having an effect on our kids.

One of the people who knows this only so well is Lt. Col. Dave Grossman. He is a retired West Point psychology professor, Army Ranger, and an expert in the study of violence in war and killing. He is also an instructor at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, and was one of the first on the scene of the Jonesboro, Arkansas shootings. He has a lot to say.

He saw the devastation wrought by the shootings—not just the five dead and ten wounded. He saw what happens when violence intrudes into everyday life. And, where he's been, he sees where the violence comes from. He says, "Anywhere television appears, fifteen years later, the murder rate doubles."{1}

He says, "In the video games, in the movies, on the television, the one behavior that is consistently depicted in glamorous terms and consistently rewarded is killing." He believes that media violence was a significant factor in the killings in Pearl, Mississippi, in West Paducah, Kentucky, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in Springfield, Oregon, and in Littleton, Colorado.

He also says that the combination of a sense of inferiority and the exposure to violence can provoke violence in young boys who are "wannabes." Sometimes they see violence as a route to fame, and one has to wonder whether all the media exposure of these school shootings will spawn even more.

Consider the 1995 movie, *The Basketball Diaries*. In the film, Leonardo DiCaprio (also of *Titanic* fame) goes into a schoolroom and shoots numerous children and teachers. In doing so, he became a role model for young boys who are "wannabes."

The parents of three students killed in Paducah, Kentucky have brought a lawsuit against the company that distributed the film *The Basketball Diaries*. The parents' lawyer points out that Michael Carneal, who opened fire on a group of students in Kentucky, viewed the film and honed his shooting skills by playing computer games such as *Doom* and *Redneck Rampage*.

Dave Grossman goes into some detail in showing how violence in films, videos, and television can affect us. The parallels in his book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*[{2}] and what is happening in the media today are chilling. Two factors are desensitization and operant conditioning. Show soldiers (or children) enough visual images of violence and they will become desensitized to it. Practice shooting targets of people and conditioning will eventually take over. In some ways it doesn't matter whether it's soldiers doing target practice at a range or kids using point-and-shoot video games. The chilling result is the same: the creation of a killing machine.

But you don't need to read Grossman's book to see the parallels. Young people today are exposed to violent images that desensitize them and make it possible for some to act out these violent images in real life. And video games help them hone their shooting skills and overcome their hesitation to kill. Dave Grossman has seen it in war, and now he is seeing it in everyday life.

Violence and Teenage Rebellion

So many words have been spoken in the last few months about school shootings that it's often difficult to hear sound commentary in the midst of the cacophony. But one voice that deserves a hearing is Jonathan Cohen who wrote a commentary in the *New York Post* entitled "Defining Rebellion Up."{3}

Years ago Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a seminal piece in an academic journal entitled "Defining Deviancy Down."{4} It was his contention that in the midst of cultural chaos we tend to redefine what is normal. When the crime rate goes through the roof, we say that crime is inevitable in a free society. When the illegitimate birth rate quadruples, we say that maybe two parents in a home aren't really necessary after all. In essence, what society has done is follow the pattern in Isaiah 5:20 of calling evil good and good evil.

Jonathan Cohen picks up on that theme and extends it to our current crisis. He says that when America became willing to define deviancy down, it simultaneously defined rebellion up. He says, "Anti-social teens are nothing new, but as deviancy has been made normal, we have made it increasingly difficult for teenagers to rebel."

Adults are no longer offended or outraged by behavior that would have sent our parents through the roof. Unfortunately, we have learned the lessons of tolerance well. We tolerate just about everything from tattoos to black nail polish to metal pierced eyebrows.

Jonathan Cohen says, "We have raised the threshold of rebellion so high that it is practically beyond reach. To be recognized, to get attention, to stir anyone in authority to lift a finger, whether it is a parent, a teacher, a principal, or a sheriff, a rebel has to go to very great lengths these days. One must send letter bombs, blow up office buildings or gun down children."

If a young person is trying to defy authority, it does take quite a bit to be recognized. Just a few decades ago, when dress codes were still in effect a student could be somewhat rebellious without getting into too much trouble or hurting other people. Today, it apparently takes quite a bit to run afoul of those in authority.

Jonathan Cohen asks, "And what of the teachers at Columbine High? It seemed they were not disturbed at all by the boys' odd conduct. In fact, one instructor actually helped them make a video dramatizing their death-and-destruction fantasy. For all we know, he may well have commended himself for being so nonjudgmental."

This surfaces an important issue. The highest value in our society today has become tolerance. We are not to judge others. When you put this trend of rising rebellion with increased tolerance together, you end up with a lethal mixture.

Jonathan Cohen concludes by wondering if all of this might have been different. He says, "If teachers had forbidden their students from coming to class wearing black trenchcoats, fingernail polish and makeup, Littleton likely would not be a name on everyone's lips. If the principal had had the common sense to ban a group of boys from coming to school sporting Nazi regalia, marching though the corridors in military fashion and calling themselves the Trench Coat Mafia, Columbine High School might not be behind a police line."

Tolerance

Tolerance has become the highest value in our society today, and I believe that it may explain why we miss the signals that something is wrong with our kids.

After the school shooting in Colorado, an editorial appeared in the *New York Post*.{5} The editorial writers said, "The

Littleton massacre could prove a turning point in American society—one of those moments when the entire culture changes course." Who knows if that will be the case. Only time will tell. The editorial writers believe that one of the things that must change is our contemporary view of tolerance.

The editorial was entitled "Too Much Tolerance?" While other pundits focused on guns, video games, and other cultural phenomena, these editorial writers said the real cause was "inattention."

After all, the killers in Colorado were sending out signals of an impending calamity. It's just that no one was paying attention. For example, one Littleton parent went to the police twice about threats made on his son's life by Eric Harris. His pleas were to no avail. The cops didn't pay attention.

These kids in the Trench Coat Mafia gave each other Hitler salutes at a local bowling alley. But the community didn't pay attention.

These same kids marched down the hallways and got into fights with jocks and other kids after school. But the school didn't pay attention.

One kid's mother works with disabled kids, but seemed unaware that her own son had a fascination with Adolf Hitler and spent a year planning the destruction of the high school. Again parents didn't pay attention.

Throughout the article the editorial writers recount all the things these kids did. They conclude that while they "were doing everything they could to offend the community they lived in, the community chose to pay them no heed."

Why? I believe that this tragic lack of attention is the sorry harvest of tolerance and diversity preached in the nation's classrooms every day. We are not to judge others. The only sin

in society is the sin of judgmentalism. We cannot judge hairstyles or lifestyles, manners or morals. We may think another person's dress, actions, or lifestyles are a bit different, but we are told not to judge. Everything must be tolerated. And so we decide to ignore in the name of tolerance. In essence, inattention is the fruit of a message of tolerance and diversity.

In decades past, boundaries existed, school dress codes were enforced, and certain behavior was not allowed. As the boundaries were dropped and the lines blurred, teachers and parents learned to cope by paying less attention.

The editorial writers therefore conclude (and please excuse the bluntness of their statement) that, "The only way Americans can live like this is to tune out, to ignore, to refuse to pay attention. In the name of broad-mindedness, Littleton allowed Harris and Klebold to fall through the cracks straight to Hell."

So why do we have kids killing kids? There are lots of reasons: the moral breakdown of society, video games, rebellion. But another reason is tolerance. We have been taught for decades not to judge, and this has given adults a license to be inattentive.

Spiritual Issues

I would like to conclude this essay by looking at some spiritual issues associated with so many of these school shootings.

Perhaps the best way to begin is to quote former Education Secretary Bill Bennett. He was on one of the talking-head shows discussing the tragedy in Littleton, Colorado. All of a sudden he turned directly to the television camera and said, "Hello?"

That was the attention-getter. But what he said afterward

should also get our attention. He pointed out that these kids were walking the halls in trench coats, and apparently that didn't really get the attention of the teachers and administrators. But, he said, if a kid walked the halls with a Bible, that would probably get their attention. Something is very wrong with a society and a school system that would admonish a school kid for carrying a Bible and spreading the good news while ignoring a group of kids wearing trench coats and spreading hate.

In her *Wall Street Journal* column{6}, former presidential speech writer Peggy Noonan talked about "The Culture of Death" our children live in. She quoted headlines from news stories and frankly I can't even repeat what she quoted. Our kids are up to their necks in really awful stuff, and it comes to them day after day on television, in the movies, and in the newspapers.

She then asked, Who counters this culture of death? Well, parents do and churches do. But they aren't really given much of a place in our society today. In fact, Peggy Noonan told a story to illustrate her point.

She said, "A man called into Christian radio this morning and said a true thing. He said, and I am paraphrasing: Those kids were sick and sad, and if a teacher had talked to one of them and said, 'Listen, there's a way out, there really is love out there that will never stop loving you, there's a real God and I want to be able to talk to you about him'—if that teacher had intervened that way, he would have been hauled into court."

You know that man who called that radio station is right. A few years ago, a very famous case made its way through the Colorado courts. A high school teacher in Colorado was taken to court merely because he had a Bible on his desk. If you haven't heard the story, I guess the conclusion wouldn't surprise you. The teacher lost the case and lost it again on

appeal.

As we've talked about the disturbing phenomenon of kids killing kids, we have discussed the breakdown of society, video games, rebellion, and tolerance. But we shouldn't forget the spiritual dimension. We are reaping the harvest of a secular society.

Kids kill other kids and so we wonder why. We throw God out of the classroom, we throw the Bible out of the classroom, we throw prayer out of the classroom, and we even throw the Ten Commandments out of the classroom.

Maybe we shouldn't wonder why any longer. Maybe we should be surprised the society isn't more barbaric given the fact that so many positive, spiritual influences have been thrown out. The ultimate solution to the problem of kids killing kids is for the nation to return to God.

Notes

1. Andrea Billups and Jerry Seper, "Experts Hit Permissiveness in Schools, Violence on TV," *The Washington Times*, 22 April, 1999.

2. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little,Brown, 1996).

3. Jonathan Cohen, "Defining Rebellion Up," *New York Post*, 27 April 1999.

4. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Defining Deviancy Down," *The American Spectator*, Winter 1993.

5."Too Much Tolerance?" *New York Post*, 27 April 1999.

6. Peggy Noonan, "The Culture of Death," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 April 1999.