

Where Have All Our Heroes Gone?

We all want to look up to someone, somebody who models a lifestyle we admire. These people need not be perfect—we know that perfect people only exist in the comic books—but they should be individuals who have risen above the circumstances of life to accomplish something significant. And, we want our heroes to be above self promotion and climbing on the backs of others. But this is where the problem lies. In today's world of widespread self-centeredness, it is very difficult to find those heroes from whom we can gain a right perspective of the world about us.

Did I say that only comic book heroes are perfect? Even the comic characters are more flawed than we may want to admit. The comic books of today hardly resemble the comic books of the past. Today's comics are often full of violence, sexual themes, and grotesque imagery.

So where do we go to find heroes? What about our parents? Some of us were fortunate enough to have parents that we could look up to as role models in our lives. But, lamentably, many have grown up in homes that are not at all conducive to establishing healthy role models.

Author Steve Farrar, speaking at Probe's annual banquet this spring, related that when he was a student in grade school he didn't even know what the word "divorce" meant. None of his relatives were divorced, and the only way he came to find out what the word divorce meant was when one of his classmates used the word in referring to his parents. To Farrar's knowledge, no one else in that school had divorced parents. What kid entering grade school today doesn't know what the word divorce means? Divorce is epidemic in today's society, and it is rather difficult to see your parents as your heroes

when their breakup has caused you so much pain and confusion.

Well, there are always heroes from the world of sports. But have you kept up on "America's Team," the Dallas Cowboys? From a tobacco-chewing quarterback to drug-thug linemen, America's favorite team has become the brunt of numerous jokes based on the team members' legal and ethical problems. We could also pick on some prominent basketball and baseball players, as well as other sports figures, but I think the point is made that finding upstanding heroes, even in the realm of sports, has become difficult.

In all fairness, one must admit that there are some great athletes out there with solid, moral lives and radiant testimonies.

But what about movie stars? The movie industry can make a hero out of anyone. Since the movie makers have absolute control of the medium and can make their world of fantasy seem so real, heroes are "created" right before our eyes, but they are heroes of fantasy, constructs of the imagination. What this world needs is real heroes, not some fantasy that doesn't exist except in our minds and on the silver screen. Movies are wonderful teaching tools, however, and great lessons can be learned and our minds and hearts can be stimulated by the events and people portrayed. Sooner or later, though, if we seek to emulate the personalities of the silver screen, we will fall flat on our faces or be disillusioned when we see or hear of the actors' true lifestyles.

We need heroes that last, who walk on the earth, and yet have that something within them that carries them beyond the frustrations and failures of everyday life. Next, we will begin to look at some heroes who inspire our better nature and motivate us to stay focused and faithful.

Heroes Worthy of Admiration

Please allow me to share with you the story of one athlete who is a hero worthy of admiration. His name is Josh Davis.

Josh, a student at the University of Texas at Austin, won three gold medals in the swimming relays at the Atlanta summer Olympics. I guess that qualifies him as a hero to every aspiring swimmer who wants to shoot for the gold, but for the rest of us it is not the gold medals that makes him a hero, but what he has done with them.

But let me back up and tell you about the transformation that took place in Josh's life leading up to the Olympics. This change in perspective enabled him to handle the pressure of the Olympics and the race for the gold in a way that makes him a model for a world so in need of true heroes.

As a young athlete back in high school, Josh excelled in his sport and was recruited by college swim teams. He chose the University of Texas where he continued to excel and became a BMOC—Big Man On Campus. His athletic gifts became his god. But he became aware of a nagging emptiness in his heart even with all the attention, affection, and acceptance he was receiving. At first he tried the world's way to fill the void by filling his life with women and alcohol, but found that was not the answer.

Josh finally overcame the emptiness in his life when he gave his life to Jesus Christ. No longer did he need to strive for love and acceptance through his performance, but found all that in the God who created him and loved him and accepted him unconditionally. [\[1\]](#)

Excited in his new-found faith, Josh began to witness to others on campus about his relationship with Jesus Christ. But his zeal exceeded his knowledge, and many challenges were thrown in his face about the validity of his Christian faith.

But instead of hiding his Christianity and bringing it out only in the presence of other Christians as so many do, Josh sought out the help of the Probe Study Center on the UT campus. There through the help of the center staff and the materials they were able to provide him, Josh was able to start a journey of knowledge and understanding to strengthen his faith. Whenever he came across a charge he couldn't answer, he would return to the Probe Center to find answers. His boldness in witnessing increased, and today he is an athlete with a message to the world, and he is excited about the position God has placed him in to reach out with the truth of God's word. Josh is invited to schools, clubs, and other organizations to tell about his experiences as a gold medal Olympian. He uses his gold medal status to bridge the gap to a greater reward, that of how we can all experience a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

This spring, Josh shared at the Probe annual banquet of the invaluable help the Probe Center was in his quest to become the kind of athlete God could use to implant in others a seed of the truth of the gospel message. It's not the gold medals that made Josh a real hero, it is how he has chosen to use them. He has chosen the courageous route by using his gold medals for the glory of God and the salvation of others.

“In Search of New Heroes”

Some time ago the *Dallas Morning News* ran some articles on the search for heroes. One of the articles wasn't too encouraging. It told of teachers who no longer ask their students who their heroes are because many of the students have such a hard time coming up with someone they look up to or admire. Too often today, when you ask a kid who his heroes are, all he can think of is someone who has made it to the top with fancy cars and lots of money. The kids have no real picture of how these “heroes” made it to the top; all they know is that this individual has what they hope to have someday. What a sad

basis for the definition of a hero.

In his book, *Heroes of My Time*, the late Harrison Salisbury says, "We do not live in the age of heroes. This is not the era of Jefferson, Lincoln, or Commodore Perry. Nor even of Charles Lindbergh. The politicians of our day seldom remind us of Franklin D. or Eleanor Roosevelt. Athletes signing five-and-ten-million-dollar contracts do not resonate as did Babe Ruth."

Today, the media often tries to tell us who our heroes are and that means celebrities, athletes, and stars of the silver screen. These are not the heroes we need. Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor has said it so well when he stated, "The world doesn't run on Magic Johnson; it runs on all us little heroes." [\[2\]](#)

Fortunately, a more encouraging article was featured on the same page as the previous article. Titled "In Search of New Heroes," the article spoke of everyday heroes, ordinary people who became heroes by their unselfish acts of heroism, like Lucy Narvaiz who volunteers her skills to help Hispanics and American Indians learn to read and write, or Eleanor Poe who runs a clinic in the poorest section of El Paso. These people are not the showy, dramatic type of heroes, but they exhibit the quiet, often unnoticed kind of heroism of people who have the courage to do what needs to be done.

The an article is about the television series, "Unsung Heroes," and the heroes featured on the program were quiet, unassuming people who can't imagine why anyone would call them heroes. But these individuals have uncommon courage, and Janet Carroll, the producer, wanted the viewers to see that. David Walther, Janet's program director said, "When you sit down and look at it and see people doing these things, it makes you feel good. It makes you want to emulate or at least be a better person than what you are already." I couldn't have said it better myself. What a contrast to the normal fare we get from the media in shows like "Hard Copy," "Inside Edition,"

and “Hollywood Access”!

As we hear about these unsung heroes’ quiet resolve, it makes us stronger and more determined to do the right thing. We see their strength and the peace they have within themselves, and we begin to see the world in a better light.[\[3\]](#)

Home Grown Heroes

Now I want to continue our discussion of heroes by looking at an excellent book called *Home Grown Heroes: How to Raise Courageous Kids*, by Tim Kimmel.[\[4\]](#)

In the foreword to this book, Brigadier General Joe Foss (retired), a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, says, “America needs a new generation of heroes . . . people who are ruled by a conscience that doesn’t take the Ten Commandments lightly who have a fundamental reverence for their Creator, and a respect for the people and things He has created.”

That’s what this book is about, being that kind of person, the unsung heroes of life who have uncommon courage. Specifically, it deals with the process of learning to add courage to our faith. Many people have faith, or at least they say that they do, but it does not seem to reveal itself in the outworking of their lives. The problem is the absence of courage and “courage is the muscle that faith uses to hold its ground.” So many people today do not seem to have the ability to courageously live out their faith. Now we are not talking about those instantaneous heroes who make the headlines because they happened to be at the right place at the right time people you typically read about in the newspapers or see on TV. I’m talking about those unsung heroes who daily make conscious decisions to respond courageously to life’s dilemmas. Webster’s Dictionary defines courage as: “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.” Courage is putting our faith in action,

adding sweat to our convictions, doing what is hard to do because we know it needs to be done.

Kimmel writes about the fact that God has placed a seed of courage in everyone. It's part of being made in His image. We need to water, cultivate, and pray over that seed so that it may grow within us. And remember, even if you've blown it many times, it is never too late to do what is right. Sometimes it is the courage to confront a person or situation that you know is not right. Often it is the courage to forgive when you want revenge. It may be the courage to turn off the TV when you know you shouldn't be watching it or to maintain your focus until you accomplish a specific goal.

What about building courage into the lives of those we love and feel responsible for? Courage is the core word in the word encouragement. Therefore when we encourage others we are helping to build courage into their lives. The more someone is encouraged when they try to do the right thing, the more courage will grow within them.

Kimmel reminds us that the lion's share of courageous living takes place in the daily grind, behind the lines, in the lonely places, among our allies, in our own hearts. Courage is the natural result of internal disciplines. Courageous living comes from daily, deliberate acts of resolve. Courage assumes there is a battle to be waged and won. To live a courageous lifestyle is a choice.

The preceding comments have been attempts to whet your appetite about this book. Now I'll state it plainly: for a wonderful book that lays out steps to courageous living, please read *Home Grown Heroes* by Tim Kimmel. You'll be glad you did!

Spiritual Heroes

Now I would like us to take a look at our spiritual heroes.

Let's start with the live ones.

It has been intriguing as we have observed the rise and fall of so many of our spiritual leaders. In Texas we have had our share with the likes of Rev. Robert Tilton and Rev. Walter Railey. Over in Louisiana it was Rev. Jimmy Swaggart. Probably the biggest headlines in the national news have been about Jim and Tammy Bakker of PTL fame, once popular televangelists. He went to prison for fraud and conspiracy. She was treated for drug dependency. But the story doesn't end there. While Jim spent his time in prison reflecting on his failures and sin before God, Tammy divorced him and sought to separate herself from the situation. She appears to have learned nothing from the experience and still tries to keep herself in the public spotlight by getting on TV shows and running her own ministry. Meanwhile Jim, after much reflection, comes out with a book of his confessions. He was humbled and seeks a fresh start on a new and different foundation. Now I don't know how being out of prison will stir up the old nature in Jim Bakker and how he will stand the test of time, but it does remind me of another man of national prominence who rose up out of the ashes of prison time to become a spiritual leader among us.

Chuck Colson was not a spiritual leader before his fall, but was known as Nixon's hatchet man. Then there was Watergate, his fall from power, his time in prison, his conversion to Christianity and his courageous road back in obedience to God. Chuck Colson is one of our heroes today, not because he lived a life without moral or ethical failure, but because he chose to accept God's grace and had the courage to admit his sin before God and man and build within himself, with the help of many others, the personal discipline needed to become a pilgrim for God in the journey of life.

Jim Bakker seems to have chosen the right path back. Only time will tell, but God may restore him to a place of spiritual leadership. Are you prepared to deal with that? If not, how do you deal with King David? He was an adulterer and a murderer

who repented of his sin and God restored him. Yes, there were dire consequences for his sin that did not go away, and there will be dire consequences for Jim Bakker that will never go away. There are probably some past sins in your life that have resulted in some consequences that don't go away. But are we willing to chose the courageous path that can lead us to be the heroes God wants us to be. We may only be heroes for our children, but is there anyone else for whom we would rather be a hero?

Heroes are made, not born. We have such a great spiritual lineage to learn from. Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews tells us about spiritual heroes, men and women who put their confidence in God, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, David, and Daniel. They were all far from perfect models, but they had the courage to not give up. God offers to each of us a journey of hope. May God bless your journey.

Notes

1. *Path To Victory: A Sports New Testament With The Testimonies Of Athletes Who Are Winning In Life*, New International Version (Colorado Springs, Colo.: International Bible Society, 1993).

2. Leslie Barker, "Wanted: Heroes; Warning: The job ain't what it used to be." *Dallas Morning News*, Sunday, 12 September 1993, Section F.

3. Leslie Barker, "In Search of New Heroes: With credit cards and a dream, one woman creates a legacy for her daughter." *Dallas Morning News*, Sunday, 12 September 1993, Section F.

4. Tim Kimmel, *Home Grown Heroes: How to Raise Courageous Kids* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1992).

When the Good Guys Don't Win

Pop! Pow! Gunfire crackled from the house next door. My neighbor John, high on marijuana, was shooting at his friend who crouched in fear behind a corner of the building. No one was injured and the arrival of police calmed John down.

That's strange, I thought to myself another sunny morning as I left my home to jog. *Why would my car windshield be covered with ice crystals? It's July.* As I drew nearer, I realized the "ice crystals" were broken glass, courtesy of some Fourth-of-July vandals.

Fear, confusion, anger, helplessness. Life can seem out of control when we are violated. Each nighttime creak could be an intruder. Were the walls thick enough to stop bullets should John's cannabis exploits resume? What did I do to deserve this?

An alleged rape victim feels cheated when the DA refuses to prosecute the accused perpetrators. A medical exam showed rape trauma; two reliable eyewitnesses saw her pushed partially clad down some stairs and heard her screams for help. "It seems to me that I am the one on trial," she complains in frustration. A rape is the only crime where the victims are treated with disrespect."[\[1\]](#) An African-American mother says she's paranoid that her well-behaved teenage son will be falsely suspected of being a criminal because of his race. Fear and fury drive her to nag him before he goes to the store: "Keep your hands out of your pockets. Don't reach under your shirt. If there's an itch, just live with it. In winter, keep your jacket open."[\[2\]](#)

Terrorist Massacre

Members of a multi-racial Cape Town, South Africa, church were enjoying a beautiful duet when the front door burst open. Terrorists sprayed the congregation with automatic rifle fire and tossed in two grenades, leaving 11 dead and 53 wounded. Lorenzo Smith pulled his wife, Myrtle, to the floor and lay on top of her to protect her. The second grenade exploded 6 feet away, sending a piece of shrapnel into her left side near her heart but missing him entirely. She died en route to a hospital.

“You’re no longer working here,” the personnel chief informs the career employee. The stellar worker had ruffled feathers by challenging ethical and financial misconduct of several company officers. Instead of applauding his integrity, the company showed him the door. Whistle blowing can be lonely.

Palestinians find their homes bulldozed. Israeli shoppers are massacred by suicide bombers in a crowded marketplace. Rwandans are maimed and slaughtered in tribal violence.

Bad things sometimes (often?) happen to good or seemingly innocent people. What should be done? How can the victims cope?

First, recognize where the problem stems from.

Why Suffering?

“Why is there suffering in the world?” ranked first in a national survey to determine the top 40 questions of life.^{3} Many human efforts to alleviate suffering and achieve happiness have borne some fruit, but each also contains examples of failure. Consider a few:

Psychology. Many psychologists offer hope based purely on human resources. Still, sometimes even the best and brightest give up in despair. Legendary psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim,

who used his own survival of Nazi horrors to help heal others, eventually took his own life. Upon learning of his suicide, one colleague remarked, "It was as if the [psychological] profession itself had failed." {4}

Marxism. Pointing at class antagonism as the culprit, Marxism aimed to create a "New Man" in a harmonious society devoid of such antagonism. Instead, it created an elite "Rich Man" as party chiefs lived in luxury while the masses remained disillusioned. "Workers of the World, We Apologize," read the Moscow demonstrators' banner as the Soviet Union crumbled. {5} Today's Cubans eat lots of bananas and ride bicycles. North Koreans starve.

Capitalism. Is this political theory the answer? The market economy has raised standards of living, yet even nations like the United States boil with crime, racism, sexual discrimination and homelessness

Could we be missing the root of the problem? Could much human suffering be rooted in something deeper than flawed political systems or philosophical constructs? Could there be something wrong with the human heart?

Heart Disease?

History is replete with confirming evidence A United Nations conference on the role of the university in the search for world peace ended early because "the delegates began quarreling too vociferously." {6} Various attempts to establish utopian societies with uniform equality have crumbled due to internal strife.

"Everybody thinks of changing humanity," noted Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, "but nobody thinks of changing himself." {7} Simon Bolivar, the great liberator of Latin America, admitted in his later years, "I was all my life a slave to my passions. The essence of liberty is precisely that

one can liberate oneself “{8}

“We have met the enemy,” announced the comic strip character Pogo, “and he is us.”

If, then, we live in a flawed world with people determined to live out their own inner sicknesses, what can we do? How do we cope with the resulting, unjust suffering? “Seek justice” was a North Carolina woman’s strategy as she recently sued her husband’s lover for destroying her marriage, winning a million-dollar settlement. Sometimes the right cause prevails in court. Often, though, both sides end up bitter and poorer.

Are there any other solutions? Anything that works?

- **Choose to look out for others.** In a commencement address at Duke University, ABC News commentator Ted Koppel said: “Maimonides and Jesus summed it up in almost identical words: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,’ ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’”{9} After Hurricane Andrew devastated parts of Miami, I returned to my hometown to help rebuild. I was amazed to discover that thousands of volunteers from around North America had come at their own expense to help the poor reconstruct their homes. Most were with Christian mission organizations, motivated as Good Samaritans by their love of God and love of people.
- **Lessen the pain by sharing it.** During a particularly trying episode in my own life, my best friend deserted me, some trusted co-workers betrayed me, and my health and finances suffered. Close friends and my faith helped me emerge wounded but growing. Building friendships takes time and effort. Initiating communication, offering to help another move or to carpool, listening to hurts, offering a compliment or word of encouragement . . . all can help build strong bonds. Giving often motivates others to respond in

kind. "Bearing one another's burdens" can make them lighter for both of you when you each need it.

- **Eliminate bitter roots.** Asking and/or granting forgiveness can help heal hearts. As Alabama governor, George Wallace preached "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" Two decades in a wheelchair gave him time to reflect on life, suffering and God. He eventually confessed his wrongs and asked forgiveness of his former racial and political enemies. South African Lorenzo Smith, who lost his wife to the grenade in church, turned and forgave his wife's murderers. "Bearing a grudge can corrode your soul," affirmed one wounded warrior. "If you nurse bitterness and refuse to forgive, it can keep you in bondage to your enemies. If you let it go and forgive regardless of your opponent's response you're free."

When the good guys don't win, you can curse the darkness. Or you can recognize the root problem and light a candle. May yours shine brightly.

Notes

1. "Was it rape? Woman in G.T. case speaks out," *The Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), August 28, 1997, A12.
2. Deborah Mathis, "Stereotypes can leave Black mothers paranoid for sons," *The Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), August 27, 1997, A9.
3. "What are the Top 40 Questions of Life?" advertisement by Thomas Nelson Publishers in *USA Today*, ca. late 1980s or 1990.
4. Celeste Fremon, "Love and Death," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, January 27, 1991, pp. 17-21, 35.
5. *Newsweek*. November 20, 1989, p. 11.

6. *Miami News*. September 4, 1969.

7. *World Christian/U* February 1989, p. U8.

8. Selden Rodman, "The Conqueror's Descent," *National Review*. October 15, 1990, p. 88.

9. Ted Koppel, "The Vannatizing of America," *DUKE Magazine*, July/August 1987, p 36 (with biblical references from Matthew 19:19 and Luke 6:31).

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Computers and the Information Revolution

The Impact of the Information Revolution

What has been the impact of the information revolution, and how should Christians respond? Those are the questions we will consider in this essay. Let's begin by considering how fast our world shifted to a computer-based society. At the end of World War 2, the first electronic digital computer ENIAC weighed thirty tons, had 18,000 vacuum tubes, and occupied a space as large as a boxcar. 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." 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. 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. 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. Modern technology makes this task much easier.

Moreover, the problem is 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, but it shows the challenges facing each of us due to the information revolution.

The Social Challenges of Computers

One of the biggest challenges raised by the widespread use of computers is privacy and 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. But more legislation is needed than this particular act and Congress needs to consider legislation that applies to the information revolution.

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.

Computers are a wonderful tool, but like any technology poses new challenges in the social and political arenas. I believe that Christians should be the forefront of these new technologies providing wise direction and moral guidelines. We need Christians in the fields of computer technology and electrical engineering who can wisely guide us into the 21st century.

Principles for Computer Ethics

I would like to propose some principles for computer ethics. The first principle is that **one should never do with computers what he or she would consider immoral without them.** An act does not gain morality because a computer has made it easier to achieve. If it is unethical for someone to rummage through your desk, then it is equally unethical for that person to search your computer files. If it is illegal to violate copyright law and photocopy a book, then it is equally wrong to copy a disk of computer software.

A second principle is to **treat information as something that has value.** People who use computers to obtain unauthorized information often do not realize they are doing something wrong. Since information is not a tangible object and can be shared, it does not seem to them like stealing since it does not deprive someone of something. Yet in an information-based society, information is a valuable asset. Stealing information should carry similar legal penalties as stealing tangible

objects.

A third principle is to remember that **computers are merely tools to be used, not technology to be worshiped**. God's mandate is to use technology wisely within His creation. Many commentators express concern that within an information society, people may be tempted to replace ethics with statistics.

Massive banks of computer data already exert a powerful influence on public policy. Christians must resist society's tendency to undermine the moral basis of right and wrong with facts and figures. Unfortunately, growing evidence indicates that the computer revolution has been a contributing factor in the change from a moral foundation to a statistical one. The adoption of consensus ethics ("51 percent make it right") and the overuse of cost-benefit analysis (a modernized form of utilitarianism) give evidence of this shift.

Fourth, **computers should not replace human intelligence**. 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." 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.

The implications, however, are profound. Besides lowering humans to the material process, it begins to elevate machines to the human level. One article asked the question, Would an Intelligent Computer Have a "Right to Life?" 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 seventeenth-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. But this will be our challenge in the future: how to manage new computing power that will most likely outstrip human intelligence.

The Bible teaches that humans are more than bits and bytes, more than blood and bones. Created in the image of God, human beings have spiritual dimensions. They are more than complex computers. Computers should be used for what they do best: analyze discrete data with objective criteria. Computers are a wonderful tool, but they should not replace human intelligence and intuition.

Biblical Principles Concerning Technology

I would like to present a set of biblical principles concerning technology in general and computer technology in particular.

In essence, technology is the systematic modification of the environment for human ends. Often it is a process or activity that extends or enhances a human function. A microscope, for example, extends man's visual perception. A tractor extends one's physical ability. A computer extends a person's ability to calculate. Technology also includes devices that make physical processes more efficient. The many chemical processes we use to make products fit this description of technology.

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. There are a number of 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.

As Christians we should see the value of technology but not be seduced into believing that more and better technology will solve social and moral problems. Computers and the Internet will tell us more about *how* people live, but they won't tell us *how to* live. Televisions, VCRs, and computers may enrich our lives, but they won't provide the direction we need in our lives. The answer is not more computers and more technology. The ultimate answer to our problems is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

A second principle is that **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.

Many commentators, most notably E. F. Schumacher, have focused on the notion of appropriate technology. In Third World countries, for example, sophisticated energy-intensive and capital-intensive forms of agriculture may be inappropriate for the culture as it presently exists. Industrial advance often brings social disruption and increasing havoc to a society. Developing countries must use caution in choosing the appropriate steps to industrialize, lest they be greatly harmed in the process.

I believe we should resist the temptation to solve every problem with computers. Our society today seems bent to putting computers in every classroom and in every place of work. As helpful as computers may be, I believe we need to question this seemingly mindless attempt to fill our world with computers. They are a wonderful tool, but that is all they are. We must be careful not to substitute computers for basics like phonics, mathematics, logic, and wise business

practices.

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. 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 evolution, 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."

Christians must bring strong biblical critique to each technological advance and analyze its impact. Computers are a wonderful tool, but Christians should constantly evaluate their impact as we live through the information revolution.

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Generation X – How They Fit in the Christian Community

Generation X! Are you familiar with this phrase? It is highly probable that you have heard or read the phrase at least once. What does it bring to your mind? Does it provoke fear, confusion, despair, misunderstandings, or is it just another in a long line of such expressions used to label youth? Generation X has quickly entered our vocabulary as an easily recognizable moniker for the children of another definable generation: the “baby boomers.” Thus this generation of teenagers also has come to be known as the “baby busters.” “Xers” and “busters” normally don’t elicit positive thoughts about our youth. Is this a legitimate response? Or are we maligning a significant portion of our population with such terms?

In 1991 a Canadian named Douglas Coupland published a novel entitled *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. Coupland’s book “is the first major work to take twentysomethings seriously, even if the book is humorous and fictional.”^{1} Thus he is the originator of the phrase that presently describes a particular generation. But he is just one of many who have given thought to youth culture, both present and past.

A Brief History of American Youth

It seems that youth have always received the attention of adults. Teenagers, as they have come to be called, have been analyzed, diagnosed, and reprimanded because older generations just don’t know what to make of them. “Juvenile delinquents,” “the beat generation,” “hippies,” “yuppies” and numerous other

titles have been used to describe certain generational distinctives. “The contemporary youth crisis is only the latest variation on centuries-old problems.”^{2} For example, in the 1730s in New England youth activities such as “night ‘walking’ and ‘company- keeping,’ also known as ‘revels,’ helped produce some of the highest premarital pregnancy rates in American history.”^{3} And during the early nineteenth century, student riots became a tradition on many campuses such as Brown, North Carolina, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. These riots included “boycotting classes, barricading college buildings, breaking windows, trashing the commons and/or chapel, setting fires around or to college buildings, beating faculty members, and whipping the president or trustees.”^{4} Such behavior—almost two hundred years ago—probably reminds us of what took place on many campuses during the Vietnam War years.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, youth became the focus of the burgeoning social sciences. “An intellectual enterprise struggled to redefine what ‘youth’ was or ought to be. That concept was labeled ‘adolescence’ and has prevailed ever since.”^{5} It is especially interesting to note that these early social scientists didn’t discover adolescence, they invented it. “Adolescence was essentially a conception of behavior imposed on youth, rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people behaved.”^{6} This is important when we understand that the world view premises of the social scientists “came from Darwinian recapitulation theory: the individual life-course replicated the evolutionary progress of the entire race. Adolescence was a distinct ‘stage’ through which each person passed on the way from childhood (the ‘primitive’ stage) to adulthood (the ‘civilized’ stage). Adolescence therefore was transitional but essential, its traits dangerous but its labor vital for attaining maturity. Squelching it was just as bad as giving it free rein.”^{7} The fruit of such concepts can be seen in the “lifestyles” that are now so ingrained in our cultural fabric.

The Web of Adolescence

What do the “lifestyles” of adults have to do with adolescents? “Since ‘lifestyle’ has come to define not just doing but their very being, adults have now become dependent on the very psychological experts who wove the web of adolescence in the first place. The classic youth tasks of ‘growth,’ ‘finding oneself,’ and preparing for one’s life-work have become the American life-work, even into the golden years’ of retirement.”^{8} Thus the concerns we have for our youth are concerns we have for ourselves. The “web of adolescence” touches all of us. As George Barna has stated, “taking the time to have a positive impact [on our youth] is more than just ‘worth the effort’; it is a vital responsibility of every adult and a contribution to the future of our own existence.”^{9} The importance of this cannot be overemphasized as we contemplate the sometimes-puzzling segment of our population called “Generation X.”

Who Are These People?

What is a “Generation Xer” or a “baby buster”? What is the “doofus generation” or “the nowhere generation”? These phrases, and many others, may be used to characterize the present generation of youth. Not very encouraging phrases, are they? More frequently than not, adults always have evaluated youth in pessimistic terms. Even the ancient Greeks were frustrated with their youth.

Today the descriptions are especially derogatory. “Words used to describe them have included: whiny, cynical, angry, perplexed, tuned out, timid, searching, vegged out—the latest lost generation.”^{10} Are these terms accurate, or do they reek of hyperbole? As is true with most generalizations of people, there is a measure of truth to them. But we make a grave mistake if we allow them to preclude us from a more complete consideration of this generation. As George Barna has

written: "You cannot conduct serious research among teenagers these days without concluding that, contrary to popular assumptions, there is substance to these young people."[{11}](#) Having served among and with youth of this generation for many years, I emphatically concur with Mr. Barna. Generation Xers consist of "41 million Americans born between 1965 and 1976 plus the 3 million more in that age group who have immigrated here."[{12}](#) Most of them are children of the "baby boomers," who comprise over 77 million of the population. This dramatic decrease in the number of births has left them with the "baby buster" label. Their parents have left a legacy that has produced a "birth dearth" and its accompanying social consequences. There are at least six contributors to this population decline.

First, the U.S. became the site for the world's highest divorce rate. Second, birth control became increasingly prominent with the introduction of the pill. Women began to experience more freedom in planning their lives. Third, a college education was more accessible for more people, especially for women who began to take more influential positions in the work force. Fourth, social change, including women's liberation, encouraged more women to consider careers other than being homemakers. Fifth, abortion reached a rate of over 1.5 million per year. Sixth, the economy led many women to work because they had to, or because they were the sole breadwinner.[{13}](#)

So we can see that this generation has entered a culture enmeshed in dramatic changes, especially regarding the family. These changes have produced certain characteristics, some positive, others negative, that are generally descriptive of contemporary youth.

How Do You Describe a "Buster"?

How do you describe someone who is labeled as a "baby buster"? We may be tempted to answer this question in a despairing

tone, especially if we haven't taken time to see a clear picture of a "buster." Consider the following characteristics:

First, they are serious about life. For example, the quality of life issues they have inherited have challenged them to give consideration to critical decisions both for the present and future. Second, they are stressed out. School, family, peer pressure, sexuality, techno-stress, finances, crime, and even political correctness contribute to their stressful lives. Third, they are self-reliant. One indicator of this concerns religious faith; the baby buster believes he alone can make sense of it. Fourth, they are skeptical, which is often a defense against disappointment. Fifth, they are highly spiritual. This doesn't mean they are focusing on Christianity, but it does mean there is a realization that it is important to take spiritual understanding of some kind into daily life. Sixth, they are survivors. This is not apparent to adults who usually share a different worldview concerning progress and motivation. This generation is not "driven" as much as their predecessors. They are realistic, not idealistic.[{14}](#)

Do these characteristics match your perceptions? If not, it may be because this generation has received little public attention. And what attention it has received has leaned in a negative direction because of inaccurate observation. The baby busters' parents, the baby boomers, have been the focus of businesses, education, churches, and other institutions simply because of their massive numbers and their market potential. It's time to rectify this if we have the wisdom to see the impact busters will have in the not-too-distant future.

What About the Church and Busters?

Let's survey a few other attributes of Generation X as we attempt to bring this group into sharper focus. These attributes should be especially important to those of us in the Christian community who desire to understand and relate to

our youth.

Because of “the loneliness and alienation of splintered family attachments” this generation’s strongest desires are acceptance and belonging.^{15} Our churches need to become *accepting* places first and *expecting* places second. That is, our youth need to sense that they are not first *expected* to conform or perform. Rather, they are to sense that the church is a place where they can first find *acceptance*. My years of ministry among youth have led me to the conclusion that one of the consistent shortcomings of our churches is the proverbial “generation gap” that stubbornly *expects* youth to dress a certain way, talk a certain way, socialize in a certain way, etc., without *accepting* them in Christ’s way.

Another important attribute of this generation is how they learn. “They determine truth in a different way: not rationally, but relationally.”^{16} Closely aligned with this is the observation that “interaction is their primary way of learning.”^{17} In order for the church to respond, it may be necessary to do a great deal of “retooling” on the way we teach.

Lastly, busters are seeking purpose and meaning in life. Of course this search culminates in a relationship with the risen Jesus. It should be obvious that ultimately this is the most important contribution the church can offer. If we fail to respond to this, the greatest need of this generation or any other, surely we should repent and seek the Lord’s guidance.

Listening to Busters

Let’s eavesdrop on a conversation taking place on a college campus between a Generation X student and a pastor:

Pastor: We have a special gathering of college students at our church each Sunday. It would be great to see you there.

Student: No, thanks. I’ve been to things like that before.

What's offered is too superficial. Besides, I don't trust institutions like churches.

Pastor: Well, I think you'll find this to be different.

Student: Who's in charge?

Pastor: Usually it's me and a group of others from the church.

Student: No students?

Pastor: Well, uh, no, not at the moment.

Student: How can you have a gathering for students and yet the students have nothing to do with what happens?

Pastor: That's a good question. I haven't really thought much about it.

Student: By the way, is there a good ethnic and cultural mix in the group?

Pastor: It's not as good as it could be.

Student: Why is that?

Pastor: I haven't really thought about that, either.

Student: Cliques. I've noticed that a lot of groups like yours are very "cliquish." Is that true at your church?

Pastor: We're trying to rid ourselves of that. But do you spend time with friends?

Student: Of course! But I don't put on a "show of acceptance."

Pastor: I appreciate that! We certainly don't want to do that! We sincerely want to share the truth with anyone.

Student: Truth? I don't think you can be so bold as to say there is any such thing.

Pastor: That's a good point. I can't claim truth, but Jesus can.

Student: I'm sure that's comforting for you, but it's too narrow for anyone to claim such a thing. We all choose our own paths.

Pastor: Jesus didn't have such a broad perspective.

Student: That may be, but he could have been wrong, you know. Look, I'm late for class. Maybe we can talk another time, as long as you'll listen and not preach to me.

Pastor: That sounds good. I'm here often. I'll look for you. Have a great day!

This fictitious encounter serves to illustrate how baby busters challenge us to find ways of communicating that transcend what may have been the norm just a few years ago.

New Rules

George Barna has gleaned a set of "rules" that define and direct youth of the mid- and late-90s:

Rule #1: Personal relationships count. Institutions don't.

Rule #2: The process is more important than the product.

Rule #3: Aggressively pursue diversity among people.

Rule #4: Enjoying people and life opportunities is more important than productivity, profitability, or achievement.

Rule #5: Change is good.

Rule #6: The development of character is more crucial than achievement.

Rule #7: You can't always count on your family to be there for you, but it is your best hope for emotional support.

Rule #8: Each individual must assume responsibility for his or her own world.

Rule #9: Whenever necessary, gain control and use it wisely.

Rule #10: Don't waste time searching for absolutes. There are none.

Rule #11: One person can make a difference in the world but not much.

Rule #12: Life is hard and then we die; but because it's the only life we've got, we may as well endure it, enhance it, and enjoy it as best we can.

Rule #13: Spiritual truth may take many forms.

Rule #14: Express your rage.

Rule #15: Technology is our natural ally.[{18}](#)

Now let's consider how parents and other adults might best respond to these rules.

What Do They Hear From Us?

Try to put yourself into the mind and body of a contemporary teenager for a moment. Imagine that you've been asked to share the kinds of things you hear most often from your parents or adult leaders. Your list may sound something like this:

- "Do as I say, not as I do."
- "I'm the adult. I'm right."
- "Because I said so, that's why."
- "You want to be *what*?"
- "This room's a pig sty."
- "Can't you do anything right?"
- "Where did you find him?"
- "You did *what*?"
- "Do you mind if we talk about something else?"

- “I’m kind of busy right now. Could you come back later?”

These statements sound rather overwhelming when taken together, don’t they? And yet too many of our youth hear similar phrases too frequently. As we conclude our series pertaining to the youth of Generation X, let’s focus on how we might better communicate and minister to them. In his book *Ten Mistakes Parents Make With Teenagers*, Jay Kesler has shared wise advice we should take to heart and consistently apply to our lives among youth.[\[19\]](#)

Advice to Parents and Other Adults

- Be a consistent model. We can’t just preach to them and expect them to follow our advice if we don’t live what we say. Consistency is crucial in the eyes of a buster.
- Admit when you are wrong. Just because you are the adult and the one with authority doesn’t mean you can use your position as a “cop out” for mistakes. Youth will understand sincere repentance and will be encouraged to respond in kind.
- Give honest answers to honest questions. Youth like to ask questions. We need to see this as a positive sign and respond honestly.
- Let teenagers develop a personal identity. Too often youth bare the brunt of their parents’ expectations. In particular, parents will sometimes make the mistake of living through their children. Encourage them in their own legitimate endeavors.
- Major on the majors and minor on the minors. In my experience, adults will concentrate on things like appearance to the detriment of character. Our youth need to know that we know what is truly important.
- Communicate approval and acceptance. As we stated earlier in this essay, this generation is under too much stress. Let’s make encouragement our goal, not discouragement.
- When possible, approve their friends. This one can be especially difficult for many of us. Be sure to take time to

go beyond the surface and really know their friends.

- Give teens the right to fail. We can't protect them all their lives. Remind them that they can learn from mistakes.
- Discuss the uncomfortable. If they don't sense they can talk with you, they will seek someone else who may not share your convictions.
- Spend time with your teens. Do the kinds of things they like to do. Give them your concentration. They'll never forget it.

This generation of youth, and all those to come, need parents and adults who demonstrate these qualities. When youth receive this kind of attention, our churches will benefit, our schools will benefit, our families will benefit, and our country will benefit. And, most importantly, I believe the Lord will be pleased.

Notes

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4. Steven J. Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798-1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1977), 17-25. Quoted in Schultze, *Dancing in the Dark*, 23.
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6. Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 243. Quoted in Schultze, *Dancing in the Dark*, 35.
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10. Dunn, x.
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13. Ibid., 16.
14. Barna, 18-21.
15. Jan Johnson, "Getting the Gospel to the Baby Busters," *Moody Monthly* (May 1995): 50.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 51.
18. Barna, 108-15.
19. Jay Kesler, *Ten Mistakes Parents Make With Teenagers (And How to Avoid Them)* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988).

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Teen Drug Abuse

A Nine Inch Nails album *The Downward Spiral* features a song "My Self Destruct" with the lyrics: "I am the needle in your vein and I control you, I am the high you can't sustain and I control you." Another song, "Hurt," explores drugs as a means of escape with lyrics like, "The needle tears a hole, the old familiar sting, try to kill it all away."

Five Dodge City, Kansas teenagers, high on marijuana, killed a stranger for no obvious reason. Three West Palm Beach, Florida teenagers mixed beer, rum, marijuana and cocaine. They then kidnapped and set ablaze a tourist from Brooklyn.

Nearly everywhere we look, the consequences of drug abuse can be seen. Violent street gangs, family violence, train crashes, the spread of AIDS, and babies born with cocaine dependency all testify to the pervasive influence of drugs in our world.

The statistics are staggering. The average age of first alcohol use is 12 and the average age of first drug use is 13.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 93 percent of all teenagers have some experience with alcohol by the end of their senior year of high school and 6 percent drink daily. Almost two-thirds of all American young people try illicit drugs before they finish high school. One out of sixteen seniors smokes marijuana daily and 20 percent have done so for at least a month sometime in their lives. A recent poll found that adolescents listed drugs as the most important problem facing people their age, followed by crime and violence in school and social pressures.

Drugs have changed the social landscape of America. Street gangs spring up nearly overnight looking for the enormous profits drugs can bring. Organized crime is also involved in setting up franchises that would make McDonald's envious. But these are not hamburgers. In the world of drugs, homicidally vicious gangs compete for market share with murderous results. Many gang members outgun the police with their weapons of choice: semi-automatic pistols, AK-47s, and Uzis. Drug dealers have also gone high tech using cellular phones and computers to keep track of deals, while their teenage runners wear phone beepers in school.

The Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) reports that children who abuse illicit drugs are significantly more likely to carry a gun to school, take part in gang activities, think of suicide, threaten harm to others, and get in trouble with the police than children who abstain.

One survey released by the University of Colorado shows that the problem of drug use is not just outside the church. The study involved nearly 14,000 junior high and high school youth and compared churched young people with unchurched young people and found very little difference. For example, 88 percent of the unchurched young people reported drinking beer as compared to 80 percent of churched young people. When asked how many had tried marijuana, 47 percent of the unchurched young people had done so compared to 38 percent of the

churched youth. For amphetamines and barbiturates, 28 percent of the unchurched had tried them while 22 percent of the church young people had tried them. And for cocaine use, the percentage was 14 percent for unchurched youths and 11 percent for churched youths.

Fighting drugs often seems futile. When drug dealers are arrested, they are often released prematurely because court dockets are overloaded. Plea bargaining and paroles are standard fare as the revolving doors of justice spin faster. As the casualties mount in this war against drugs, some commentators have begun to suggest that the best solution is to legalize drugs. But you don't win a war by surrendering. If drugs were legalized, addiction would increase, health costs would increase, and government would once again capitulate to societal pressures and shirk its responsibility to establish moral law.

But if legalization is not the answer, then something must be done about the abuse of drugs like alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and PCP. Just the medical cost of drug abuse was estimated by the National Center for Health Statistics to be nearly \$60 billion, and the medical bill for alcohol was nearly \$100 billion.

How to Fight the Drug Battle

Society must fight America's drug epidemic on five major fronts. The first battlefield is at the border. Federal agents must patrol the 8426 miles of deeply indented Florida coastline and a 2067 mile border with Mexico. This is a formidable task, but vast distances are not the only problem.

The smugglers they are up against have almost unlimited funds and some of the best equipment available. Fortunately, the federal interdiction forces (namely Customs, DEA, and INS) are improving their capability. Customs forces have been given an increase in officers and all are getting more sophisticated

equipment.

The second battlefield is law enforcement at home. Police must crack down with more arrests, more convictions, longer sentences, and more seizures of drug dealers' assets. Unfortunately, law enforcement successes pale when compared to the volume of drug traffic. Even the most effective crackdowns seem to do little more than move drugs from one location to another.

An effective weapon on this battlefield is a 1984 law that makes it easier to seize the assets of drug dealers before conviction. In some cities, police have even confiscated the cars of suburbanites who drive into the city to buy crack.

But attempts to deter drug dealing have been limited by flaws in the criminal justice system. A lack of jail cells prevents significant prosecution of drug dealers. And even if this problem were alleviated, the shortage of judges would still result in the quick release of drug pushers.

A third battlefield is drug testing. Many government and business organizations are implementing testing on a routine basis in order to reduce the demand for drugs.

The theory is simple. Drug testing is a greater deterrent to drug use than the remote possibility of going to jail. People who know they will have to pass a urine test in order to get a job are going to be much less likely to dabble in drugs. In 1980, 27 percent of some 20,000 military personnel admitted to using drugs in the previous 30 days. Five years later when drug testing was implemented, the proportion dropped to 9 percent.

But drug testing is not without its opponents. Civil libertarians feel this deterrent is not worth the loss of personal privacy. Some unions believe that random testing in the workplace would violate the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable searches. A fourth battleground is drug

treatment. Those who are addicted to drugs need help. But the major question is, Who should provide the treatment and who should foot the bill? Private hospital programs are now a \$4 billion-a-year business with a daily cost of as much as \$500 per bed per day. This is clearly out of the reach of many addicts who do not have employers or insurance companies who can pick up the costs.

A fifth battleground is education. Teaching children the dangers of drugs can be an important step in helping them to learn to say no to drugs. The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that 72 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary-school children are being given some kind of drug education.

Should We Legalize Drugs?

Those weary of the war on drugs have suggested that we should decriminalize drugs. Former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders suggested we study the impact of legalizing drugs. For years, an alliance of liberals and libertarians have promoted the idea that legalizing drugs would reduce drug costs and drug crimes in this country. But would it? Let's look at some of the arguments for drug legalization.

1. Legalization will take the profit out of the drug business.

As surprising as it may sound, relatively few drug dealers actually earn huge sums of money. Most in the crack business are low-level runners who make very little money. Many crack dealers smoke more crack than they sell. Drug cartels are the ones making the big profits.

Would legalizing drugs really affect large drug dealers or drug cartels in any appreciable way? Drug cartels would still control price and supply even if drugs were legalized in this country. If government set the price for legalized drugs, criminals could undercut the price and supply whatever the

government did not supply.

Addicts would not be significantly affected by legalization. Does anyone seriously believe that their behavior would change just because they are now using legal drugs instead of illegal drugs? They would still use theft and prostitution to support their habits.

Proponents also argue that legalizing drugs would reduce the cost of drugs and thus reduce the supply of drugs flowing to this country. Recent history suggests that just the opposite will take place. When cocaine first hit the United States, it was expensive and difficult to obtain. But when more was dumped into this country and readily available in less expensive vials of crack, drug addiction rose and drug-related crimes rose.

2. Drug legalization will reduce drug use.

Proponents argue that legalizing drugs will make them less appealing they will no longer be "forbidden fruit." However, logic and social statistics suggest that decriminalizing drugs will actually increase drug use.

Those arguing for the legalization of drugs often point to Prohibition as a failed social experiment. But was it? When Prohibition was in effect, alcohol consumption declined by 30 to 50 percent and death from cirrhosis of the liver fell dramatically. One study found that suicides and drug-related arrests also declined by 50 percent. After the repeal of the 18th amendment in 1933, alcoholism rose. So did alcohol-related crimes and accidents. If anything, Prohibition proves the point. Decriminalization increases drug use.

Comparing alcohol and drugs actually strengthens the argument against legalization since many drugs are even more addictive than alcohol. Consider, for example, the difference between

alcohol and cocaine. Alcohol has an addiction rate of approximately 10 percent, while cocaine has an addiction rate as high as 75 percent.

Many drugs are actually “gateway drugs” to other drugs. A 1992 article in The Journal of Primary Prevention found that marijuana is essentially a “necessary” condition for the occurrence of cocaine use. Other research shows that involvement with illicit drugs is a developmental phenomenon, age correlates with use, and cigarette and alcohol use precedes marijuana use.

Dr. Robert DuPont, former head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, argues that the potential market for legal drugs can be compared to the number of Americans who now use alcohol (140 million persons). If his analysis is correct, then approximately 50 million Americans would eventually use cocaine if it were a legal drug.

But the real question is not, Which is worse: alcohol or drugs? The question is whether we can accept both legalized alcohol and legalized drugs. Legalized alcohol currently leads to 100,000 deaths/year and costs us \$99 billion/year. We don't need to legalize drugs too.

3. Legalizing drugs will reduce social costs.

“We are losing the war on drugs,” say drug legalization proponents, “so let's cut the costs of drug enforcement by decriminalizing drugs.”

Currently the U.S. spends \$11 billion/year to combat drug-related crime. If drugs were made legal, some crime-fighting costs might drop but many social costs would certainly increase: other forms of crime (to support habits), drug-related accidents, and welfare costs.

Statistics from states that have decriminalized marijuana demonstrate this concern. In California, within the first six

months of decriminalization, arrests for driving under the influence of drugs rose 46 percent for adults and 71.4 percent for juveniles. The use of marijuana doubled in Alaska and Oregon when it was decriminalized in those states.

Crime would certainly increase. Justice Department figures show that approximately one-third of inmates used drugs prior to committing their crimes.

And juvenile crime would no doubt increase as well. A 1990 study published in the Journal of Drug Issues found a strong association between the severity of the crime and the type of substance used the more intoxicating the substance, the more serious the incident.

Meanwhile, worker productivity would decrease and student productivity would decrease.

The Drug Enforcement Administration estimates that drug decriminalization will cost society more than alcohol and tobacco combined, perhaps \$140-210 billion a year in lost productivity and job-related accidents.

Government services would no doubt have to be expanded to pay for additional drug education and treatment for those addicted to legal drugs. And child protective services would no doubt have to expand to deal with child abuse. Patrick Murphy, a court-appointed lawyer for 31,000 abused and neglected children in Chicago, says that more than 80 percent of the cases of physical and sexual abuse of children now involve drugs. Legalizing drugs will not reduce these crimes; it would make the problem worse.

And is it accurate to say we are losing the war on drugs? Drug use in this country was on the decline in the 1980s due to a strong anti-drug campaign. Casual cocaine use, for example, dropped from 12 million in 1985 to 6 million in 1991. You don't win a war by surrender. Legalizing drugs in this country would constitute surrender in the drug war at a time when we

have substantial evidence we can win this battle on a number of fronts.

4. Government should not dictate moral policy on drugs.

Libertarians who promote drug legalization value personal freedom. They believe that government should not dictate morals and fear that our civil liberties may be threatened by a tougher policy against drugs.

The true threat to our freedoms comes from the drug cartels in foreign countries, drug lords in this country, and drug dealers in our streets. Legalizing drugs would send the wrong message to society. Those involved in drug use eventually see that drugs ultimately lead to prison or death, so they begin to seek help.

Obviously some people are going to use drugs whether they are legal or illegal. Keeping drugs illegal maintains criminal sanctions that persuade most people their life is best lived without drugs. Legalization, on the other hand, removes the incentive to stay away from drugs and increases drug use.

William Bennett has said, "I didn't have to become drug czar to be opposed to legalized marijuana. As Secretary of Education I realized that, given the state of American education, the last thing we needed was a policy that made widely available a substance that impairs memory, concentration, and attention span. Why in God's name foster the use of a drug that makes you stupid?"

Biblical Perspective

Some people may believe that the Bible has little to say about drugs, but this is not so. First, the Bible has a great deal to say about the most common and most abused drug: alcohol. Ephesians 5:18 admonishes Christians not to be drunk with wine. In many places in Scripture drunkenness is called a sin (Deut. 21:20-21, Amos 6:1, 1 Cor.6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-20). The

Bible also warns of the dangers of drinking alcohol in Proverbs 20:1, Isaiah 5:11, Habakkuk 2:15-16. If the Bible warns of the danger of alcohol, then by implication it is also warning of the dangers of taking other kinds of drugs.

Second, drugs were an integral part of many ancient near East societies. For example, the pagan cultures surrounding the nation of Israel used drugs as part of their religious ceremonies. Both the Old Testament and New Testament condemn sorcery and witchcraft. The word translated "sorcery" comes from the Greek word from which we get the English words "pharmacy" and "pharmaceutical." In ancient time, drugs were prepared by a witch or shaman.

Drugs were used to enter into the spiritual world by inducing an altered state of consciousness that allowed demons to take over the mind of the user. In that day, drug use was tied to sorcery. In our day, many use drugs merely for so-called "recreational" purposes, but we cannot discount the occult connection.

Galatians 5:19-21 says: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft [which includes the use of drugs]; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." The word witchcraft here is also translated "sorcery" and refers to the use of drugs. The Apostle Paul calls witchcraft that was associated with drug use a sin. The non-medical use of drugs is considered one of the acts of a sinful nature. Using drugs, whether to "get a high" or to tap into the occult, is one of the acts of a sinful nature where users demonstrate their depraved and carnal nature.

The psychic effects of drugs should not be discounted. A questionnaire designed by Charles Tate and sent to users of

marijuana documented some disturbing findings. In his article in *Psychology Today* he noted that one fourth of the marijuana users who responded to his questionnaire reported that they were taken over and controlled by an evil person or power during their drug induced experience. And over half of those questioned said they have experienced religious or “spiritual” sensations in which they meet spiritual beings.

Many proponents of the drug culture have linked drug use to spiritual values. During the 1960s, Timothy Leary and Alan Watts referred to the “religious” and “mystical” experience gained through the use of LSD (along with other drugs) as a prime reason for taking drugs.

No doubt drugs are dangerous, not only to our body but to our spirit. As Christians, we must warn our children and our society of the dangers of drugs.

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Feminist Myths

As someone who works in the media, I am well aware that certain myths get started and have a life of their own. A number of these myths are promoted and disseminated by feminists and can be found in the book *Who Stole Feminism?* The author, Christina Hoff Sommers, though a feminist, has been concerned for some time about the prominence of these myths and does a masterful job tracing down the origin of each and setting the record straight. If you want more information on any of these, I would recommend you obtain her well-documented book.

Myth of the Extent of Anorexia Nervosa

In her book *Revolution from Within*, Gloria Steinem informed her readers that "in this country alone...about 150,000 females die of anorexia each year." To put this dramatic statistic in perspective, this is more than three times the annual number of fatalities from car accidents for the total population. The only problem with the statistic is that it is absolutely false.

Lest you think that this was a mere typographical error, consider the following. The statistic also appears in the feminist best-seller *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf. "How," she asks, "would America react to the mass self-immolation by hunger of its favorite sons?" While admitting that "nothing justifies comparison with the Holocaust," she nevertheless makes just such a comparison. "When confronted with a vast number of emaciated bodies starved not by nature but by men, one must notice a certain resemblance."

What was the source of this statistic? Ms. Wolf got her figures from *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* by Joan Brumberg, a historian and former director of women's studies at Cornell University. It turns out that she misquoted the American Anorexia and Bulimia Association which had stated that there are 150,000 to 200,000 sufferers (not fatalities) of anorexia nervosa. The actual figure is many orders of magnitude lower. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, there were 70 deaths from anorexia in 1990. Even 70 deaths is tragic, but 70 deaths out of population of over 100 million women can hardly be considered a holocaust.

Apparently Naomi Wolf plans to revise her figures in an updated version of *The Beauty Myth*, but the figure is now widely accepted as true. Ann Landers repeated it in her 1992 column by stating that "every year, 150,000 American women die from complications associated with anorexia and bulimia." The

false statistic has also made it into college textbooks. A women's studies text, aptly titled *The Knowledge Explosion*, contains the erroneous figure in its preface.

Myth of Amount of Domestic Violence

On November 1992, Deborah Louis, president of the National Women's Studies Association, sent a message to the Women's Studies Electronic Bulletin Board. It read, "According to [the] last March of Dimes report, domestic violence (vs. pregnant women) is now responsible for more birth defects than all other causes combined." On February 23, 1993, Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women, said on the Charlie Rose program that "battery of pregnant women is the number one cause of birth defects in this country."

Certainly unsettling data. But again, the biggest problem is that the statistic is absolutely false. The March of Dimes never published the study and did not know of any research that corroborated the statement.

Nevertheless, journalists willingly recited the erroneous statistic. The *Boston Globe* reported that "domestic violence is the leading cause of birth defects, more than all other medical causes combined, according to a March of Dimes study." The *Dallas Morning News* reported that "the March of Dimes has concluded that the battering of women during pregnancy causes more birth defects than all the diseases put together for which children are usually immunized."

When *Time* magazine published essentially the same article, the rumor started spinning out of control. Concerned citizens and legislators called the March of Dimes for the study. Eventually the error was traced to Sarah Buel, a founder of the domestic violence advocacy project at Harvard Law School. She misunderstood a statement made by a nurse who noted that a March of Dimes study showed that more women are screened for

birth defects than they are for domestic battery. The nurse never said anything about battery causing birth defects.

Although we could merely chalk this error up to a misunderstanding, it is disturbing that so many newspapers and magazines reported it uncritically. Battery causing birth defects? More than genetic disorders like spina bifida, Downs syndrome, Tay-Sachs, sickle-cell anemia? More than alcohol, crack, or AIDS? Where was the press in checking the facts? Why are feminist myths so easily repeated in the press?

Myth of Increased Domestic Battery on Super Bowl Sunday

In January 1993 newspaper and television networks reported an alarming statistic. They stated that the incidence of domestic violence tended to rise by 40 percent on Super Bowl Sunday. NBC, which was broadcasting the game, made a special plea for men to stay calm. Feminists called for emergency preparations in anticipation of the expected increase in violence.

Feminists also used the occasion to link maleness and violence against women. Nancy Isaac, a Harvard School of Public Health research associate specializing in domestic violence, told the Boston Globe: "It's a day for men to revel in their maleness and unfortunately, for a lot of men that includes being violent toward women if they want to be."

Nearly every journalist accepted the 40 percent figure—except for Ken Ringle at the *Washington Post*. He checked the facts and was able to expose the myth, but not before millions of Americans were indoctrinated with the feminist myth of male aggression during Super Bowl Sunday.

Myth Concerning Percent of Women Raped

The Justice Department says that 8 percent of all American women will be victims of rape or attempted rape in their

lifetime. Feminist legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon, however, claims that rape happens to almost half of all women at least once in their lives.

Who is right? Obviously, the difference between these two statistics stems from a number of factors ranging from under-reporting to very different definitions of rape. The Justice Department figure is obviously low since it is based on the number of cases reported to the police, and rape is the most under-reported of crimes.

The feminist figures are artificially high because they use very broad definitions of rape and let the questioner rather than the victim decide whether there was a rape or not. The two most frequently cited studies are the 1985 *Ms.* magazine study and the 1992 National Women's Study. The *Ms.* magazine study of 3,000 college students gave a statistic of about 1 in 4 for women who have been raped or victim of an attempted rape. However, the study used very broad definitions of rape which sometimes included kissing, fondling, and other activities that few people would call rape. In fact, only 27 percent of those women counted as having been raped actually labeled themselves as rape victims. Also, 42 percent of those counted as rape victims went on to have sex with their "attackers" on a later occasion.

The National Women's Study released a figure of 1 in 8 women who have been raped. Again the surveyors used extremely broad, expanded definitions of rape that allowed the surveyor to decide if a woman had been raped or not.

The statistics for "date rape" and rape on campus have also been exaggerated. Camille Paglia warns that "date rape has swelled into a catastrophic cosmic event, like an asteroid threatening the earth in a fifties science-fiction film." Contrast this with the date-rape hype on most college campuses that includes rallies, marches, and date-rape counseling groups.

Peter Hellman, writing for New York magazine on the subject of rape on campus, was surprised to find that campus police logs at Columbia University showed no evidence of rape on campus. Only two rapes were reported to the Columbia campus police, and in both cases, the charges were dropped for lack of evidence. Hellman checked figures for other campuses and found fewer than .5 rapes per campus. He also found that public monies were being spent disproportionately on campus rape programs while community rape programs were scrambling for dollars.

The high rape numbers serve gender feminists by promoting the belief that American culture is sexist and misogynist. They also help liberal politicians by providing justification for additional funding for social services. Senator Joseph Biden introduced the Violence Against Women Act to "raise the consciousness of the American public." He argues that violence against women is much like racial violence and calls for civil as well as criminal remedies.

Myth Concerning Female Self-esteem

In 1991, newspapers around the country proclaimed that the self-esteem of teenage girls was falling. The *New York Times* announced, "Little girls lose their self-esteem on way to adolescence, study finds."

The study was commissioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to measure self-esteem of girls and boys between the ages of nine and fifteen. Their poll seemed to show that between the ages of eleven and sixteen, girls experience a dramatic drop in self-esteem, which in turn significantly affects their ability to learn and to achieve. The report made headlines around the country and led to hundreds of conferences and community action projects.

Here is how the AAUW summarized the results of the survey in their brochure: In a crucial measure of self-esteem, 60

percent of elementary school girls and 69 percent of elementary school boys say they are “happy the way I am.” But, by high school, girls’ self-esteem falls 31 points to only 29 percent, while boys’ self-esteem falls only 23 points to 46 percent.

Girls are less likely than boys to say they are “pretty good at a lot of things.” Less than a third of girls express this confidence, compared to almost half the boys. A 10-point gender gap in confidence in their abilities increases to 19 points in high school.

It turns out that the report didn’t even define the term self-esteem, or even promote an informal discussion of what the authors meant by it. Other researchers suspect that the apparent gap in self-esteem may merely reflect a gap in expressiveness. Girls and women are more aware of their feelings and more articulate in expressing them, and so they are more candid about their negative emotions in self-reports than males are.

When asked if they are “good at a lot of things,” boys more often answered, “all the time,” whereas girls, being more reflective, gave more nuanced answers (“some of the time” or “usually”). Although the surveyors decided that the girls’ response showed poor self-esteem, it may merely reflect a “maturity gap” between boys and girls. Boys, lacking maturity, reflectiveness, and humility, are more likely to answer the question as “always true.”

Myth of Discrimination Against Females in School

An American Association of University Women (AAUW) report argued that schools and teachers were biased against girls in the classroom. *The Wellesley Report*, published in 1992, argued that there was a gender bias in education. The *Boston Globe* proclaimed that “from the very first days in school, American

girls face a drum-fire of gender bias, ranging from sexual harassment to discrimination in the curriculum to lack of attention from teachers, according to a survey released today in Washington." The release of this study was again followed by great media attention and the convening of conferences. It also provided the intellectual ammunition for the "Gender Equity in Education" bill introduced in 1993 by Patricia Schroeder, Susan Molinari, and others. It would have established a permanent and well-funded gender equity bureaucracy.

Are women really being damaged by our school system? Today 55 percent of college students are female, and women receive 52 percent of the bachelor's degrees. Yes, girls seem somewhat behind in math and science, but those math and science test differentials are small compared with the large differentials favoring girls in reading and writing.

The study also assumed that teachers' verbal interactions with students indicated how much they valued them. The surveyors therefore deduced that teachers valued boys more than girls. However, teachers often give more attention to boys because they are more immature and require the teacher to keep them in line. Most girls, being more mature, don't want the attention or verbal discipline and need less negative attention to get their work done.

Myth of Huge Gender Wage Gap

A major rallying cry during the debates on comparable worth was that women make 59 cents for every dollar men do. The figure is now 71 cents. But if you factor in age, length of time in the workplace, and type of job, the wage gap is much smaller for younger women. Those with children tend to make slightly less than those without children, but it's closer to 90 cents.

Feminists argue that the pay gap is a vivid illustration of

discrimination. Economists argue that it's due to shorter work weeks and less workplace experience. It is no doubt also due to the kind of jobs women choose. Women generally prefer clean, safe places with predictable hours and less stress. The more dangerous, dirty, and high-pressure jobs generally appeal to men. This is reflected in salary differences.

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Violence in Society

Kerby Anderson helps us take a biblical perspective on a very scary and touchy issue: violence in America. Applying a Christian worldview, he shines the spotlight on areas of today's culture that should concern us all.

It's a scary world today!

Growing up used to be less traumatic just a few decades ago. Children back then worried about such things as a flat tire on their Schwinn and hoped that their teacher wouldn't give too much homework.

How life has changed. A 1994 poll found more than half the children questioned said they were afraid of violent crime against them or a family member. Are these kids just paranoid, or is there a real problem?

Well, it turns out this is not some irrational fear based upon a false perception of danger. Life has indeed become more violent and more dangerous for children. Consider the following statistics: One in six youths between the ages of 10 and 17 has seen or knows someone who has been shot. The

estimated number of child abuse victims increased 40 percent between 1985 and 1991. Children under 18 were 244 percent more likely to be killed by guns in 1993 than they were in 1986. Violent crime has increased by more than 560 percent since 1960.

The innocence of childhood has been replaced by the very real threat of violence. Kids in school try to avoid fights in the hall, walk home in fear, and sometimes sleep in bathtubs in order to protect themselves from stray bullets fired during drive-by shootings.

Even families living in so-called "safe" neighborhoods are concerned. They may feel safe today, but there is always a reminder that violence can intrude at any moment. Polly Klaas and her family no doubt felt safe in Petaluma, California. But on October 1, 1993, she was abducted from her suburban home during a sleepover with two friends. If she can be abducted and murdered, so can nearly any other child.

A child's exposure to violence is pervasive. Children see violence in their schools, their neighborhoods, and their homes. The daily news is rife with reports of child molestations and abductions. War in foreign lands along with daily reports of murder, rape, and robberies also heighten a child's perception of potential violence.

Television in the home is the greatest source of visual violence for children. The average child watches 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school. That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age 18.

And the latest scourge is MTV. Teenagers listen to more than 10,000 hours of rock music, and this impact is intensified as they spend countless hours in front of MTV watching violent and sensual images that go far beyond the images shown on commercial television.

It's a scary world, and children are exposed to more violence than any generation in recent memory. An article in *Newsweek* magazine concluded: "It gets dark early in the Midwest this time of year. Long before many parents are home from work, the shadows creep up the walls and gather in the corners, while on the carpet a little figure sprawls in the glow emanating from an anchorman's tan. There's been a murder in the Loop, a fire in a nightclub, an indictment of another priest. Red and white lights swirl in urgent pinwheels as the ambulances howl down the dark streets. And one more crime that never gets reported, because there's no one to arrest. Who killed childhood? We all did."

"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he."

Violence has always been a part of the human condition because of our sin nature (Rom. 3:23). But modern families are exposed to even more violence than previous generations because of the media. Any night of the week, the average viewer can see levels of violence approaching and even exceeding the Roman Gladiator games.

Does this have an effect? Certainly it does. The Bible teaches that "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). What we view and what we think about affects our actions.

Defenders of television programs say that isn't true. They contend that televised imagery doesn't make people violent nor does it make people callous to suffering. But if televised imagery doesn't affect human behavior, then the TV networks should refund billions of advertising dollars to TV sponsors.

In essence, TV executives are talking out of both sides of their mouths. On the one hand, they try to convince advertisers that a 30-second commercial can influence consumer behavior. On the other hand, they deny that a one-hour program wrapped around the commercials can influence social behavior.

So, how violent is the media? And what impact does media have on members of our family? First, we will look at violence in the movies, and then we'll take up the issue of violence on television.

Ezra Pound once said that artists are "the antennae of the race." If that is so, then we are a very sick society judging by the latest fare of violence in the movies. The body count is staggering: 32 people are killed in "RoboCop," while 81 are killed in the sequel; 264 are killed in "Die Hard 2," and the film "Silence of the Lambs" deals with a psychopath who murders women and skins them.

Who would have imagined just a few years ago that the top grossing films would be replete with blood, gore, and violence? No wonder some film critics now say that the most violent place on earth is the Hollywood set.

Violence has always been a part of movie-making, but until recently, really violent movies were only seen by the fringe of mass culture. Violence now has gone mainstream. Bloody films are being watched by more than just punk rockers. Family station wagons and vans pull up to movie theaters showing R-rated slasher films. And middle America watches these same programs a few months later on cable TV or on video. Many of the movies seen at home wouldn't have been shown in theaters 10-20 years ago.

Movie violence these days is louder, bloodier, and more anatomically precise than ever before. When a bad guy was shot in a black-and-white Western, the most we saw was a puff of smoke and a few drops of fake blood. Now the sights, sounds, and special effects often jar us more than the real thing. Slow motion, pyrotechnics, and a penchant for leaving nothing to the imagination all conspire to make movies and TV shows more gruesome than ever.

Children especially confront an increasingly violent world

with few limits. As concerned parents and citizens we must do what we can to reduce the level of violence in our society through the wise use of discernment and public policy. We need to set limits both in our homes and in the community.

Does Media Violence Really Influence Human Behavior?

Children's greatest exposure to violence comes from television. TV shows, movies edited for television, and video games expose young children to a level of violence unimaginable just a few years ago. The average child watches 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school. That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age 18.

The violent content of TV includes more than just the 22 minute programs sent down by the networks. At a very young age, children are seeing a level of violence and mayhem that in the past may have only been witnessed by a few police officers and military personnel. TV brings hitting, kicking, stabbings, shootings, and dismemberment right into homes on a daily basis.

The impact on behavior is predictable. Two prominent Surgeon General reports in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a 94-page report entitled, "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties." They found "overwhelming" scientific evidence that "excessive" violence on television spills over into the playground and the streets. In one five-year study of 732 children, "several kinds of aggression— conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency—were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing."

Long-term studies are even more disturbing. University of

Illinois psychologist Leonard Eron studied children at age eight and then again at eighteen. He found that television habits established at the age of eight influenced aggressive behavior through childhood and adolescent years. The more violent the programs preferred by boys in the third grade, the more aggressive their behavior, both at that time and ten years later. He therefore concluded that "the effect of television violence on aggression is cumulative."

Twenty years later Eron and Rowell Huesmann found the pattern continued. He and his researchers found that children who watched significant amounts of TV violence at the age of 8 were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at 30.

They concluded "that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence."

Since their report in the 1980s, MTV has come on the scene with even more troubling images. Adolescents already listen to an estimated 10,500 hours of rock music between the 7th and 12th grades. Now they also spend countless hours in front of MTV seeing the visual images of rock songs that depict violence, rebellion, sadomasochism, the occult, drug abuse, and promiscuity. MTV reaches 57 million cable households, and its video images are even more lurid than the ones shown on regular TV. Music videos filled with sex, rape, murder, and other images of mayhem assault the senses. And MTV cartoons like Beavis and "the other guy" assault the sensibilities while enticing young people to start fires and commit other acts of violence. Critics count 18 acts of violence in each hour of MTV videos.

Violent images on television and in the movies do contribute to greater violence in society. Sociological studies along

with common sense dictate that we do something to reduce the violence in the media before it further damages society.

Television Promotes Not Only Violence But Fear As Well.

Children see thousands of TV murders every year. And the impact on behavior is predictable. Various reports by the Surgeon General in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a 94-page report entitled, "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties." They found "overwhelming" scientific evidence that "excessive" violence on television spills over into the playground and the streets. In one five-year study of 732 children, "several kinds of aggression (such as conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency) were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing."

Confronted with such statistics, many parents respond that their children aren't allowed to watch violent programs. Such action is commendable, but some of the greatest dangers of television are more subtle and insidious. It now appears that simply watching television for long periods can manipulate your view of the world— whether the content is particularly violent or not.

George Gerbner and Larry Gross working at the Annenberg School of Communications in the 1970s found that heavy TV viewers live in a scary world. "We have found that people who watch a lot of TV see the real world as more dangerous and frightening than those who watch very little. Heavy viewers are less trustful of their fellow citizens, and more fearful of the real world."

So heavy viewers were less trustful and more fearful than the average citizen. But what constitutes a heavy viewer. Gerber

and Gross defined heavy viewers as those adults who watch an average of four or more hours of television a day. Approximately one-third of all American adults fit that category.

They found that violence on prime-time TV exaggerated heavy viewers' fears about the threat of danger in the real world. Heavy viewers, for example, were less likely to trust someone than light viewers. Heavy viewers also tended to overestimate their likelihood of being involved in a violent crime.

And if this is true of adults, imagine how much TV violence affects children's perception of the world. Gerbner and Gross say, "Imagine spending six hours a day at the local movie house when you were 12 years old. No parent would have permitted it. Yet, in our sample of children, nearly half the 12-year-olds watch an average of six or more hours of television per day." This would mean that a large portion of young people fit into the category of heavy viewers. Their view of the world must be profoundly shaped by TV. Gerbner and Gross therefore conclude: "If adults can be so accepting of the reality of television, imagine its effect on children. By the time the average American child reaches public school, he has already spent several years in an electronic nursery school."

Television violence affects both adults and children in subtle ways. While we may not personally feel or observe the effects of TV violence, we should not ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perception and behavior.

Obviously something must be done. Parents, programmers, and general citizens must take responsible actions to prevent the increasing violence in our society. Violent homes, violence on television, violence in the movies, violence in the schools all contribute to the increasingly violent society we live in. We have a responsibility to make a difference and apply the

appropriate principles in order to help stem the tide of violence in our society.

Some Suggestions for Dealing with Violence in the Media

Christians must address this issue of violence in our society. Here are a number of specific suggestions for dealing with violence.

1. Learn about the impact of violence in our society. Share this material with your pastor, elders, deacons, and church members. Help them understand how important this issue is to them and their community.

2. Create a safe environment. Families live in the midst of violence. We must make our homes safe for our families. A child should feel that his or her world is safe. Providing care and protection are obvious first steps. But parents must also establish limits, provide emotional security, and teach values and virtue in the home.

3. Parents should limit the amount of media exposure in their homes. The average young person sees entirely too much violence on TV and at the movies. Set limits to what a child watches, and evaluate both the quantity and quality of their media input (Rom. 12:2). Focus on what is pure, beautiful, true, right, honorable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

4. Watch TV with children. Obviously we should limit the amount of TV our children watch. But when they watch television, we should try to watch it with them. We can encourage discussion with children during the programs. The plots and actions of the programs provides a natural context for discussion and teach important principles about relationships and violence. The discussion could focus on how cartoon characters or TV actors could solve their problems

without resorting to violence. TV often ignores the consequences of violence. What are the consequences in real life?

5. Develop children's faith and trust in God. Children at an early age instinctively trust their parents. As the children grow, parents should work to develop their child's trust in God. God is sovereign and omnipotent. Children should learn to trust Him in their lives and depend upon Him to watch over them and keep them safe.

6. Discuss the reasons for pain and suffering in the world. We live in the fallen world (Gen. 3), and even those who follow God will encounter pain, suffering, and violence. Bad things do happen to good people.

7. Teach vigilance without hysteria. By talking about the dangers in society, some parents have instilled fear—even terror—in their children. We need to balance our discussions with them and not make them hysterical. Kids have been known to become hysterical if a car comes down their street or if someone looks at them.

8. Work to establish broadcaster guidelines. No TV or movie producer wants to unilaterally disarm all the actors on their screens out of fear that viewers will watch other programs and movies. Yet many of these same TV and movie producers would like to tone down the violence, but they don't want to be the first to do so. National standards would be able to achieve what individuals would not do by themselves in a competitive market.

Violence is the scourge of our society, but we can make a difference. We must educate ourselves about its influence and impact on our lives. Please feel free to write or call Probe Ministries for more information on this topic. And then take time to apply the principles developed here to make a difference in your home and community. You can help stem the

tide of violence in our society.

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The Teen Sexual Revolution – Abstinence Programs Are The Only Biblical Response

Kerby Anderson considers the real problems created by the new American attitude extolling the virtues of teen sexual activity. He examines the effectiveness of various programs designed to stem the tide of teen sexual activity. He concludes the only reasonable approach is teaching the reasons for and benefits of abstinence prior to marriage.

One of the low points in television history occurred September 25, 1991. The program was “Doogie Howser, M.D.” This half-hour TV show, aimed at preteen and teenage kids, focused on the trials and tribulations of an 18-year-old child prodigy who graduated from medical school and was in the midst of medical practice. Most programs dealt with the problems of being a kid in an adult’s profession. But on September 25 the “problem” Doogie Howser confronted was the fact that he was still a virgin.

Advance publicity drove the audience numbers to unanticipated levels. Millions of parents, teenagers, and pajama-clad kids sat down in front of their televisions to watch Doogie Howser and his girlfriend Wanda deal with his “problem.” Twenty minutes into the program, they completed the act. Television

ratings went through the roof. Parents and advertisers should have as well.

What is wrong with this picture? Each day approximately 7700 teenagers relinquish their virginity. In the process, many will become pregnant and many more will contract a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Already 1 in 4 Americans have an STD, and this percentage is increasing each year. Weren't the producers of "Doogie Howser, M.D." aware that teenage pregnancy and STDs are exploding in the population? Didn't they stop and think of the consequences of portraying virginity as a "problem" to be rectified? Why weren't parents and advertisers concerned about the message this program was sending?

Perhaps the answer is the trite, age-old refrain "everybody's doing it." Every television network and nearly every TV program deals with sensuality. Sooner or later the values of every other program were bound to show up on a TV program aimed at preteens and teenagers. In many ways the media is merely reflecting a culture that was transformed by a sexual revolution of values. Sexually liberal elites have hijacked our culture by seizing control of two major arenas. The first is the entertainment media (television, movies, rock music, MTV). The second is the area of sex education (sex education classes and school-based clinics). These two forces have transformed the social landscape of America and made promiscuity a virtue and virginity a "problem" to be solved.

The Teenage Sexuality Crisis

We face a teenage sexuality crisis in America. Consider these alarming statistics of children having children. A New York Times article reported: "Some studies indicate three-fourths of all girls have had sex during their teenage years and 15 percent have had four or more partners." A Lou Harris poll commissioned by Planned Parenthood discovered that 46 percent of 16-year-olds and 57 percent of 17-year-olds have had sexual

intercourse.

Former Secretary of Education William Bennett in speaking to the National School Board Association warned that “The statistics by which we measure how our children how our boys and girls are treating one another sexually are little short of staggering.” He found that more than one-half of America’s young people have had sexual intercourse by the time they are seventeen. He also found that more than one million teenage girls in the U.S. become pregnant each year. Of those who give birth, nearly half are not yet eighteen.

“These numbers,” William Bennett concluded, “are an irrefutable indictment of sex education’s effectiveness in reducing teenage sexual activity and pregnancies.” Moreover, these numbers are not skewed by impoverished, inner city youths from broken homes. One New York polling firm posed questions to 1300 students in 16 high schools in suburban areas in order to get a reading of “mainstream” adolescent attitudes. They discovered:

- *57% lost virginity in high school*
- *79% lost virginity by the end of college*
- *16.9 average age for sex*
- *33% of high school students had sex once a month to once a week*
- *52% of college students had sex once a month to once a week.*

Kids are trying sex at an earlier age than ever before. More than a third of 15-year-old boys have had sexual intercourse as have 27 percent of the 15-year-old girls. Among sexually active teenage girls, 61 percent have had multiple partners. The reasons for such early sexual experimentation are many.

Biology is one reason. Teenagers are maturing faster sexually

due to better health and nutrition. Since the turn of the century, for example, the onset of menstruation in girls has dropped three months each decade. Consequently, urges that used to arise in the mid-teens now explode in the early teens. Meanwhile the typical age of first marriage has risen more than four years since the 1950s.

A sex-saturated society is another reason. Sex is used to sell everything from cars to toothpaste. Sexual innuendos clutter most every TV program and movie. And explicit nudity and sensuality that used to be reserved for R-rated movies has found its way into the home through broadcast and cable television. Media researchers calculate that teenagers see approximately five hours of TV a day. This means that they see each year nearly 14,000 sexual encounters on television alone.

Lack of parental supervision and direction is a third reason. Working parents and reductions in after-school programs have left teenagers with less supervision and a looser after-school life. In the inner city, the scarcity of jobs and parents coupled with a cynical view of the future invites teenage promiscuity and its inevitable consequences. Adolescent boys in the suburbs trying to prove their masculinity, herd into groups like the infamous score-keeping Spur Posse gang in California.

Even when teenagers want to sit out the sexual revolution, they often get little help from parents who may be too embarrassed or intimidated to talk to their children. Parents, in fact, often lag behind their kids in sexual information. At one sex-education workshop held by Girls Inc. (formerly Girls Club of America), nearly half of the mothers had never seen a condom. Other mothers did not want to talk about sex because they were molested as children and were fearful of talking about sex with their daughters.

Teenagers are also getting mixed messages. In any given week, they are likely to hear contradictory messages. "No sex until

you're married." "No sex unless you're older." "No sex unless you're protected." "No sex unless you're in love." No wonder adolescents are confused.

The Report Card on Sex Education

For more than thirty years proponents of comprehensive sex education have told us that giving sexual information to young children and adolescents will reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. In that effort nearly \$3 billion has been spent on federal Title X family planning services, yet teenage pregnancies and abortions rise.

Perhaps one of the most devastating popular critiques of comprehensive sex education came from Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. The journalist who said that Dan Quayle was right also was willing to say that sex education was wrong. Her article in the October 1994 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* entitled "The Failure of Sex Education" demonstrated that sex education neither reduced pregnancy nor slowed the spread of STDs.

Comprehensive sex education is mandated in at least 17 states, so Whitehead chose one state and focused her analysis on the sex education experiment in New Jersey. Like other curricula the New Jersey sex education program rests on certain questionable assumptions.

The first tenet is that children are "sexual from birth." Sex educators reject the classic notion of a latency period until approximately age twelve. They argue that you are "being sexual when you throw your arms around your grandpa and give him a hug."

Second, sex educators hold that children are sexually miseducated. Parents, in their view, have simply not done their job, so we need "professionals" to do it right. Parents try to protect their children, fail to affirm their sexuality, and even discuss sexuality in a context of moralizing. The

media, they say, is also guilty of providing sexual misinformation.

Third, if miseducation is the problem, then sex education in the schools is the solution. Parents are failing miserably at the task, so "it is time to turn the job over to the schools. Schools occupy a safe middle ground between Mom and MTV."

Learning About Family Life is the curriculum used in New Jersey. While it discusses such things as sexual desire, AIDS, divorce, condoms, and masturbation, it nearly ignores such issues as abstinence, marriage, self-control, and virginity. One technique promoted to prevent pregnancy and STDs is noncoital sex, or what some sex educators call outercourse. Yet there is good evidence to suggest that teaching teenagers to explore their sexuality through noncoital techniques will lead to coitus. Ultimately, outercourse will lead to intercourse.

Whitehead concludes that comprehensive sex education has been a failure. For example, the percent of teenage births to unwed mothers was 67 percent in 1980 and rose to 84 percent in 1991. In the place of this failed curriculum, Whitehead describes a better program. She found that "sex education works best when it combines clear messages about behavior with strong moral and logistical support for the behavior sought." One example she cites is the *Postponing Sexual Involvement* program at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, which offers more than a "Just Say No" message. It reinforces the message by having adolescents practice the desired behavior and enlists the aid of older teenagers to teach younger teenagers how to resist sexual advances. Whitehead also found that "religiously observant teens" are less likely to experiment sexually, thus providing an opportunity for church-related programs to stem the tide of teenage pregnancy. The results of Whitehead's research are clear: abstinence is still the best form of sex education.

Is “Safe Sex” Really Safe?

At the 1987 World Congress of Sexologists, Theresa Crenshaw asked the audience, “If you had the available partner of your dreams and knew that person carried HIV, how many of you would have sex depending on a condom for your protection?” When they were asked for a show of hands, none of the 800 members of the audience indicated that they would trust the condoms. If condoms do not eliminate the fear of HIV-infection for sexologists and sex educators, why do we encourage the children of America to play STD Russian Roulette?

Are condoms a safe and effective way to reduce pregnancy and STDs? To listen to sex educators you would think so. Every day sex education classes throughout this country promote condoms as a means of safe sex or at least safer sex. But the research on condoms provides no such guarantee.

For example, Texas researcher Susan Weller writing in the 1993 issue of *Social Science Medicine*, evaluated all research published prior to July 1990 on condom effectiveness. She reported that condoms are only 87 percent effective in preventing pregnancy and 69 percent effective in reducing the risk of HIV infection. This translates into a 31 failure rate in preventing AIDS transmission. And according to a study in the 1992 *Family Planning Perspectives*, 15 percent of married couples who use condoms for birth control end up with an unplanned pregnancy within the first year.

So why has condom distribution become the centerpiece of the U.S. AIDS policy and the most frequently promoted aspect of comprehensive sex education? For many years, the answer to that question was an a priori commitment to condoms and a safe sex message over an abstinence message. But in recent years, sex educators and public health officials have been pointing to one study which appeared to vindicate the condom policy.

The study was presented at the Ninth International Conference

on AIDS held in Berlin on June 9, 1993. The study involved 304 couples with one partner who was HIV positive. Of the 123 couples who used condoms with each act of sexual intercourse, not a single negative HIV partner became positive. So proponents of condom distribution thought they had scientific vindication for their views.

Unfortunately that is not the whole story. Condoms do appear to be effective in stopping the spread of AIDS when used "correctly and consistently." Most individuals, however, do not use them "correctly and consistently." What happens to them? Well, it turns out that part of the study received much less attention. Of 122 couples who could not be taught to use condoms properly, 12 became HIV positive in both partners. Undoubtedly over time, even more partners would contract AIDS.

How well does this study apply to the general population? I would argue the couples in the study group were quite dissimilar from the general population. For example, they knew the HIV status of their spouse and therefore had a vested interest in protecting themselves. They were responsible partners and in a committed monogamous relationship. In essence, their actions and attitudes differ dramatically from teenagers and single adults who do not know the HIV status of their partners, are often reckless, and have multiple sexual partners.

Contrary to popular belief, condoms are not as reliable as public health pronouncements might lead you to think. Abstinence is still the only safe sex.

Only Abstinence-Only Programs Really Work

Less than a decade ago, an abstinence-only program was rare in the public schools. Today directive abstinence programs can be found in many school districts while battles are fought in other school districts for their inclusion or removal. While proponents of abstinence programs run for school board or

influence existing school board members, groups like Planned Parenthood bring lawsuits against districts that use abstinence-based curricula arguing that they are inaccurate or incomplete. At least a dozen abstinence-based curricula are on the market, with the largest being *Sex Respect* (Bradley, Illinois) and *Teen-Aid* (Spokane, Washington).

The emergence of abstinence-only programs as an alternative to comprehensive sex education programs was due to both popularity and politics. Parents concerned about the ineffectiveness of the safe sex message eagerly embraced the message of abstinence. And political funding helped spread the message and legitimize its educational value. The Adolescent Family Life Act enacted in 1981 by the Reagan Administration created Title XX and set aside \$2 million a year for the development and implementation of abstinence-based programs. Although the Clinton Administration later cut funding for abstinence programs, the earlier funding in the 1980s helped groups like *Sex Respect* and *Teen-Aid* launch abstinence programs in the schools.

Parents and children have embraced the abstinence message in significant numbers. One national poll by the University of Chicago found that 68 percent of adults surveyed said premarital sex among teenagers is "always wrong." A 1994 poll for USA Weekend asked more than 1200 teens and adults what they thought of "several high profile athletes [who] are saying in public that they have abstained from sex before marriage and are telling teens to do the same." Seventy-two percent of the teens and 78 percent of the adults said they agree with the pro-abstinence message.

Their enthusiasm for abstinence-only education is well founded. Even though the abstinence message has been criticized by some as naive or inadequate, there are good reasons to promote abstinence in schools and society.

1. Teenagers want to learn about abstinence. Contrary to the

often repeated teenage claim, not “everyone’s doing it.” A 1992 study by the Centers for Disease Control found that 43 percent of teenagers (age 14 to 17) had engaged in sexual intercourse at least once. Put another way, the latest surveys suggest that a majority of teenagers are not doing it.

2. Abstinence prevents pregnancy. Proponents of abstinence-only programs argue that it will significantly lower the teenage pregnancy rate and cited lots of anecdotes and statistics to make their case. For example, the San Marcos Junior High in San Marcos, California, adopted an abstinence-only program developed by Teen- Aid. The curriculum dropped the school’s pregnancy rate from 147 to 20 within a two-year period. An abstinence-only program for girls in Washington, D.C., has seen only one of 400 girls become pregnant.

3. Abstinence prevents sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). After more than three decades, the sexual revolution has taken lots of prisoners. Before 1960 there were only two STDs that doctors were concerned about: syphilis and gonorrhea. Today, there are more than 20 significant STDs ranging from the relatively harmless to the fatal. Twelve million Americans are newly infected each year, and 63 percent of these new infections are in people less than 25 years old. Eighty percent of those infected with an STD have absolutely no symptoms.

The conclusion is simple: abstinence is the only truly safe sex.

Baby Boomerangs

In the last few years, newspapers and newsmagazines have been full of stories about baby boomers returning to church. The purpose of this essay is to take a look at those stories and statistics and see what we can make of all of this hoopla. Is there a spiritual revival taking place? What caused the exodus and what is bringing about the return? These are just a few questions we will address. [\(1\)](#)

The baby boomers returning to church have been dubbed “baby boomerangs.” Most of them grew up in religious households. In fact, about 96 percent had some religious instruction in their early years. But many jettisoned their religious beliefs when they became adults because spirituality seemed irrelevant in the secular, pluralistic culture of modern life. Now, like boomerangs return to the point of their departure, many baby boomers are returning to church.

At least two processes were responsible for their exodus from organized religion. The process of secularization in modern society removed religious ideas and institutions from the dominant place they had in previous generations. Religious ideas were less meaningful, and religious institutions were more marginal in their influence on the baby boom generation. To their parents’ dismay, most boomers dropped out of traditional religion for at least two years during their adolescence and adulthood.

The process of pluralization in their world rapidly multiplied the number of world views, faiths, and ideologies. This increase in choice led naturally to a decrease in commitment and continuity. Many boomers during their adolescence and early adulthood went through what might be best called serial-conversions. Spiritually hungry for meaning, they dined heartily at America’s cafeteria for alternative religions: est, gestalt, meditation, scientology, bioenergetics, and the

New Age. Others sought spiritual peace through 12-step programs for alcoholics, workaholics, even chocoholics. This have-it-your-way, salad-bar spirituality has been high on choices and options but low on spiritual commitment.

One author wrote, "Although there are those who try to follow the demanding precepts of traditional religion, most baby boomers find refreshment in a vague religiosity which does not interfere in any way with how they live."

As this generation passes through midlife, it will inevitably look to the future more with anxiety than anticipation. Boomers are asking, Who will care for me? Will I be able to provide for me and my family?

And these questions are also mingled with questions of identity. Who am I? Where am I going? Is this all there is to life? These questions have an underlying spiritual dimension and are not easily answered in a secular world nor in a mystical world filled with bland spirituality.

Certainly this generation has sought answers in self-help programs and community activities, but something more than social changes and technology are necessary. As one commentator said, "There is a feeling of being lost and looking for something greater. People know that technology hasn't worked for them. It hasn't done anything for their souls."

This is, in part, why many baby boomers have begun to return to church. But is this a true spiritual revival? Furthermore, what about the large segment of this generation that is still outside the church and seemingly uninterested in coming back? What could the church do to reach out to those boomers who are still outside the church?

Seekers of Experiences

As in other endeavors, baby boomers have been seekers: seekers of pleasure, seekers of experience, seekers of freedom, seekers of wealth, and yes, seekers of spirituality. But unlike their parents, boomers' search for spirituality took them down unpredictable paths. This generation has been eclectic in its religious

experiences where brand loyalty is unheard of and the customer is king. While some have stayed true to the "faith of their fathers," most mix traditional religion with New Age mysticism and modern self-help psychologies in a flexible and syncretistic manner.

Tracking this generation's values and attitudes toward religion and spiritual issues is not easy, if for no other reason than the lack of substantial research. Most of the significant research on boomer attitudes toward religion have been done within the last ten years. Consider this comment from the late 1980s: "When the first of its number reached 40 last summer, the Baby Boom once again entered the spotlight. But for all the coverage, including a 10-page cover story in *Time* and [Landon] Jones' 350-page book, little more than a paragraph was written on the role of religion in the lives of the Baby Boom generation." Fortunately, more research since then has provided a better perspective on this generation's attitudes and perspectives on religion.

Boomers can be divided into three religious subcultures: loyalists, returnees, and dropouts. Loyalists tend to be social conservatives. They had better relations with their parents and tended to grow up in stricter homes. Loyalists never really identified with the counterculture and never left their church or synagogue.

At the other extreme are the dropouts. They had less confidence in the country when growing up and had more

conflicts with parents. Traditional religion was, to them, out of touch with modern life. They have never come back to church and pursue spirituality (if at all) in a personal and individual way.

Between the loyalists and the dropouts are the returnees. They were and are middle-of-the-road types who were less alienated than the dropouts but more disaffected than the loyalists. They left church or synagogue and have returned but often with some ambivalence.

Each religious subculture manifests differences in spiritual styles and commitment but all are affected to some degree by their experiences in the counterculture. Though their views are different from one another, collectively the three boomer subcultures are very different from their parents. For example, few in the returnees subculture actually consider themselves religious and do not hold to traditional views of God even though they may actually attend religious services on a regular basis. Returnees are much less likely to engage in traditional religious activities (daily prayers, saying grace at meals, reading the Bible). Almost one-fourth of returnees and nearly one-fifth of loyalists say they believe in reincarnation.

In short, baby boomers are very different from their parents in terms of spiritual commitment and biblical understanding. And churches and Christian organizations that reach out to this generation must be aware of these differences if they are to be effective.

“Teach Your Children Well...”

Those baby boomers who have returned to church—the so-called “baby boomerangs”—have returned for one of two major reasons: children or spiritual restlessness. Boomers concerned about the moral and spiritual upbringing of their children have made the spiritual pilgrimage back to their religious roots.

Members of this generation may say they do not believe in absolute values, but frequently their relativistic world view collapses when they have children. They don't want their kids growing up without any moral direction. Church suddenly becomes a much more important place. Gallup surveys, for example, show that nearly nine in ten Americans say they want religious training for their kids, even though fewer than seven in ten with children (ages 4-18) say they are currently providing such training.

The boomerang phenomenon is not peculiar to baby boomers. Church historians have found a predictable pattern of church attendance that has affected numerous generations. Typically after high school young adults drop out of church and often don't drop back into church until they have children. In that regard, boomers are no different than generations that preceded them.

Unlike previous generations, boomers prolonged the cycle by postponing marriage and children. Getting married later and having children later essentially extended their absence from church. And this extended absence allowed many of them to get more set in their ways. A generation used to free weekends and sleeping in on Sunday is less like to make church attendance a priority.

Kids begin to rearrange those priorities. Statistically, it has been shown that the presence of children in a family makes a significant difference in the likelihood of church attendance. One survey found that married baby boomers are nearly three times more likely to return to church if they have children. Children do indeed seem to be leading their parents back to church.

Another reason for boomers returning to church is spiritual restlessness. Sixteen hundred years ago, St. Augustine acknowledged, "We were made for thee, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee." Social

commentators have generally underestimated the impact of this generation's restless desire for meaning and significance. Ken Woodward, religion editor for *Newsweek* magazine believes "That search for meaning is a powerful motivation to return to the pews. In the throes of a midlife re-evaluation, Ecclesiastes—'A time for everything under heaven'—is suddenly relevant." George Gallup has found that two thirds of those who dropped out of a traditional church (left for two years or more) returned because they "felt an inner need" to go back and rediscover their religious faith.

For these and other less significant reasons, baby boomers are returning to church though not in the numbers sometimes reported in the media. All of this attention to returning boomers fails to take into account that more than forty percent of baby boomers have not returned to church. And while many are celebrating those coming in the front door, they shouldn't overlook the stream of boomers leaving the church out the back door. They are bored, disillusioned, or restless and need to be reached more effectively if the church is to make a difference in the 1990s and the 21st Century.

"If It Feels Good..."

Although much has been made of the baby boomerang phenomenon, many more are skeptical of church as well as other institutions such as government, military, and schools. While they are consistent with previous generations in their boomerang cycle, "statistics on church attendance, when viewed up close, reveal dramatic and distinctive patterns along generational lines." The data show:

- Throughout their lives, Americans born during the Depression have been more faithful than later generations in their church/synagogue attendance.
- "War babies" [born 1939-45] dropped out of church as they entered their twenties during the turbulent sixties, and stayed away. The twin disillusionments

stemming from Vietnam and Watergate made them more suspicious of institutions—the church included. Only recently, as they approach and pass midlife, are they trickling back to church.

- “Baby boomers” [born 1946-64] also dropped out of the church in their twenties, but now, in their thirties and early forties, they are returning to the ranks of the faithful. The real boom in church attendance is coming from this generation.” [\(2\)](#)

Nevertheless, boomers are returning to church in increasing numbers. By the early 1980s the number of leading edge baby boomers who attend church regularly rose nearly ten percent (33.5% to 42.8%) and continued to rise through the decade.

Will this revitalized interest in religion make a difference in society? This is a question many social commentators are considering. “Will the churches and synagogues provide the kind of training necessary to keep the faith vital—or will the churches merely mirror the culture?” asks sociologist Os Guinness. “The natural tendency of the baby boomers is to be laissez faire socially. Will their return to faith make any decisive difference in their personal and social ethics, or will their religious commitment be [simply] a variant of their social philosophy?”

Traditionally boomers have been samplers with little brand loyalty. They don't feel bound to the denomination of their youth and search for experiences (both spiritual and otherwise) that meet their needs. It is not uncommon for families to attend different churches each week (or on the same day) to meet their perceived spiritual needs. They aren't bashful about attending a particular church to take advantage of a special seminar or program and then picking up and moving to another church when those programs seem inviting.

Many boomers may be interested in spiritual issues but see no need to attend church. George Gallup refers to this

characteristic in his book *The Unchurched in America—Faith Without Fellowship*. Such religious individualism stems both from American individualism that has been a part of this country for centuries and this generation's desire for flexibility and individuality. The have-it-your-way attitude in every area of a boomer's life has given rise to this religious individualism.

Boomers approach religion and spirituality differently than previous generations. They embrace a faith that is low on commitment and high on choice. As one commentator noted, "They are comfortable with a vague, elastic faith that expands to fill the world after a pleasant Christmas service and contracts to nothing when confronted with difficulties." No wonder many boomers are starting to embrace religious beliefs that previous generations would never have considered.

Spiritual hunger

Spiritually hungry boomers looking for nourishment for their souls have already tried a variety of selections from America's spiritual cafeteria. They will probably continue to do so. Lonely, isolated in boxes in the suburbs, often hundreds of miles from their families, boomers are facing significant psychological issues in the midst of busy lives that sap their emotional and spiritual resources. Beneath this isolation and turmoil is a restless desire for spirituality.

Some will try to meet these needs by dabbling in the New Age Movement. And if the churches do not meet their real and perceived needs, this trickle may turn into a torrent. The New Age Movement is attractive to the spiritually naive and institutionally cynical. If the church fails, then the New Age will thrive.

This may be the greatest challenge for the Christian church. Can church leaders woo baby boomers back to the flock? Can the church challenge boomers to a greater level of religious

commitment in their lives? Can the church provide religious training necessary to keep boomers' faith vital? These are important questions.

Churches need to challenge boomers to deeper faith and greater religious commitment, but surveys and statistics show that churches themselves may be suffering from the same maladies as baby boomers. Church members like to believe that they are more spiritually committed and live lives different from the unchurched. The data show otherwise.

Approximately 40 percent of America attends church or other religious services on a fairly regular basis. But George Gallup has found that fewer than 10 percent of Americans are deeply committed Christians. Those who are committed "are a breed apart. They are more tolerant of people of diverse backgrounds. They are more involved in charitable activities. They are more involved in practical Christianity. They are absolutely committed to prayer."

Numerous surveys show that most Americans who profess Christianity don't know the basic teachings of the faith. Such shallow spirituality makes them more susceptible to the latest fad, trend, or religious cult. Gallup notes that not being grounded in the faith means they "are open for anything that comes along." For example, studies show that New Age beliefs "are just as strong among traditionally religious people as among those who are not traditionally religious."

Lack of commitment to a faith position and to a lifestyle based upon biblical principles also extends to church attendance and instruction. Eight in ten Americans believe they can arrive at their own religious views without the help of the church.

Commitment to biblical instruction is not high either. George Gallup says that Americans are trying to do the impossible by "being Christians without the Bible." He goes on to say that,

“We revere the Bible, but we don’t read it.” Pastors and pollsters alike have been astounded by the level of biblical illiteracy in this nation.

Churches that reach out to baby boomers will have to shore up their own spiritual commitment as they challenge this generation to a higher level of commitment and discipleship. If they are successful, then their congregations will grow. If they aren’t then this generation will go elsewhere to satisfy its spiritual hunger.

Notes

1. Information in this pamphlet is taken from my book *Signs of Warning, Signs of Hope*. (Moody, 1994).
2. Wesley Pippert, “A Generation Warms to Religion,” *Christianity Today*, 6 October 1989, p. 22.

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Financial Security for the Future

Kerby Anderson looks at our financial future, especially of baby boomers, discussing savings, corporate pensions, Social Security and retirement.

✘ What kind of financial security can you expect in the future? The answer to that question may depend on when you were born. The generation currently entering retirement will do much better as a group than the baby boom generation following it.

A major reason is demographics. The baby boom was preceded, and more importantly, succeeded by consecutive years of fewer births. Thirty-five percent more Americans were born during the baby boom than during the previous nineteen years. And 12 percent more were born than during the subsequent nineteen years. This nineteen-year blip in fertility has created more than just an oddity in social statistics. It has clouded the financial future of baby boomers. The elderly are supported, especially during the waning years of their old age, by members of the younger generation. The baby boom was immediately followed by a baby bust, or what many commentators have labeled a "birth dearth." This disproportionate ratio between baby boomers and baby busters raises questions about the boom generation's future and suggests it will face an impending crisis of financial security.

Concern arises from both economic and demographic realities. The harsh economic reality in the 1990s is the federal deficit which mushroomed during the 1980s. Aggravating this economic situation are also such issues as trade deficits, increased taxes, higher oil prices, and an inevitable downturn in the economy.

A survey released by the International Association of Financial Planning found that "the long term psyche of the American public is depressed," with significant majorities fearing a resurgence of high inflation and worrying about the chances for a deep recession. But the more important issue is not economics but how demographics affect economics. The sheer size of the boom generation has had a negative impact on its members. Paul Hewitt of the Retirement Policy Institute put it this way:

The baby boom as a generation has been its own worst enemy. Whenever we wanted anything the price went up, and when we sold the price went down. So we got less for our labor and paid more for our houses. When we want to sell those houses the price will go down, and when we want medical care in old

age, prices will go up.

Boomers in general, and leading-edge boomers in particular, find themselves part of what has become called “the triple-squeeze generation.” The more than 25 percent of Americans between the ages of 35 and 44 are finding their own retirement being squeezed out by the college costs of their children and the long-term health care costs of their aging parents. Sixty-six percent of baby boomers surveyed by the International Association of Financial Planning said “providing long-term care for a parent would affect their ability to save for their children’s education” and would no doubt also affect their ability to save for their own retirement.

Commentators have also referred to these people as the “sandwich generation” because they are sandwiched between an older generation dependent upon them for elder care and a younger generation dependent upon them for housing and education. Surely this is one generation that needs to take a hard look at its financial future. The economic and demographic realities may seem dismal, but they will be much worse if we fail to apply biblical principles to our finances. The key to financial security for most Americans has been the three-legged stool of savings, pensions, and Social Security. Unfortunately, economic termites threaten the strength of that stool.

Savings

The first leg on the retirement stool is savings. The boomers are justly concerned about the savings (or more to the point, the lack of savings) they have put away so far for their retirement. A survey of leading-edge boomers found that six out of ten expressed great concern about being able to meet all of their financial responsibilities, and 62 percent fear that they will outlive their retirement savings.

But they aren’t the only ones concerned. A survey by the

American Academy of Actuaries echoed boomers' fears. Seventy-two percent of pension-fund actuaries polled predict that half the baby boom won't have the wherewithal to retire at age 65.

How much have baby boomers saved so far? Well, not very much if a recent survey is any indication. When a group of 35- to 49-year-olds were asked if they could come up with three thousand dollars in a few days without borrowing or using a credit card, 49 percent said they could and 49 percent said they couldn't. Not surprisingly a smaller percentage (only 29 percent) of the 18- to 24-year-olds had the three thousand dollars.

The inability of so many boomers to come up with the sum of three thousand dollars illustrates two things. First, it shows how little (if anything) they have in savings or investments. Second, it demonstrates how much many of them are in debt. The first leg of the three-legged stool is in awful shape because, for many in the boom generation, savings are decreasing while debt is increasing. The reasons for boomer debt are fairly simple. First, the boomers had great expectations for themselves and were often willing to go deeply in debt in order to finance the lifestyle they had chosen for themselves. Second, they had the misfortune of entering the consumer world at the time when wages were stagnant and when most of the goods and services they craved were hit by inflation. This further fueled consumer borrowing, which became both a cause and a consequence of their downward mobility.

Between 1970 and 1983, the percentage of boomer families paying off consumer debt increased from two-thirds to three-fourths. Of families in debt in 1983, the average amount of debt was nearly five thousand dollars.

Families in debt usually are not saving. If they had any financial resources to save and invest, they would be wise to first retire their high interest consumer debt. In 1984, more than a third of all households headed by a person under

thirty-five had no savings whatsoever on deposit with banks and other financial institutions, aside from non-interest-paying checking accounts.

The solution to this problem is simple: Get out of debt and put money into savings and retirement. Now while this may be easy to say, it is difficult for the current generation to do. Baby boomers' expectations frequently exceed their income, and the changing economic and demographic realities place them in a precarious position. But if this generation wants to have a more secure financial future, it must take appropriate financial measures now.

Corporate Pensions

In the past, there used to be an unwritten agreement between a company and an individual. If you faithfully worked for the company, the company would take care of you in your retirement. But this tacit agreement has broken down for two reasons.

First, many of these companies lack the financial resources to take care of the baby boom generation. Consolidation of some companies and the bankruptcies of many others put pensions in jeopardy. Other companies heavily invested in speculative schemes by thrifts and junk bonds, and their portfolios rest on shaky ground. In other cases, the current financial resources seem adequate but have yet to be tested when the millions of baby boomers begin to retire. Second, many baby boomers have not spent enough time with any one company to earn a significant pension. It was not uncommon for the parents of baby boomers to have worked for a single company for more than twenty years. Baby boomers, on the other hand, change jobs if not career paths with unprecedented frequency.

This apparent restlessness is born from both choice and necessity. Boomers are much less likely to stay in a job that does not enhance personal development and self-expression.

Unlike their fathers, who would often remain with a company “for the sake of the family,” the boom generation is much more likely to move on.

Boomers also change jobs out of necessity. They find themselves competing with each other for fewer upper-management positions for a number of reasons. First, companies have thinned their management ranks. Most of this restructuring was done in the 1980s to make companies more efficient. The rest was a natural result of buyouts, takeovers, and consolidation leaving fewer structural layers in upper management and fewer jobs.

Second, boomers crowded into middle-management ranks at the same time restructuring was taking place. The leading-edge boomers in their prime career years are finding themselves on career plateaus and becoming dissatisfied. Many wonder if they will ever make it to the corner office or the executive suite.

Third, there was a boom of business school graduates. The first boomers who graduated with MBAs were often ridiculed by classmates in other academic disciplines. But this initial condemnation gave way to active pursuit, and the number of business graduates quickly proliferated. As supply has outstripped demand, this ambitious group with heightened expectations finds itself frustrated and constantly looking for a job change.

All of these factors have put this generation in a precarious position. By and large, they are not saving and have inadequate pensions to give them a secure financial future. So many are trusting that Social Security will be there for them when they retire. But will it?

Social Security

The impending Social Security debacle is complex and the subject of whole books. But the basic issue can be illustrated

by once again looking at the demographic impact of the boom generation.

When Social Security began in the mid 1930s, the ratio of workers to recipients was ten to one and life expectancy was two years below retirement age. The pay-as-you-go system could work with those kinds of numbers.

But two fundamental demographic changes threaten to send Social Security off a cliff. First is the "senior boom." Advances in modern medicine have raised life expectancy by 28 years in just this century. Today the median age is already 32 and still climbing. Some demographers see the median age reaching as high as 50 years old. One has to wonder about the stability of Social Security in a country where half of the people qualify for membership in the American Association of Retired Persons.

The second demographic change is the ratio between the baby boom generation and the baby bust generation. The smaller generation following the boom generation will be called upon to support Social Security when boomers retire. The system will face incredible strains through the next few decades as the ratio of workers to Social Security beneficiaries continues to decline.

Both demographic changes are relevant. Americans are living longer, and ratios between generations are skewed. These two changes are certain to transform the current pay-as-you-go system into nothing more than an elaborate Ponzi scheme by the twenty-first century. The solutions to the Social Security crisis are few and all politically difficult to achieve. Either you have to change the supply of contributions or the demand of the recipients. Increasing the supply of contributors could be achieved by increasing the birth rate (unlikely, and probably too little too late) or allowing more immigration of workers who could contribute to Social Security. The only other way to increase the supply of

contributions is to increase FICA payments. But there will have to be an upper limit on how much Americans can be taxed. If benefits stay at their current levels, workers in the year 2040 could find Social Security taking as much as 40 percent of their paychecks.

Decreasing demand would require trimming benefits. Current recipients benefit most from Social Security. A retiree on Social Security today recovers everything he paid into the system in about four years. On the other hand, few boomers will ever get the amount of money they paid into the system. Some politicians have suggested trimming benefits to current recipients. Others suggest applying a means test to wealthy recipients or those who receive other pension income. Neither proposal has much likelihood of passage.

More likely, Congress will be forced to trim future benefits. Congress has already increased the age of retirement and may induce workers to stay on the job until age 70. Another solution would be to provide the biggest tax breaks for workers to fund their own retirement through IRAs or Keoghs.

Obviously the solutions are not popular, but the alternative is a collapse of the Social Security system in the next decade. If something isn't done, the demographic realities will destroy the system.

Retirement

Although this generation grew up assuming retirement would be the norm, the changing social and economic conditions we have discussed may force a rethinking of that basic assumption. After all, the idea of retirement historically is of recent origin.

When Social Security was first adopted in 1935, life expectancy was below 63, a full two years under the retirement age. Retirement was for the privileged few who lived long

enough to enjoy the meager financial benefits from the system.

Even as late as the 1950s, the contemporary image we have today of retirement communities and the elderly sightseeing in recreational vehicles did not exist. Retirement still did not exist as an institution. Nearly half the men over age 65 were still in the workforce.

Polls taken during the 1950s and early 1960s showed that most Americans desired to work for as long as they could and saw retirement merely for the disabled. Today, however, most Americans look forward to their retirement as a time to travel, pursue personal interests, and generally indulge themselves. Yet the demographic landscape suggests we might have to revise our current images of retirement.

As baby boomers slowly jog towards Golden Pond, they will likely be the largest generation of senior citizens in history, both in absolute size and in relative proportion to the younger generation. By the year 2000, the oldest boomers could be taking early retirement. The number of workers and dependents retired by 2025 could swell to as many as 58 million workers and dependents, more than double the current number of retirees.

These large numbers are certain to precipitate a "retirement crisis" for two reasons. First, people are living longer. We have raised the life expectancy by 28 years. During most of human history, only one in ten lived to the age of 65. Today eight out of every ten Americans zoom past their 65th birthday.

Second, the burden of providing retirement benefits will fall upon the younger, (and more to the point) smaller generation born after the baby boom. Never will so few be required to fund the retirement of so many. When Social Security was adopted in 1935, there were ten workers for every person over age 65. That ratio shrank to six to one in the 1970s.

Today there are about 3.4 working Americans to support each retiree. But by the time the last boomer hits retirement age in 2029, the ratio of workers to retirees will drop to less than two to one. Obviously, baby boomers face much greater uncertainty than their parents did when they entered into the years now seen as the time of retirement.

This next generation may even decide to reject the idea of retirement, choosing instead to enrich themselves with meaningful work all of their lives. Yet such an idyllic vision could quickly be crushed by the harsh reality of failing health. Working until you are 70 or beyond may not be physiologically possible for all people.

No wonder a chorus of Cassandras is predicting financial disaster in the next century. But significant changes can be made now to avert or at least lessen a potential crisis in the future. Wise investment according to biblical principles now is absolutely necessary to prepare for this uncertain future. The future really depends on what this generation does in the 1990s to get ready for the Retirement Century.

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