Points of Contact

Making Contact

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

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

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

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

2. It stimulates dialogue.

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

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

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

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

7. It stretches you to converse with non-believers in ways that can be understood by them. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "I have come to the conviction that if you cannot translate your thoughts into uneducated language, then your thoughts were confused. Power to translate is the test of having really understood one's own meaning."{1} Christians tend to have their own "educated language." We may understand one another. But the non-Christian probably has no idea what we are saying; he is uneducated in our language.{2}

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

Pertinent Points

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

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

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

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

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

One of the more intriguing aspects of classical music history

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

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

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

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

Think of the newspapers, books, and magazines you read. They consist of ordered arrangements of ink on paper. "Neither the chemistry of the ink nor the shapes of the letters determines

the meaning of the text. In short, the message transcends the properties of the medium."{6} The message requires a messenger.

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

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

Fifth, many people struggle with a sense of *existential anxiety and alienation.* This reflects a deeply rooted fear of meaninglessness and pointlessness, a sense of the utter futility of life, even sheer despair at the bewildering things that threaten to reduce us to nothing more than a statistic—ultimately a mortality statistic. While it seems trite to talk about "the meaning of life," it is a question that lingers at the edges (and sometimes squarely in the center) of reflective human existence.{8}

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

seen and heard; one has to be sensitive to what lies below the surface.

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

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

> *To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,*
> *Creeps in this petty pace from day to day*
> *To the last syllable of recorded time,*
> *And all our yesterdays have lighted fools*
> *The way to dusty death.*
> *Out, out, brief candle!*
> *Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player*
> *That struts and frets his hour upon the stage*
> *And then is heard no more: it is a tale*
> *Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,*
> *Signifying nothing.{10}*

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

Biblical Points of Contact

Mustard seeds, hidden treasure, vineyards, debtors, fig trees, sheep, money. What do such things have in common? You probably recognize such terms from the parables that Jesus used to

teach spiritual principles. We could add many more phrases, because the Gospels contain many instances when Jesus used His favorite teaching device as a point of contact with His listeners.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contemporary Contacts

You are taking a walk around your neighborhood. As you turn a corner a few blocks from your house, you see an old friend whom you have not seen in a couple of years. She is riding a bicycle in your direction. As she gets closer she recognizes you and stops. The two of you strike up a conversation that revolves around the kinds of things that usually are discussed on such occasions: Have you seen Sally lately? Did you hear about Jim’s divorce? How are your children? Then you realize that God’s Spirit is encouraging you to guide the conversation

toward Christ. You are thinking of a way to do this when you suddenly notice that she is wearing an especially beautiful necklace with a cross. You comment on her jewelry, then you ask, “What does the cross represent?” She responds by saying it’s just a nice piece of jewelry that was given to her by her daughter. But it has no “religious significance.” You respond to her statement by sharing the true meaning and significance of the cross.

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

First, be attentive to your God-given imagination. Of all people, Christians should creatively interact with the world around them for the glory of God. This may mean you will need to practice the habit of “sharpening your focus” on the world around you. Maybe you can begin to see with new eyes and hear with new ears.

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

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

Fourth, be attentive to the subjects that occupy someone’s conversations. If the person with whom you are conversing talks a great deal about movies, find a point of contact

there. If another person is fanatical about sports, find a point of contact there. If a hobby is the center of conversation, find a point of contact there. Such a list virtually is endless.

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

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

The world around us is starving for contact. People need to hear what God has to say through us. He will guide us to make contact for His glory. We are God's messengers of hope. I hope we get the point.

Notes

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

2. See my article Christian Cliches.

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

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

5. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952),

31-32. Quoted in McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God*, 35.

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

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

8. See my article The Meaning of Life.

9. Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 48.

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

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

12. Ibid.

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Kids Killing Kids

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Media and Video Games

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

One of the people who knows this only so well is Lt. Col. Dave Grossman. He is a retired West Point psychology professor, Army Ranger, and an expert in the study of violence in war and

killing. He is also an instructor at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, and was one of the first on the scene of the Jonesboro, Arkansas shootings. He has a lot to say.

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

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

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

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

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

Dave Grossman goes into some detail in showing how violence in films, videos, and television can affect us. The parallels in his book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to*

Kill in War and Society{2} and what is happening in the media today are chilling. Two factors are desensitization and operant conditioning. Show soldiers (or children) enough visual images of violence and they will become desensitized to it. Practice shooting targets of people and conditioning will eventually take over. In some ways it doesn't matter whether it's soldiers doing target practice at a range or kids using point-and-shoot video games. The chilling result is the same: the creation of a killing machine.

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

Violence and Teenage Rebellion

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

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

Jonathan Cohen picks up on that theme and extends it to our current crisis. He says that when America became willing to

define deviancy down, it simultaneously defined rebellion up. He says, “Anti-social teens are nothing new, but as deviancy has been made normal, we have made it increasingly difficult for teenagers to rebel.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tolerance

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

After the school shooting in Colorado, an editorial appeared in the *New York Post*.{5} The editorial writers said, “The Littleton massacre could prove a turning point in American society—one of those moments when the entire culture changes course.” Who knows if that will be the case. Only time will tell. The editorial writers believe that one of the things that must change is our contemporary view of tolerance.

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

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

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

attention.

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

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

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

Why? I believe that this tragic lack of attention is the sorry harvest of tolerance and diversity preached in the nation's classrooms every day. We are not to judge others. The only sin in society is the sin of judgmentalism. We cannot judge hairstyles or lifestyles, manners or morals. We may think another person's dress, actions, or lifestyles are a bit different, but we are told not to judge. Everything must be tolerated. And so we decide to ignore in the name of tolerance. In essence, inattention is the fruit of a message of tolerance and diversity.

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

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

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

Spiritual Issues

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

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

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

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

She then asked, Who counters this culture of death? Well,

parents do and churches do. But they aren't really given much of a place in our society today. In fact, Peggy Noonan told a story to illustrate her point.

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Millennial Cautions

Over twenty years ago, as a new Christian, I found myself mesmerized by Christian speakers and books that predicted future social and political events with newspaper-like details. I relished sharing those details with less biblically informed friends. They were amazed and sometimes frightened by what I thought the Bible was predicting about tomorrow’s events. But as the years have progressed, I now wonder if that was an appropriate way to introduce my friends to Christianity. Many of the predictions that I shared have not come true. Did I make the claims of Christ more believable by

focusing on prophecy or did I place roadblocks in the path of some, actually making their understanding of the gospel more difficult?

People seem to have an innate desire to know the future. Perhaps it is part of our need to be in control, see what's coming, and have time to prepare for it. As Charles Kettering once wrote, "My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there." Some people's lives are changed forever by those who claim to know the future. Hitler claimed that he and his followers were establishing a reign that would last a thousand years. A few short years after first making those claims, his nation, and much of the world, lay in ruins as a result of his violent vision. Recent examples of the dangers of unbalanced fascination with prophecy include the odd Heaven's Gate cult, with their predictions of UFOs, death, and resurrection, and the Waco, Texas, sect led by David Koresh. Both groups, led by self-appointed "visionaries," influenced people in dramatically harmful ways.

On the other hand, a single person with vision can be a powerful force for positive change. William Wilberforce, after converting to evangelical Christianity in 1784, had a life-long desire to see an end to the international slave trade and of slavery itself in England and its colonies. His tenacity and vision had the remarkable impact of rallying both the British people and the powerful British navy toward achieving his goals. Another example of the positive impact that one person with vision can have is seen in the life of Dr. Martin Luther King. His prophetic "I have a Dream" speech on the steps to the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 has had, and continues to have, a profound effect on many people in America and the world regarding racial prejudice. It seems clear that an individual with an exceptionally strong vision for the future can have a great impact on it.

Sharing the truth of Christ's return can no doubt have a

positive impact on people. Our Lord's return is a reality that all Christians claim as part of the hope mentioned in 1 Peter 3:15. Unfortunately, I have encountered Christians who spend too much time trying to determine when Christ will return. In fact, some prophecy experts have fallen into the trap of the early heretic Montanus who claimed prophetic powers and claimed to know the time of our Lord's return even though Jesus himself said that no one knows when He will return but the Father (Matt. 24:36).(1)

As we approach the year 2000, prophets and prophecies are expected to multiply in both the secular world and the Church. In this discussion, I will look at examples of prophecy experts who claimed to know more than they could deliver. My purpose is not to endorse one end-times system over another. However, my hope is that Christians will be discouraged from claiming knowledge they do not possess and encouraged to keep their focus on the gospel message rather than on highly questionable prophetic schemes.

Christ's Return and the Church

A quick scan of the Internet reveals the popularity of prophetic claims. Along with sites on biblical prophecy, there are pages detailing the predictions of Edgar Cayce, the famous "sleeping prophet," and the fairly well-known Nostradamus. But there are many lesser-known prophetic sources as well, like one site called *Millennium Matters*. It has 583 pages of information on something called the "Deoxyribonucleic Hyperdimension," which predicts the awakening of a planetary entity on the earth in the near future. We might make fun of these prophecies, but imagine how Christians appear to others when we make false predictions about the return of Christ.

Attempting to predict the future is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments (Deut. 18; Acts 16) with warnings against divination and interpreting omens. Yet history has recorded the tendency of Christians to predict Christ's coming in every

generation. Tertullian, a follower of Montanus in the second century, supported the idea of a near return when he wrote, "What terrible wars, both foreign and domestic! What pestilences, famines . . . and quakings of the earth has history recorded!"(2) He felt that these evidences alone were enough to indicate Christ's return. Novation in the third century and Donatus in the fourth, were both branded as heretics, but gathered a large number of followers by proclaiming the immanent return of Christ. Later, in the sixth century, Pope Gregory was sure that the end of the world was near. He wrote,

> *Of all the signs described by our Lord as presaging the end of the world, some we see already accomplished…. For we now see that nation arises against nation and that they press and weigh upon the land in our own times as never before in the annals of the past. Earthquakes overwhelm countless cities, as we often hear from other parts of the world. Pestilence we endure without interruption. It is true that we do not behold signs in the sun and moon and stars but that these are not far off we may infer from the changes of the atmosphere.(4)*

Pope Gregory's words sound quite contemporary, and remarkably similar to some current thinking on prophecy.

What I am warning against is not the preaching of Christ's return. Virtually all Christians believe that He will return physically and that a final judgment will follow. How then, do we respond to this truth? Christ uses the parables of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) and the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) to teach His followers to be constantly ready for His return. We are to be ambassadors for Christ and the Kingdom of God, sharing the message of reconciliation that is found only in Him (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

One potentially damaging aspect of some prophecy teaching is the tendency to look for and find conspiracies that foretell

Christ's return. Whether it be a renewed Roman Empire or a one-world government, Christians seem to relish a world of secret connections and commitments. We already know that the world system is hostile to the gospel, Jesus told us as much and warned of persecution. When we tend to see people through the lens of grand conspiracies, the natural response is to fight the conspiracy rather that share the gospel with the individual. The New Testament calls us to build God's Kingdom one heart at a time. We accomplish this not with legal or political power, but by sharing the good news revealed by God in a culturally relevant way.

The First Millennium

Predictions for the end of the world were prolific at the close of the first millennium after Christ. Now we will look at some of these predictions and consider their impact on the Church.

In A.D. 950 Adso of Montier-en-Der wrote a "Treatise on the Antichrist" which was a response to a number of mid-century crises that had provoked widespread alarm and fear of an end-time apocalypse.(5) Five years later, Abbo of Fleury heard a preacher in Paris who announced that the Antichrist would be unleashed in the year 1000 and that the Last Judgment would soon follow.(6) At about the same time a panic occurred in the German army of Emperor Otto I because of a solar eclipse that the soldiers mistook as a sign of the end of the world.(7) And when the last Carolingian dynasty fell with the death of King Louis V in 987, many saw this event as a precursor to the arrival of the Antichrist. King Otto II of Germany had Charlemagne's body exhumed on Pentecost in the year 1000 supposedly in order to forestall the apocalypse. Both Halley's comet in A.D. 989 and a super nova in A.D. 1006 were interpreted as signs of the end. About the same time, the Moslem caliph, Al Hakim, destroyed the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem prompting apocalyptic fear in the west as well as

violent anti-Jewish outbursts.(8)

The Calabrian monk, Joachim of Fiore (ca. A.D. 1135 1202) stands out as a key figure in medieval apocalypticism. On Easter Sunday in 1183 he was inspired to write his massive Exposition on Revelation. Later near the end of his life, he summarized his prophetic knowledge in the Book of Figures. His writings influenced a wide range of medieval events. The Franciscan order was founded on the basis that they would be the spiritual elite described in Joachim's "Age of the Spirit," a future time when God would send revelation directly to believers. Using Joachim's hints, writers concluded that the "Age of Grace" would end and the "Age of the Spirit" would begin in A.D. 1260. This prophecy, mixed with German social unrest, created a myth surrounding Frederick II. Having ruled from 1220 to 1250, many believed that Frederick was the "Emperor of the Last Days" who would usher in the new Millennium.(9) The myth gained force when Frederick seized Jerusalem in 1229. When he died in 1250, a new myth started that Frederick would return from the dead. Two pseudo-Fredericks were burned at the stake by his successor to the throne. The Book of a Hundred Chapters stated that the returned Frederick would lead a fight against corruption in the state and the church, and that he will instruct his followers to "Go on hitting them" (referring to the Pope and his students) and to "Kill every one of them!"(10)

The Taborites, founded in A.D. 1415, also looked back to Joachim for their prophetic beliefs. They believed that once their persecutors were defeated, Christ would return and rule the world from Mount Tabor, a mountain they had renamed south of Prague. Their communal activities eventually turned bloody, prompted by tracts with lines like, "Accursed be the man who withholds his sword from shedding the blood of the enemies of Christ."(11) After a crushing defeat at the hands of the German army, the group quickly disbanded.

Although all of these prophecies were misguided, it would be a

mistake to doubt the sincerity of the individuals. However, the events surrounding the end of the first millennium should temper our desire to make predictions about the coming new millennium. Next, we will look at more recent predictions that have been just as wrong.

Recent Predictions

People want to know the future and are eager to follow those who claim to predict it. When a Jehovah's Witness knocks on your door, prophecy is used as a hook to gain entrance. A recent best-selling book *The Bible Code* claims to have uncovered a hidden code in the Old Testament that predicts many modern-day events as well as a nuclear holocaust in the year 2000 or 2006. Many New Age books are sold on the claim that channelers have access to future events when connected to those on another spiritual plane. Because of the emotional power of prophecy, the temptation for Christians to make dramatic claims about future events is great. Discernment and care must be used so that the integrity of the gospel message is not compromised. There is no doubt that Scripture teaches a Second Coming of Christ and that a final judgment will follow. However, there is considerable disagreement among Bible-believing Christians regarding the signs that foretell these events and our ability to predict when Christ will return.

One of the favorite past-times of date setters is to attempt to identify the Antichrist, a powerful figure who will appear immediately prior to Christ's return. This guessing game has a long tradition, going back to the time right after Jesus' death. The early church fathers Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Cyprian, and Augustine all believed that this person would be present immediately prior to Christ's return. During the Middle Ages, some churchmen identified the Antichrist as a Moslem, such as Saladin, but others pointed to a Jew, and some even pointed to the Pope. During the American Revolution it was popular to cast King George III in the role of Antichrist,

but the Earl of Bute and British general John Burgoyne also got nominations.

Other familiar names to be included in this long list of suspected Antichrists are Napoleon, the British Parliament, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Joseph Stalin. Since World War II, the Pope still makes the list as does Jewish leader Moshe Dayan, the assassinated Egyptian leader Anwar el-Sadat, Spain's King Juan Carlos, and Korean cult leader Sun Myung Moon. For some, Mikhail Gorbachev and Saddam Hussein are naturals for the job.

The mark of the Beast, the number 666, has been used in very creative ways to support many different Antichrist theories. Although many conservative theologians have seen the number 666 from Revelation 13 as symbolic of all that is evil and a blasphemous parody of the perfection that the Bible attributes to the number 7, others attempt to use the number to identify an individual.(12) The advent of the computer has caused some to see it as the Beast. One writer noted that if the letter "A"=6 and "B"=12 and "C"=18, and so on, the word computer adds up to 666. The same writer also observed that the words "New York" added up to 666.(13) Some pointed to John Kennedy because he had received 666 votes for the vice-presidency in 1956.(14) Others pointed to Henry Kissinger because his name in Hebrew added up to 111 or 666 divided by 6.(15) Even Ronald Reagan was considered because his first, middle, and last names all had six letters.(16)

The striking number of attempts to identify the Antichrist and the significance of the number 666 should at least give us a sense of humility before adding another name to the list. Perhaps we should follow the example of Irenaus in the second century. Seeing the many efforts to identify the Antichrist in his day, he cautioned against the practice and believed that the name was deliberately concealed until it would be obvious in the day of the Antichrist's arrival.

The U.S. in Prophecy

As the year 2000 gets closer, prophets and their prophecies will explode in number. A popular topic for prophecy experts is the future of the United States. Although prophecy expert John Walvoord has written, "No specific mention of the United States or any other country in North America or South America can be found in the Bible,"(17) this has not, and probably will not, stop others from seeing detailed references to the U.S. and its future in Scripture.

The depiction of the United States in end-times scenarios has varied over the years. There is a long tradition of seeing the U.S. as the New Israel. Near the end of his life, Christopher Columbus wrote, "God made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth of which He spoke in the Apocalypse of St. John . . . and he showed me the spot where to find it."(18) In 1653 the New England historian Edward Johnson wrote that the U.S. "is the place where the Lord will create a new heaven and a new earth," a theme that Jonathan Edwards picked up nearly a hundred years later.(19)

This notion that the colonies held a special place in God's redemption plan continued to spread as the colonies grew. By the time of the War for Independence, this conception changed from a primarily religious or spiritual role to a civic one as well. In 1808 Elias Smith, a New England evangelist, argued that the Great Awakening in America, as well as the American and French revolutions, had set the foundation for the end-time age described in the Bible.(20) In his book *White Jacket* in 1850, Herman Melville writes, "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. . . God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls."(20)

This ardent belief in America's millennial role reached its peak during the Civil War. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's*

Cabin, Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address" all contained allusions to Scripture and apocalyptic themes. Although this trend did not disappear, the twentieth century found Christian thinkers beginning to see the U.S. in another light. In 1937 Arno Gaebelein wrote that the U.S. had been overrun by the powers of darkness(21) and in 1949 Wilbur Smith saw American society described in the list of end time evils of 2 Timothy.(22) More and more, America was being identified with Babylon rather than with the New Israel.

Since the 1960s, prophecy writers have pointed out America's long list of moral failures as evidence that God will soon focus His wrath on us. Many of them hold that the increase in abortion, homosexuality, godless education, divorce, crime, and pornography in our nation will soon seal our fate and lead to our downfall as a nation.

This may be the case, but the many different interpretations of America's future role in God's end-times plan should cause a great deal of humility and prudence concerning our own ability to know what God has in mind for this nation. Once one goes beyond the general principal that God blesses those who conform to His moral guidelines, we are on shaky ground. Perhaps we would be far better off seeking a pure heart rather than trying to discern what role America will play in the millennium or who the Antichrist might be. Jesus is coming again. Worrying about the details or the exact time of His return is pointless if it does not turn us toward a holy life. As Jesus said, "Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matt. 6:27).

Notes

1. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, Harvard University, 1992), p. 46.
2. Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth

& Hyatt, 1991), p. 7.
3. Ibid., p. 11.
4. Ibid., p. 7.
5. http://www.mille.org/1000-dos.htm, p.1.
6. Ibid., p. 2.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 6.
9. *When Time Shall Be No More*, p. 53.
10. Ibid., p. 54.
11. Ibid., p. 55.
12. Alan F. Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), p. 535.
13. *When Time Shall Be No More*, p. 283.
14. Ibid., p. 275.
15. Ibid., p. 276.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 247.
18. Ibid., p. 225.
19. Ibid., p. 226.
20. Ibid., p. 227.
21. Ibid., p. 228.
22. Ibid., p. 231.

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The Games We Play

Game-playing and competition can and should be seen as a healthy part of a life that seeks to glorify God in all things.

Games and a Christian Worldview

Ten seconds are left in the game. The Wolves lead by two points. The Bobcats cross midcourt, knowing they must score or they will miss the playoffs. Smith stumbles! Jones grabs the ball and races toward the Wolves' basket for a lay-up. Smith tackles him like a linebacker! Both of them slide across the floor and run into the wall behind the basket. It looks as if Jones may be injured! Players from both teams are shouting at each other. The referee has thrown Smith out of the game!

Does this sound like something you may have seen during a high school, college, or professional basketball game? Or perhaps you have read about a similar incident. Actually, such an event took place in my experience. (The names have been changed to protect the guilty.) I was playing for my church team in a church league. I was the one who was tackled.

Does such an incident represent a Christian worldview of games? Surely most of us would answer with an emphatic, "No!" Unfortunately, though, too many Christians approach games with attitudes that appear to leave their Christian convictions out of the picture. Too many of us can tell stories involving Christians and games that don't align with a Christian worldview. Many times I was the one who allowed athletic intensity to overcome moral conviction in the midst of competition, and I have seen many friends do the same. Why? What is it about games that can encourage some of our more ungodly characteristics?

On the other hand, can sports bring out some of our more godly characteristics? Can God be glorified through games? There have been times in my life when the exhilaration and concentration that can accompany games have included thankfulness to God. He gives me joy when I express my thankfulness to Him as I hit or throw a baseball, catch a football, shoot a basketball, volley a tennis ball, or hit a golf ball.

Arthur Holmes has written that “play is all-pervasive. It does not lie just on the fringes of life, as if games were spare parts we don’t really need in the main business of the day.”(1) If true, such a statement indicates the importance of our subject. It is worthy of our attention. Some even believe play is the defining characteristic of humans. “Nietzsche went so far as to reduce all of life and thought to masks in a play, taking nothing seriously except the will to power—in effect, the will to win— that all of life is a biologically driven power play.”(2) A Christian, of course, does not agree with this perspective, but the Christian does live in a world that tends to agree with Nietzsche’s dictum. The “will to power” definitely is translated into “the will to win” for many. Indeed, the phrase is often elaborated to mean “the will to win at all costs.” Vince Lombardi, the coach of the Green Bay Packers during their period of NFL domination, is famous for the statement: “Winning isn’t the main thing, it’s the only thing.” But, can the Christian play, win or lose, and not agree that winning is the only thing? If the answer is, “Yes!,” the believer must realize that he has accepted a challenge to be Christ’s ambassador even on the field of play.

A Brief History of Games

“That was an Olympian effort!” “Those mountains have an Olympic grandeur.” Such expressions indicate some of the ways in which ancient games and their impact are part of our consciousness. Games were part of all ancient cultures. For some, games were more sedentary than for others, but a sense of play permeates man’s history. The Greeks, who first held the Olympic Games and others that were similar, organized these events approximately 3,500 years ago. All of them were dedicated to certain gods and were integrated with religious ceremonies. The competitors were originally amateurs whose only reward was a wreath or garland. Eventually, though, the rigorous training that was required led to their professional status. They received adulation in their cities, as well as

substantial prizes and monetary rewards.(3) As we will see, the New Testament contains metaphors relating to these games and competitors.

When the Romans became the dominant world power, they rejected the Greek emphasis on athletic skill because of the public nakedness of the competitors.(4) Such a response is ironic in light of the brutal games that soon came into vogue in the empire. Gladiatorial combat to the death, fights with beasts, even naval battles were staged in the arenas. The circus Maximus in Rome, where important chariot races were held, probably held up to 250,000 people. "By A.D. 354 the games claimed 175 days out of the year."(5) Such popularity is indicative of a significant difference between the Greek and Roman attitudes about games. "The Greeks originally organized their games for the competitors, the Romans for the public. One was primarily competition, the other entertainment."(6) The Roman thirst for barbaric spectacle and entertainment ultimately prompted the outrage of early church leaders. They "denounced the games and similar amusements because of idolatry, immodesty, and brutality. It was, in fact, the opposition of Christianity that brought them to an end."(7) Such a response may prove to be appropriate in our time. But for the moment I propose we simply consider what Scripture contains to guide us in an appraisal of the games played by both Christians and non- Christians.

The Old Testament contains few references to games, even though evidence of them can be found in all areas of the ancient Near East. "Simple and natural amusements and exercises, and trials of wit and wisdom, were more to the Hebrew taste."(8) The biblical text does mention children's games, sports such as running, archery, stone-lifting, high leaping, games of chance and skill, story-telling, dancing, the telling of proverbs, and riddles. In addition, wrestling probably was part of Hebrew life.(10)

It is of special interest to note the joyous prophetic picture

of Zechariah 8:5: “And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets” (NASB). “The promise of the kingdom, as Lewis Smedes observes, is of restored playfulness.” Evidently play and games have a place in God’s plan for His people:

> *Scripture begins with life in a garden and ends with a city at play; so play—art and celebration and fun and games, and a playful spirit—is part of our calling, part of the creation mandate. It is not the play of self-indulgence, nor of shed responsibility, but of gladness and celebration in responsible relationship to God.”(11)*

Games and the New Testament

Can you picture the Apostle Paul as a sportswriter? Imagine him sitting in a stadium pressbox observing the athletes compete. Then imagine him writing his observations and opinions of what transpired. The next morning you purchase a newspaper and turn to the sports section. There you find an account of the previous day’s game under Paul’s byline. Does this sound farfetched, out of character, ludicrous? Actually such a scenario is not far removed from Paul’s knowledge of the games of his day. In several portions of his letters, one can find metaphors relating to athletic preparation and competition. The same is true for the writer of Hebrews. These New Testament writers evidently were aware of Greek and Roman games and realized they could be used to teach valuable lessons to their readers. Their awareness is evidence that they were enmeshed in the surrounding culture, which was filled with indicators of the importance of games and competition in the ancient world.

These games “were so well known in Palestine and throughout the Roman Empire in the time of Christ and the apostles that they cannot be passed over in silence.”(13) Archaeological remains indicate stadiums of various types in many cities

including Jerusalem, Jericho, Caesarea, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, and Tarsus, the city of Paul's early life. "The early Christians, therefore, whether of Jewish or gentile origin, were able to understand, and the latter at any rate to appreciate, references either to the games in general, or to details of their celebration."(14) A brief survey of particular New Testament passages will provide us with a foundation for an analysis of games in contemporary life.

Some of the most intriguing athletic metaphors in all of Paul's writings are found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. He uses Greek terminology and images that stem directly from the athletic contests of his day, especially the triennial Isthmian Games held in Corinth. These terms and images include running a race to win, receiving a prize, competition, discipline in preparation for competition, concentration, abiding by the rules, and even boxing. Variations on these themes can be found in Galatians 2:2 and 5:7; Philippians 2:16 and 3:14; 2 Timothy 2:5 and 4:7. In Hebrews 12:1 the author of Hebrews echoes Paul's metaphors by encouraging Christians to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." In verse 2 he even refers to Jesus as the one who set the pace and has already covered the course.

These passages are worthy of many sermons and extensive commentary. Since that is not possible in this short essay, let's consider a few insights from these biblical metaphors that are most germane to our subject.

First, there is no blanket condemnation of games. The metaphors carry the positive weight of someone who respected athletic endeavors. Second, there is much to learn about the Christian life when we compare it with games. Games can be seen and experienced in ways that correlate with Christian principles such as discipline, concentration, and perseverance. Third, these passages should not be gleaned in an uncritical manner. Surely Paul rejected many aspects of the games, such as the pagan religious emphases. Fourth, the

physical body was not rejected as unimportant. Gnosticism, which was a prominent heresy of New Testament times, taught that the body was unimportant or even sinful. In contrast, these verses take the importance of the body for granted. It is God's creation.

Contemporary Views of Games

The Super Bowl. The Final Four. College Bowl Games. The Olympics. The NBA Finals. The World Series. Little League Baseball. The Masters. The World Cup. The list of such sports-related titles could fill several pages of this essay because our culture is saturated with games. This infatuation takes a great deal of our time, attention, and money. An objective observer, in my opinion, would conclude that humans are obsessed with games. Current predictions and opinions of this infatuation vary from the skeptical to the optimistic. Alvin Toffler, writing in 1970, predicted that, "Leisure-time pursuits will become an increasingly important basis for differences between people, as the society shifts from a work orientation toward greater involvement in leisure. We shall advance into an era of breathtaking fun specialism."(15) Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the great basketball player of the recent past, stated, "Modern sports is getting to be like professional wrestling; something is going awry."(16) According to Robert Higgs, author of *God in the Stadium*, "Professional sports is getting warped, and they carry a somber message to society in our contemporary times."(17) He continued along this theme by suggesting that "the idea of play and fun and enjoyment of the natural gifts of games is being warped by this incredible drive for money."(18) In comparing the games with a prize, such as the Super Bowl, Higgs concluded:"The more emphasis you put on the cultural prize, the bigger you make those prizes, the less regard and appreciation of the gift of the game itself, it seems to me." (19)

Do any of these opinions concur with your estimation of games? Are you one of the skeptics? If so, that probably is a sign that you have at least begun to ask if games are occupying the proper place in your life, your family's life, and the life of the culture at large. Before we become too cynical, though, let's consider more optimistic analyses.

In his book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch draws a fascinating parallel between sports and our need for traditions and order. He believes that an intelligent sports spectator is one of the keys to a retention of the positive nature of games. He writes: "One of the virtues of contemporary sports lies in their resistance to the erosion of standards and their capacity to appeal to a knowledgeable audience."(20) Michael Novak, who has written a thought-provoking book entitled *The Joy of Sports*, juxtaposes European and American traditions around the place of sports in America's history. He believes that the "streets of America, unlike the streets of Europe, do not involve us in stories and anecdotes rich with a thousand years of human struggle. Sports are our chief civilizing agent. Sports are our most universal art form. Sports tutor us in the basic lived experiences of the humanist tradition."(21) Novak continues his praise with a statement that echoes the Apostle Paul: "Play provides the fundamental metaphors and the paradigmatic experiences for understanding the other elements of life."(22) Is there a "happy medium" between the skeptical and optimistic views of games? Or should we bring the two views together in order to find a wise perspective? Perhaps a coupling of the two views provides creative positive tension that enables us to better evaluate the place of games in the Christian life.

Christians in a Competitive World

> *"I believe that God made me for a purpose. For China. But He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure. To give it up would be to hold Him in contempt. . . . To win is*

to honor Him."(23)

These poignant phrases are from *Chariots of Fire*, one of the truly great films. They were spoken by the actor who portrayed Eric Liddell, a great athlete and a great Christian. He is talking with his sister, who is pleading with him to fulfill his commitment to their mission in China. He was to fulfill that commitment, but first he considered it his duty to run in the 1924 Paris Olympics for the glory of God. When I first saw the film I wept with joy and gratitude because of the film's portrayal of a man who understood and appreciated God's gift to him. In my estimation the film, and this scene in particular, contains a clear and eloquent statement of a Christian worldview as it applies to games, play, sports, or athletics. With Eric Liddell's words in mind, we will offer principles that can help us establish a foundation for a Christian's involvement in games. First, "play is best seen as an attitude, a state of mind rather than as a distinguishable set of activities."(24) One doesn't have to be involved in play to play; work can include an attitude of play as well.

Second, "play is not the key to being human, but being human is the key to play."(25) And being human includes a free spirit that is "celebrative and imaginative because of the possibilities God has for us in this world."(26)

Third, play should instill "an attitude that carries over into all of life, finding joyful expression in whatever we do, productive or not."(27)

Fourth, play should be seen as an act of worship. "It is the religious meaning of life that gives purpose and meaning to both work and play. A responsible relationship to God includes play."(28)

Some of you may be saying, "OK, I can think on these things in solitude or in group discussion, but what about principles that will help me when I'm actually involved in games? How

should I play?" Application on the field is a challenge for many of us. Even Albert Camus, the existentialist writer, said that sports provided him with his "only lessons in ethics."(29) Thomas Aquinas "expressed three cautions that we would do well to observe nowadays. First, do not take pleasure in indecent or injurious play." Think of a sold-out football stadium of people screaming their approval as an opponent lies immobile on the field. Such a reaction surely does not align with a Christian attitude toward games. "Second, do not lose your mental or emotional balance and self-control." This may be one of the most challenging cautions. When we lose self-control during games, we are damaging what we say outside of games about our relationship with Christ. "Third, do not play in ways ill-fitting either the hour or the person."(30) When we play and how we honor God in the process speak loudly about the place of games in our lives. So when we hear "Play ball!" or "Let the games begin!" or "Take your mark!," let us remember, whether as participants or spectators, that God can honor our games, but He requires a playful attitude that honors Him.

Notes

1. Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a worldview* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 226.

2. Ibid.

3. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Athletic Games and Contests."

4. Ibid.

5. *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Games."

6. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

7. *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia*.

8. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v.

“Games.”

9. Ibid.

10. *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Games.”

11. Lewis Smedes, quoted in Holmes, *Contours of a worldview*, 230.

12. Ibid., 231.

13. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*.

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15. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 289.

16. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, quoted by Robert Higgs, on *Mars Hill Tapes*: May/June 1996, vol. 21, Ken Myers, ed.(Charlottesville, Va.: Mars Hill Tapes, 1996).

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.

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21. Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sports* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 27.

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23. David Puttnam, producer, *Chariots of Fire* (Burbank, Calif.: Warner Home Video, 1991).

24. Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a World View*, 224.

25. Ibid., 228.

26. Ibid., 231.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 228.

29. Albert Camus, quoted in Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sports*, 172.

30. Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a World View*, 231.

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Ten Lies of Feminism: A Christian Perspective

Sue Bohlin examines how this prevalent view of women measures up from a biblical perspective.

This essay examines the ten lies of feminism that Dr. Toni Grant suggests in her book *Being a Woman*.{1}

> *At its inception, the feminist movement, accompanied by the sexual revolution, made a series of enticing, exciting promises to women. These promises sounded good, so good that many women deserted their men and their children or rejected the entire notion of marriage and family, in pursuit of "themselves" and a career. These pursuits, which emphasized self-sufficiency and individualism, were supposed to enhance a woman's quality of life and improve her options, as well as her relations with men. Now, a decade or so later, women have had to face the fact that, in many ways, feminism and liberation made promises that could not be delivered.{2}*

Lie #1: Women Can Have It All

The first lie is that women can have it all. We were fed an illusion that women, being the superior sex, have an inexhaustible supply of physical and emotional energy that enable us to juggle a career, family, friendships and volunteer service. Proponents of feminism declared that not only *can* women do what men do, but we *ought* to do what men do. Since men can't do what women can do—have babies—this put a double burden on women. It wasn't enough that women were already exhausted from the never-ending tasks of child-rearing and homemaking; we were told that women needed to be in the work force as well, contributing to the family financially.

Scripture presents a different picture for men and women. The Bible appears to make a distinction between each gender's primary energies. The commands to women are generally in the realm of our relationships, which is consistent with the way God made women to be primarily relational, being naturally sensitive to others and usually valuing people above things. Scripture never forbids women to be gainfully employed; in fact, the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is engaged in several part-time business ventures, in real estate and manufacturing. Nonetheless, it is the excellent care of her husband, her children, her home and her community that inspires the praise she is due. Titus 2 instructs older women to mentor younger women, and teach them to care for their husbands and children and homemaking responsibilities. The God-given strengths of a woman were given to bring glory to God through her womanly differences

Lie #2: Men and Women are Fundamentally the Same

Apart from some minor biological differences, feminism strongly suggested that males and females are fundamentally the same. Culture, it announced, was responsible for turning

human blank slates into truck-wielding boys and doll-toting girls. This lie has been very effective at changing the culture. My husband Ray and I offer a seminar at Probe's *Mind Games* conferences called "Guys Are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus," where we go over the major differences between the sexes. Men, for instance, tend to be more goal-oriented and competitive, where women are more relational and cooperative. Men are active; women are verbal. This is intuitively obvious to the adults in our audience, but it is often new news to high school and college students. We find adults nodding with smiles of recognition, some of them nudging each other in the ribs. In the younger members of the audience, though, we see "the lights come on" in their eyes as they are exposed to something that is obvious and they probably already knew was true, but feminism's worldview had been feeding them a lie. They have been so immersed in this cultural myth that they had accepted it without question. One young man came up to me after a session and said he totally disagreed with me, that there are no real differences between males and females. I asked him if he treated his guy friends the same way he treated his girl friends, and he said, "Of course!" I asked, "And this doesn't cause you any problems?" He said no. With a smile, I suggested he come talk to me in ten years after he'd had a chance to experience real life!

The truth is that God created significant differences between males and females. We can see evidence of this in the fact that Scripture gives different commands for husbands and wives, which are rooted in the differing needs and divinely-appointed roles of men and women.

Lie #3: Desirability is Enhanced by Achievement

The third lie of feminism is that the more a woman achieves, the more attractive and desirable she becomes to men. The importance of achievement to a man's sense of self—an element

of masculinity that is, we believe, God-given—was projected onto women. Feminism declared that achieving something, making a mark in the world, was the only measure of success that merited the respect of others. Women who believed this myth found themselves competing with men. Now, competition is appropriate in the business and professional world, but it's disastrous in relationships.

Men do respect and admire accomplished women, just as they do men, but personal relationships operate under a different set of standards. Men most appreciate a woman's unique feminine attributes: love, sensitivity, her abilities to relate. Women have been shocked to discover that their hard-won accomplishments haven't resulted in great relationships with men. Sometimes, being overeducated hampers a woman's ability to relate to men. Men's egos are notoriously fragile, and they are by nature competitive. It's threatening to many men when a woman achieves more, or accomplishes more, or knows more than they do. Feminism didn't warn women of the double standard in relationships: that achievement can and does reap benefits in our careers, but be a stumbling block in our relationships.

The question naturally arises, then, Is it bad for a woman to have a higher degree of education than the man in a relationship? Is it troublesome when a woman is smarter than the man? Should a woman "dumb down" in order to get or keep her man? In the words of the apostle Paul, "May it never be!" A woman living up to the potential of her God-given gifts brings glory to God; it would be an insult to our gracious God to pretend those gifts aren't there. The answer is for women to understand that many men feel threatened and insecure about this area of potential competition, and maintain an attitude of humility and sensitivity about one's strengths; as Romans exhorts us, "Honor[ing] one another above yourselves" (12:10).

Not surprisingly, God already knew about the disparity between the sexes on the issue of achievement. Throughout the Bible, men are called to trust God as they achieve whatever God has

called them to do. It’s important for men to experience personal significance by making a mark on the world. But God calls women to trust Him in a different area: in our relationships. A woman’s value is usually not in providing history-changing leadership and making great, bold moves, but in loving and supporting those around us, changing the world by touching hearts. Once in a while, a woman does make her mark on a national or global scale: consider the biblical judge Deborah, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, and Indira Ghandi. But women like these are the exception, not the rule. And we don’t have to feel guilty for not being “exceptional.”

Lie #4: The Myth of One’s “Unrealized Potential”

Lie number four says that all of us—but especially women—have tremendous potential that simply *must* be realized. To feminism’s way of thinking, just being average isn’t acceptable: you must be *great*.

This causes two problems. First, women are deceived into thinking they are one of the elite, the few, the special. Reality, though, is that most women are ordinary, one of the many. All of us are uniquely gifted by God, but few women are given visible, high- profile leadership roles, which tend to be the only ones that feminism deems valuable. We run into trouble when we’re operating under a set of beliefs that don’t coincide with reality!

Consequently, many women are operating under unrealistically high expectations of themselves. When life doesn’t deliver on their hopes, whether they be making class valedictorian, beauty pageant winner, company president, or neurosurgeon, women are set up for major disappointment. Just being a cog in the wheel of your own small world isn’t enough.

This brings us to the second problem. A lot of women beat themselves up for not accomplishing greatness. Instead of

investing their life's energies in doing well those things they *can* do, they grieve what and who they are *not*. Just being good, or being good at what they do, isn't enough if they're not the *best*.

Romans 12:3 tells us, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought." Rather than worrying about our unrealized potential for some sort of nebulous greatness, we ought to be concerned about being faithful and obedient in the things God has given us to do, trusting Him for the ultimate results. And we ought to not worry about being ordinary as if there were some stigma to it. Scripture says that God is pleased to use ordinary people, because that's how He gets the most glory. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.) There is honor in being an ordinary person in the hand of an extraordinary God.

Lie #5: Sexual Sameness

The fifth lie of feminism is that men and women are the same sexually. This lie comes to us courtesy of the same evil source that brought us the lies of the sexual revolution.

The truth is that women can't separate sex from love as easily as men can. For women, sex needs to be an expression of love and commitment. Without these qualities, sex is demeaning, nothing more than hormones going crazy.

The cost of sex is far greater for women than for men. Sex outside of a committed, loving relationship—I'm talking about marriage here—often results in unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and profound heartbreak. Every time a woman gives her body away to a man, she gives a part of her heart as well. Sexual "freedom" has brought new degrees of heartache to millions of women. The lie of sexual equality has produced widespread promiscuity and epidemic disease. No wonder so many women are struggling with self-esteem!

God's commands concerning sex take into account the fact that

men and women are not the same sexually or any other way. He tells us to exercise self-control before marriage, saving all sexual expression for the constraints of a marriage relationship, and then to keep the marriage bed pure once we are married. When we follow these guidelines, we discover that God's laws provide protection for women: the security of a committed relationship, freedom from sexual health worries, and a stable environment for any children produced in the union. This high standard also protects men by providing a safe channel for their sexual energies. Both chaste single men, and faithful husbands, are kept safe from sexual diseases, unwanted pregnancies with women other than their wives, and the guilt of sexual sin.

Lie #6: The Denial of Maternity

Many women postponed marriage and childbearing to pursue their own personal development and career goals. This perspective denies the reality of a woman's reproductive system and the limitations of time. Childbearing is easier in a woman's 20s and 30s than in her 40s. Plus, there is a physical cost; science has borne out the liabilities that older women incur for themselves and their babies. Midlife women are more prone to have problems getting pregnant, staying pregnant, and then experiencing difficult deliveries. The risk of conceiving a child with Down's Syndrome is considerably higher in older mothers.{3} Fertility treatment doesn't work as well for women over 40.{4}

There is also a spiritual dimension to denying maternity. When women refuse their God-ordained roles and responsibilities, they open themselves to spiritual deception and temptations. 1 Timothy 2:15 is an intriguing verse: "But women will be saved through childbearing." One compelling translation for this verse is, "Women will be *kept safe* through childbearing," where Paul uses the word for *childbearing* as a sort of shorthand for the woman's involvement in the domestic

sphere—having her "focus on the family," so to speak.(5) When a married woman's priorities are marriage, family and the home, she is kept safe—protected—from the consequences of delaying motherhood and the temptations that beleaguer a woman trying to fill a man's role. For example, I know one married woman who chose to pursue a full-time career in commercial real estate, to the detriment of her family. She confessed that she found herself constantly battling the temptation to lust on two fronts: sexual lust for the men in her office and her clients, and lust for the recognition and material things that marked success in that field. Another friend chose her career over having any children at all, and discovered that like the men in her field, she could not separate her sense of self from her job, and it ultimately cost her her marriage and her life as she knew it. The problem isn't having a career: the problem is when a woman gets her priorities out of balance.

Lie #7: To Be Feminine Is To Be Weak

In the attempt to blur gender distinctions, feminists declared war on the concept of gender-related characteristics. The qualities that marked feminine women—softness, sweetness, kindness, the ability to relate well—were judged as silly, stupid and weak. Only what characterized men—characteristics like firmness, aggressiveness, competitiveness—were deemed valuable.

But when women try to take on male qualities, the end result is a distortion that is neither feminine nor masculine. A woman is perceived as shrill, not spirited. What is expected and acceptable aggression in a man is perceived as unwelcome brashness in a woman. When women try to be tough, it is often taken as unpleasantness. Unfortunately, there really is a strong stereotype about "what women should be like" that merits being torn down. A lot of men are threatened by strong women with opinions and agendas of their own, and treat them

with undeserved disrespect. But it is not true that traditionally masculine characteristics are the only ones that count.

There really is a double standard operating, because the characteristics that constitute masculinity and femininity are separate and different, and they are not interchangeable. To be feminine is a special kind of strength. It's a different, appealing kind of power that allows a woman to influence her world in a way quite distinct from the way a man influences the world. It pleased the Lord to create woman to complement man, not to compete with him or be a more rounded copy of him. 1 Corinthians 11:7 says that man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. Femininity isn't weakness; it's the glorious, splendid crown on humanity.

Lie #8: Doing is Better Than Being

In his book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*{6}, John Gray pointed out that men get their sense of self from achievement, and women get their sense of self from relationships. Feminism declared that the male orientation of *what you do* was the only one that mattered; *who you are*, and how important you are to the people in your world, didn't count for as much.

This lie said that active is good, passive is bad. Traditional feminine behaviors of being passive and receptive were denounced as demeaning to women and ineffective in the world. Only being the initiator counted, not being the responder. "To listen, to be there, to receive the other with an open heart and mind—this has always been one of the most vital roles of woman. Most women do this quite naturally, but many have come to feel uneasy in this role. Instead, they work frantically on assertiveness, aggression, personal expression, and power, madly suppressing their feminine instincts of love and relatedness."{7}

Women's roles in the family, the church, and the world are a combination of being a responder and an initiator. As a responder, a wife honors her husband through loving submission, and a woman serves the church through the exercise of her spiritual gifts. As an initiator and leader, a woman teaches her children and uses her abilities in the world, such as the woman of Proverbs 31. God's plan is for us to live a balanced life—sometimes active, sometimes passive; sometimes the initiator, sometimes the responder; at all times, submitting both who we are and what we do to the Lordship of Christ.

Lie #9: The Myth of Self-Sufficiency

The ninth lie is the myth of self-sufficiency. Remember the famous feminist slogan that appeared on everything from bumper stickers to t-shirts to notepads? "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle." The message was clear: women don't need men, who are inferior anyway. The world would be a better place if women ran it: no wars, no greed, no power plays, just glorious cooperation and peace.

The next step after "women don't need men" was logical: women don't need anybody. We can take care of ourselves. Helen Reddy's hit song "I Am Woman" became feminism's theme song, with the memorable chorus, "If I have to, I can do anything / I am strong / I am invincible / I am woman!"

Of course, if women don't need anybody except themselves, they certainly don't need God. Particularly a masculine, patriarchal God who makes rules they don't like and insists that He alone is God. But the need to worship is deeply ingrained in us, so feminist thought gave rise to goddess worship. The goddess was just a female image to focus on; in actuality, goddess worship is worship of oneself.{8}

The lie of self-sufficiency is the same lie that Satan has been deceiving us with since the Garden of Eden: What do you

need God for? We grieve the Lord's heart when we believe this lie. Jeremiah 2:13 says, "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." God made us for Himself; believing the lie of self-sufficiency isn't only futile, it's a slap in God's face.

Lie #10: Women Would Enjoy the Feminization of Men

The tenth lie of feminism is that women would enjoy the feminization of men. Feminists believed that the only way to achieve equality of the sexes was to do away with *role* distinctions. Then they decided that that wasn't enough: society had to do away with *gender* distinctions, or at the very least blur the lines. Women embraced more masculine values, and men were encouraged to embrace more feminine characteristics. That was supposed to fix the problem. It didn't.

As men tried to be "good guys" and accommodate feminists' demands, the culture saw a new type of man emerge: sensitive, nurturing, warmly compassionate, yielding. The only problem was that this "soft man" wasn't what women wanted. Women pushed men to be like women, and when they complied, nobody respected them. Women, it turns out, want to be the soft ones—and we want men to be strong and firm and courageous; we want a manly man. When men start taking on feminine characteristics, they're just wimpy and unmasculine, not pleasing themselves or the women who demanded the change. There is a good reason that books and movies with strong, masculine heroes continue to appeal to such a large audience. Both men and women respond to men who fulfill God's design for male leadership, protection, and strength.

Underlying the women's liberation movement is an angry, unsubmissive attitude that is fueled by the lies of deception.

It’s good to know what the lies are, but it’s also important to know what God’s word says, so we can combat the lies with the power of His truth.

Notes

1. Toni Grant, *Being a Woman: Fulfilling Your Femininity and Finding Love*. New York: Random House, 1988.

2. Ibid, 3.

3. March of Dimes, “Pregnancy After 35,” www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332_1155.asp.

4. Jodi Panayotov, “IVF & Older Women – How Successful is IVF After 40?” ezinearticles.com/?IVF-and-Older-Women—How-Successful-is-IVF-After-40?&id=636335.

5. Andreas Kostenberger, “Saved Through Childbearing?” (*CBMW [The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood] News*, Sept. 1997), p. 3.

6. John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

7. Grant, 9.

8. Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 159.

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Business and Ethics

This essay grapples with some of the problems Christians face trying to operate ethically in today’s business world.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Can “business” and “ethics” be used in the same sentence?

A while back, a member of the Probe lecture team was invited to speak on the topic of “Business Ethics” in a class at Colorado State University. When the Probe speaker arrived at the classroom, the professor explained that the reason the class chose to have him speak on this topic was their overwhelming sense of curiosity. They could not comprehend how the words business and ethics could be used in the same title.

Business enterprise has received a very diverse review from the ethicists of this generation. In the “Me First” era of the 80s, there was very little concern for ethics in the world of business, and you would have been hard pressed to find a university that dealt seriously with the need for ethics in its business school curriculum. A case in point concerns John Shad, former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. He donated $35 million dollars to the Harvard Business School to establish an ethics department. Yet two years later, Harvard had only come up with one rather flimsy-sounding course, and they had been unable to find an ethicist to head up the department.(1)

The 90s saw an awakening to the need for ethics because of the many scandals that were beginning to erupt within the world of business and finance, moral failures such as the disgraceful actions that brought down Michael Milken and Ivan Boesky. The problem is that in the 90s, the concern for ethics has not returned us to any absolute standard of ethics, but rather to a search for relative balance between ethics and the bottom line or personal values. The following statement by a state representative from Tennessee demonstrates this tendency all too well. While explaining why he was for fair trade price controls on milk, but against it for liquors, he said, “I’ve got 423 dairy farmers in my district, and I’ve got to rise above principle.”

Often, today, the highest ethic is “tolerance.” By that, I don’t mean the traditional view of tolerance in which one tries to recognize and respect other people’s values without necessarily accepting those values as being correct. I’m talking about a whole new meaning to the word tolerance. Today the word is used in a way to imply that all values, beliefs, and claims to truth and life-styles are equal. It becomes extremely difficult to run a business when (1) you have to walk the tightrope of balancing everyone’s values and (2) you are expected to treat all these values as equally valid. Our society today has lost its ability to determine what is right from what is wrong. Business enterprise requires a level of trust among the participants. Where is that trust going to come from if we have no common platform upon which to base our ethics and must rely, instead, on the assorted and conflicting individual values of whatever group we’re a part of? This essay will grapple with some of the problems we must face as Christians in trying to operate in the business world, while surrounded with people who believe their personal values are not subject to any higher standard than their own reasoning.

Who Makes the Rules?

The fundamental question we need to address is, Who makes the rules, God or man? That is what the issue of ethics is all about. Either there is a source for what is morally right that is beyond ourselves, i.e., God, and that standard is absolute and universal, or we are left to ourselves to figure out what is right and what is wrong, if we can even agree among ourselves that there is a right and a wrong. If we were, in fact, left to ourselves, how could we say one person’s values were any better than another’s? In the age of the industrial and scientific revolution, people believed they could reason themselves toward better behavior, but today, having seen the horrors of what the industrial and scientific revolution has brought upon us, many have given up any hope of finding a unified answer for right and wrong. In fact, many now actually

fear anyone who thinks that he or she has a handle on any absolute standard by which we might live.

Society has moved from a Christian base, which held that there is a source of ultimate truth, through modernism, which saw truth as relative to circumstances, duty, consequences, situations, etc., to post-modernism, which asserts that there is no truth, only the power to put forth one's values.

King Solomon, who was hailed as the wisest leader ever to govern any nation, said, "Be wise and give serious thought to the way you live." In all endeavors, including our work, we must realize that morality is the single most important guiding principle behind all that we do and say. Our morality molds our ultimate being, who we really are.

Today most professional organizations have a code of ethics. The problem is that their codes are often ignored or not made known. For example, a few years ago Probe was speaking in the engineering department at Southern Methodist University. One of the students, after hearing the lecture on engineering ethics, came up to the speaker afterwards and said, "I have been an engineering student for four years, and this is the first time I ever heard that there was an engineering code of ethics."

There are some companies working hard to communicate to their employees a corporate goal and standard that puts forth biblical values. One company like this is the Servicemaster Company. Their corporate goals are: (1) Honor God in all we do, (2) Help people to develop, (3) Pursue excellence, and (4) Grow profitably. Notice that the profitability goal, although one of their four key goals, is listed last. Making a profit is a necessary goal, but there are things more important than surviving in this world. In fact, there are a lot of businesses that should shut down, for their only legitimate goal is that they do make a profit. In this regard, the vast pornography business comes to mind, not to mention state

lotteries and all the other forms of gambling.

So, as an individual or a business, do our personal or corporate goals demonstrate a commitment to a standard beyond ourselves? Do we have a set of guidelines that helps us to steer a course that is straight and narrow in a world that is adrift—floating all over the ethical map? What we need are some guidelines that will help us to steer that straight and narrow course.

Ethical Guidelines for the Real World

In his book, *Honesty, Morality & Conscience,* published by NavPress,(2) Jerry White gives us five excellent guidelines for conducting our business activities.

First, there is the guideline of a **just weight** as found in Deuteronomy 25:13-15. The principle of a just weight is to give a full amount in exchange for a fair payment. Another way to look at it is to give full quality for what is paid for and according to what is advertised. We must accept responsibility for both the quality and the amount of our product or service. As a business owner, do I fairly represent my product or service? As an employee, do I give a full day's work for a full day's pay? Remember, as it says in Colossians 3:23, we are working for the Lord and not for men.

Second, the Lord demands our **total honesty**. Ephesians 4:25 calls upon us to speak the truth. Jerry White reminds us that, "Although we will frequently fail, our intent must be total honesty with our employer, our co-worker, our employees, and our customers."(3) This is a difficult principle to adhere to. James 3:2 says this is where we often fail, but if we can control our tongue we will be able to control the rest of our body as well. The Living Bible best sums it up in Romans 12:17 which says, "Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through." We must ask ourselves, are we totally honest in reporting our use of time, money, and

accomplishments?

The third principle is **being a servant**. Someone has said Christians like to be *called* servants, but don't appreciate being *treated* like servants. To serve God sounds glorious, but to serve others is another matter. As usual, Jesus Christ is our example. Matthew 20:28 says that Christ did not come to be served, but to serve others, in fact, to give up his life for others. The value of a business is its service. How well it serves the needs of its customers will determine its success. The business, in turn, is made up of people who must do the serving. The value of the employees is in how well they serve the customer's needs. This is putting the needs of others before our own and then trusting God to meet our needs in the process.

The fourth guideline is **personal responsibility**. We must take full responsibility for our own actions and decisions. We should not try to excuse our actions based on pressure within our business or organization to do what we know is not right. We all fail at times to do what we know we should do. We must then accept the responsibility for what we have said or done and not try to pass that responsibility on to someone else or try to blame it on some set of circumstances. Romans 12:2 warns us about the danger of allowing the world to shape us into its mold.

Finally, there is the issue of **reasonable profits**. This principle is quite a bit harder to get a handle on, but it is still vital to have guidelines to follow. What is a reasonable profit? This is something each person has to deal with on his own. Luke 6:31 is a great help on this. It says that we should treat others the same way we would want to be treated. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and ask yourself how you would want to be treated in a particular situation. To the business person this is the price of our service or product above our cost. To the employee it is the amount of our wages for our service to the organization. Luke 3:14 says to be

content with our wages, but the Bible also reminds the employer in 1 Timothy 5:18 that the laborer is worthy of his wages.

It is all too easy to rationalize our way around many of these principles, but God will hold us accountable in the end. Ultimately it is God whom we serve and to whom we must give account.

The Cost of Living Ethically

The media is awash with reports of faulty business ethics: frauds, manipulations, thefts, industrial espionage, corruption, kickbacks, conspiracy, thefts, tax evasion, embezzling, and unfair competition proliferate. Either a lot more unethical acts are taking place today or those behaviors that have always existed are being exploited more in contemporary society. A Gallup report concluded that "you can't trust Americans as much as you used to." The *Wall Street Journal* reported that churched persons appear only slightly more likely to walk the straight and narrow than their less-pious compatriots.

Why is it so hard to walk the straight and narrow in our business dealings? We are continually under the stress of performance on the job and in the competitive work environment. Often our very livelihood is threatened under pressure of the job. Usually we know what we should do, but we count the cost of doing the right thing and then back down due to pressure from people or circumstances. If we feel that we must do whatever is necessary to keep our jobs, we may end up serving the wrong master.

Steven Covey, in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*,(4) addresses the issue of the need to become principle-centered individuals. Are we living principle-centered lives? This means that there are some principles that are more important than the success or even the continuance of

our business. Are there some ethical standards for which we are prepared to die if necessary? Those who let their business die rather than set aside their ethical standards can return to do business again someday, since they were able to maintain their integrity and their reputation. Those who cave in to the pressures to keep the business alive may be caught and end up losing their reputation and thus deprive themselves of a platform from which to rebuild their lives and businesses.

Ten Global Principles for Success

We are going to close this essay on business ethics with *Ten Global Principles for Business and Professional Success* from the booklet *Mega Values* by Colonel Nimrod McNair.(5) These principles are modeled after the Ten Commandments.

The first principle is, "Show proper respect for authority." This is the invisible superstructure of productive enterprise. God clearly commands us to respect those in authority over us. God uses this command to bring order out of chaos. Authority is a necessary prerequisite to order.

The second rule is, "Have a singleness of purpose." Divided purposes dilute effectiveness when interests conflict. We cannot serve two masters effectively. We must evaluate our time, talent, and resources and make sure we are using these God-given elements in a way that ultimately brings Him the glory.

Precept number three is, "Use effective communication in word and deed." Complete communications and predictable follow-through are the basic expressions of personal integrity. It means doing what you say you'll do, even if it is uncomfortable or inconvenient. This commandment is honored when promises are kept and accurate recounting of transactions is given.

A fourth truth is, "Provide proper rest, recreation, and

reflection.” This ensures a quality of life that will be reflected in creativity, productivity, and motivation. Rest is a necessity for effectiveness. Recreation guards the mind against mental and emotional fatigue. Reflection promotes self-monitoring, allows for mid-course corrections, and ensures single-mindedness. The fifth tenet is, “Show respect for the older and more experienced.” Our parents, teachers, coaches, employers, pastors, and other elders in our lives have an investment in us. It is to our benefit to honor that investment and to draw fully from the wisdom and expertise of those more experienced than ourselves.

The sixth axiom is, “Show respect for human life, dignity, and rights.” This encompasses product quality and service, the work environment, health and safety, personnel policies and responsibilities, and competitive practices. It is simply the Golden Rule—treating others as you would want to be treated.

The seventh principle is, “Maintain a stability of sexes and the family.” Wisdom and good business practice dictate equal regard for men and women as persons irrespective of gender or marital status. Respect for the family structure as the crucial foundation of our cultural system must be reflected in our decisions regarding the conflicts between business demands and the value of the family and personal life.

Precept number eight is, “Demonstrate the proper allocation of resources.” Two fundamental responsibilities and privileges of business are optimal use of material resources and wise leadership of people. We must treat all our business assets, whether they be people, funds, or materials, as a gift from the Lord.

The ninth truth is, “Demonstrate honesty and integrity.” Integrity is the cornerstone of any good relationship. Without demonstrating the willingness to give and the worthiness to receive trust, no business can survive or prosper. A reputation for honesty is a comprehensive statement of both a

person's character and how he or she treats others. It is a fundamental mindset against stealing, lying, or deceiving.

The tenth and final business commandment is, "Maintain the right of ownership of property." Those who are disciplined, creative, prudent, and industrious are entitled to the fruits of their labor. We must not covet that which belongs to another.

Business ethics is more than a list of do's and don'ts, but these principles can help us get off to a good start.

Notes

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2. Jerry White, Honesty, Morality & Conscience (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1978).
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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 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

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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).

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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: "Maimonedes 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 forgiveregardless of*

your opponent's responseyou'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

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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 it not limited to governmental agencies. Many banking systems, for example, utilize electronic funds-transfer systems. Plans to link these systems together into a national system could also provide a means of tracking the actions of citizens. A centralized banking network could fulfill nearly every information need a malevolent dictator might have. This is not to say that such a thing will happen,

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. Schulmacher, 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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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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9. George Barna, *Generation Next: What You Need to Know About Today's Youth* (Ventura,Calif.: Regal, 1995), 11.
10. Dunn, x.
11. Barna, 18.
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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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