

“Is It a Sin For a Christian to be a Soldier in the Military?”

Is it a sin for a Christian to be a soldier (i.e. someone training to be on the frontlines to kill) in the military?

I have been reading some arguments on both sides of this coin, and both have some weight to them. The main argument from the peaceful side of this coin is that Jesus said “those who live by the sword, will die by the sword” and that first century christians did not serve in the military, except for a few, but they weren’t in war at that time. The other side of the coin seperates personal responsibility from state responsibility and says that if you are serving in the military and kill, God holds the head of the state responsible. It also uses the Old Testament wars in many of its arguments.

It seems to me that there is power in not fighting, and that the Bible teaches that we should love our enemies, and not kill others just because a government tells you too. However, it would seem in such an evil world that if we didn’t stand up and fight for the protection of others, all Christians would be oppressed. It just keeps flipping back and forth.

Thank you for your question about Christians serving in the military. Probably the three best known books dealing with this subject are:

- *Robert Clouse, ed., War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981).*
- *Arthur Holmes, ed., War and Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975).*
- *Keith Payne and Karl Payne, A Just Defense (Portland: Multnomah, 1987).*

I could go into the details of the various positions, but I think these books (especially the InterVarsity book) provide a good overview of the arguments on each side.

I might also mention that Tommy Nelson (the pastor of Denton Bible Church in Denton, TX) has put together a 90-minute video on the subject of Christians in the military. It is simply called "God and the Military: Is It Right to Bear Arms?" You can contact him at www.dentonbible.org. Thanks for writing.

Kerby Anderson

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"Where Did The Terms 'Right Wing' and 'Left Wing' Come From?"

I was reading Ecclesiastes 10:2 ("The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left") and what struck me right away was this fits our right and left wings.

My question is, how did the political parties get their status of being considered left and right?

It turns out that the historical explanation for the political terms left wing and right wing are based upon the seating arrangement of the first French General Assembly. The proponents of the political ideas inspired by the Enlightenment were seated on the left. Those who supported the old regime were seated at the right hand of the president of the Assembly.

So early on, ideas that were something new and novel were associated with the left, and conservative ideas were associated with the right. Actually, the story is a bit more complicated than that, but to answer your question, the origin of left and right is found in modern politics rather than Ecclesiastes.

Thanks for writing. God bless you.

Kerby Anderson

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The Second Half of Marriage

*When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. Kerby Anderson looks at the book *The Second Half of Marriage* by David and Claudia Arp and describes the eight challenges of second-half marriages.*

When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. In this article we are going to be looking at the book *The Second Half of Marriage* (Zondervan, 1998) by David and Claudia Arp. Suddenly marriages that were child-centered once again become couple-centered. Many marriages do not survive the transition. According to the National Center of Health Statistics, while divorce generally declined, divorces among couples married thirty years or more increased significantly.

In their book, the Arps describe eight themes within a second-half marriage. One is the need to transition from a child-focused marriage to a more partner-centered marriage. Without children as buffers, couples face the challenge of redefining

their marriage. Either it becomes more intimate or it slowly disintegrates. A husband married for nineteen years said, "I'm fearful that when our children leave home, we will go our separate ways, because our priorities and interests are so different."

Couples must learn how to communicate and effectively deal with conflict and anger. Couples often lose the ability to communicate in marriage because there is such an urgent focus on the kids and their needs and problems. One wife said, "The greatest stress in my marriage is lack of communication—just being able to converse at the end of the day. I always feel as if I'm competing with the computer, the newspaper, or CNN news."

Couples in the second half of marriage must also learn to adjust to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. Your parents may have placed certain expectations on you and your marriage that you are still feeling in midlife. A wife married thirty-one years said, "Whatever I do for my parents, I can never meet all of their expectations. Yet I keep trying. I'd have to say unmet expectations are the hardest to deal with. I need to add that my expectations are the hardest to deal with."

Reconnecting with your adult children is also a challenge. As children leave the nest, they leave behind certain requirements and expectations. Our relationship with them changes, and couples in the second half of marriage must reconnect with children who are now adults on a different level. Often we must learn to resist giving advice unless it is requested. And even when we give advice, we should mentally prepare ourselves for the possibility that our grown children may not act on it.

Here we will be looking at these eight themes of second half marriages and discuss the challenges of each of them. We will view them from the kaleidoscope of over five hundred survey

responses used by the Arps in writing their book. We pray that this look at second half marriages will help strengthen your marriage no matter how long you have been married.

Expectations and Companionship

The first challenge is to learn to let go of past marital disappointment, forgive each other, and commit to making the rest of your marriage the best. All of us go into marriage with certain dreams and expectations. Some of these will never be realized. Are you willing to let go of unmet expectations and unrealistic dreams? You may never build your dream house or go on that exotic vacation. Are you willing to let it go? Can you accept those extra pounds or that gray hair or even no hair at all? Giving up lost dreams and dealing with each other's imperfections is a positive step toward forgiving past hurts and moving on in your marriage.

A wife married for twenty-five years said, "After twenty years of marriage, I finally realized my husband will never be home at 5 p.m. While this is disappointing to me, I simply had to let that expectation go." Another wife said, "During times of testing and disappointment, we kept working on our relationship. We learned how to forgive each other and how to work things out. We are committed to our marriage and we never give up. That's our secret."

The second challenge is to create a marriage that is partner-focused rather than child-focused. When children leave the nest, couples often move from a child-focused marriage to an activity-focused marriage. Community or church activities may now take up the time and energy formerly devoted to children. As valuable as these activities might be, they still serve as buffers to a mutual, partnership marriage. In the second half of marriage, couples need to redefine their roles and functions. What previously worked may no longer be relevant. Marriage can be more personal and more fulfilling as you focus on the couple's relationship rather than the children.

A wife married for thirty-three years said, "It's important to build a good relationship with your spouse so that when the children leave, you have the underlying joy of focusing on each other and not on your adult children."

Key to this is to develop what is called a "companionship marriage." This has been defined as a socially registered commitment between a man and a woman where they seek to know themselves and each other as far as they are capable of being known. It also involves mutual affection and affirmation where they help each other grow and change in order to become the loving and creative persons they are capable of becoming.

These then are the first two of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Next we will look at two more challenges.

Communication and Conflict

The third challenge is to maintain an effective communication system that allows you to express your deepest feelings, joys, and concerns. Communication is the lifeblood of a good marriage. But what do you do when the communication patterns that seemed to work in the first half of marriage seem inadequate for the second half? When children are gone, there are more spaces of silence, and there is often less to say to each other. Couples may wonder how they made it this far only to end up as quiet strangers in front of each other. Couples in the second half of marriage need to develop intimate and honest communication that focuses on their needs, wants, and dreams at midlife.

A wife married for eighteen years said, "My greatest fear is that when the kids are gone, we won't communicate or have anything in common. I'm afraid of being left alone with someone who never speaks, pays attention, or ever touches me." Another wife said, "The greatest frustration for me in my marriage is simply not being understood."

The fourth challenge is to use anger and conflict in a creative way to build your relationship. Anger and conflict are part of any marriage. Mature couples need to learn how to process anger. Marriage must become a safe place to express your concerns in the context of a loving relationship. This challenge is critical because often the real problem isn't the facts but the strong negative feelings we harbor. Once those feelings are dealt with, it's easier to move on and resolve the conflict.

A wife of eighteen years said, "We had the divorce papers ready to sign a couple of times a number of years ago, but both times we looked at each other and said, 'But I haven't stopped loving you.' Even when we couldn't agree on virtually anything else, we have always agreed on that. Nothing we've been through was bad enough to kill the love we have for each other."

Often the key to dealing with anger is to objectively state the problem and then begin to set forward the solutions. In the process, the couple can also identify what is at stake and what each partner has invested. Finding a solution to the problem is easier when both partners are committed to each other and committed to a mutually satisfying solution. Sometimes this will involve compromise and in other cases, it will involve showing love to your partner by accepting his or her perspective.

These then are the first four of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. In the next section we will look at two more challenges.

Friendship and Romance

The fifth challenge is to build a deeper friendship and enjoy your spouse. In the second half of marriage, we can deepen our friendship and become close companions. When we are in a long-term marriage, we become more familiar and comfortable with

each other. When we acknowledge that we aren't perfect, we can relax and enjoy each other. What are you doing to build your friendship with your spouse? Are you working to expand your boundaries and prevent boredom? Are you trying to put more fun back into your marriage? Fun and friendship are two key ingredients in the second half of marriage.

One wife married for twenty years said, "This year has been a time of growth for us as a couple. It started with lots of stress—overcommitment and relationship problems—but God helped us through it. We just celebrated our twentieth anniversary with a romantic getaway. We've become best friends again. Hope can be restored!"

In their book, the Arps provide some concrete tips for making the second half more enjoyable. First, take care of yourself. Sometimes our back muscles can give us a midlife wake-up call, so exercise and physical therapy should become a way of life. Second, pace yourself. Third, build relationships and maintain them. This is the time of life to beef up your friendships and develop a support system. Fourth, stretch your boundaries. Fifth, stay involved with life. Sixth, hang in there. When you are discouraged, don't throw your life away.

The sixth challenge is to renew romance and restore a pleasurable, sexual relationship. Contrary to popular belief, interest in sex does not have to diminish as we grow older. Actually the research done by the Arps tends to indicate that sexual satisfaction increases rather than decreases with the number of years married. Couples in the second half of marriage need to do three things: protect privacy, cherish the love relationship, and renew romance. These are important priorities.

The Arps list six secrets to rekindle romance. These are: be affectionate, be a listener, be adventuresome, be playful, be in shape, and be a little wacky. As we grow older, the pace of life changes and there is a greater need to stay in shape by

eating well, working out, and watching our weight. This is not only good for your marriage. It is good for your health.

These then are the first six of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Let's look at the last two challenges.

Adapted Relationships and Spiritual Growth

The seventh challenge is to adjust to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. As children leave the nest, we release them into adulthood. But it is also important to reconnect with them on an adult level. At the same time, you need to balance relationships with your own parents. This will be difficult, especially if your parents did not successfully meet this challenge in their marriage. Whatever your situation, your relationship with your adult children and your elderly parents will affect your marriage. Accepting the circumstances can be key in building a strong second half of marriage. You can't go back and change your family history, but you can make wise choices for the future based upon past circumstances.

The drain of family commitments can take its toll on a second half marriage. One wife of twenty-eight years said, "For me, the emotional drain of trying to be everything to everybody is affecting my relationship with my husband. There is no energy left at the end of the day for me to invest in our marriage."

The challenge of rearing children and sending them into a world also affects one of the other challenges we have discussed: the challenge of communication. One husband of thirty years said, "We don't have an empty nest yet, although two out of three are gone. We've tried to push our children out of the nest but leave the lines of communication open to advise and assist when needed."

The final challenge is to evaluate where you are on your

spiritual pilgrimage, grow closer to each other and to God, and together serve others. Our faith in God should make a difference in our marriage. The relationship of a husband and wife to God provides the foundation for a good marriage that will be tested by the changing circumstances of the second half of marriage. Couples should evaluate their spiritual pilgrimage and seek to grow closer spiritually to each other and to God.

A husband married for thirty-two years said, "The best aspects of our marriage are companionship, our faith in God, and our love for each other. We try to add to the other's happiness by surprising each other with little gifts, a hug, a kiss, or giving a compliment—or just being thoughtful."

We trust that this has been helpful to you as you seek to strengthen your marriage and grow closer to God. We believe you will grow closer to each other as you grow closer to God. May God bless you.

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"How Can I Prepare for College?"

Dear Mr. Bohlin,

I will be attending Cornell University in the fall of 2000. My declared major is pre-med, biochemical engineering. I will also attending the Mind Games conference in July. Can you suggest any Christian reading materials for me so that I can be prepared for the conference in July, but most importantly, so I can be prepared for Cornell in August as a Christian.

Good to hear we will see you in July! I am looking forward to meeting you and spending the week together.

I would recommend Jim Sire's book, *The Universe Next Door*, as a good place to start. Worldview is an essential concept to the conference and Sire maps out the different worldviews in a concise manner. Considering your future major, I would recommend *Darwin's Black Box* by Michael Behe and *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* by Phillip Johnson for starters. If Sire proves interesting reading to you and you are wondering where some of these strange ideas came from, you might look for a copy of Francis Schaeffer's *How Should We Then Live?* which briefly (258 pages) traces the historical development of philosophy, theology, art and science in the west. Though the book is over twenty years old, Schaeffer turned out to be an accurate prophet of where things were headed. So, read Sire first and take on the others as time, money and interest dictate.

See you in July.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.
Probe Ministries

Online Affairs – A Christian Look at a Major Problem

Kerby Anderson highlights online affairs, the sin of adultery with an "electronic" relationship on the Internet.



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

The Allure of Cyber-Relationships

The Internet is becoming a breeding ground for adultery, so say many experts who track the pattern of extramarital affairs. So we will discuss the phenomenon of online affairs.

Peggy Vaughn is the author of *The Monogamy Myth* and also serves as an expert for America Online on problems caused by infidelity. She predicts that one "role of the Internet in the future will be as a source of affairs." She is writing a second book on the subject of adultery and says she could base half of it just on the letters she receives from people who started an affair online.[\[1\]](#)

An online affair (or cyberaffair) is an intimate or sexually explicit communication between a married person and someone other than their spouse that takes place on the Internet. Usually this communication takes place through an online service such as America Online or CompuServe. Participants usually visit a chat room to begin a group conversation and then often move into a one-to-one mode of communication. Chat room categories range from "single and liking it" to "married and flirting" to "naked on the keyboard."

Women in a chat room are often surprised at what develops in a fairly short period of time. At first the conversation is stimulating, though flirtatious. Quickly, however, women are often confronted with increasingly sexual questions and comments. Even if the comments don't turn personal, women find themselves quickly sharing intimate information about themselves and their relationships that they would never share with someone in person. Peggy Vaughn says, "Stay-at-home moms in chat rooms are sharing all this personal stuff they are hiding from their partners." She finds that the intensity of women's online relationships can "quickly escalate into thinking they have found a soulmate."

Online affairs differ from physical world affairs in some

ways, but are similar in others. Cyberaffairs are based upon written communication where a person may feel more free to express herself anonymously than in person. Frequently the communication becomes sexually graphic and kinky in ways that probably would not occur if a real person were hearing these comments and could act on them. Participants in an online affair will often tell their life stories and their innermost secrets. They will also create a new persona, become sexually adventurous, and pretend to be different than they really are.

Pretending is a major theme in cyberaffairs. Men claim to be professionals (doctors, lawyers) who work out every day in the gym. And they universally claim that if their wives met their needs, they wouldn't be sex shopping on the Internet. Women claim to be slim, sexy, and adventurous. The anonymity of the Internet allows them to divulge (or even create) their wildest fantasies. In fact, their frank talk and flirtation pays great dividends in the number of men in a chat room who want to talk to them and get together with them.

Just as the Internet has become a new source of pornography for many, so it seems that it has also become a new source for affairs. Relationships online frequently go over the line leaving pain, heartbreak, and even divorce in their wake. Even though these online affairs don't involve sex, they can be very intense and threaten a marriage just the same.

Current Statistics on Adultery

In a [previous article](#), I talked about some of the statistics concerning adultery. Before we continue, let me update some of those numbers with a multitude of studies all coming to similar conclusions.

One conclusion is that adultery is becoming more common, and researchers are finding that women are as likely as men to have an affair. A 1983 study found that 29 percent of married people under 25 had had an affair with no statistical

difference between the number of men and women who chose to be unfaithful to their spouses early in life.^{2} By comparison, only 9 percent of spouses in the 1950s under the age of 25 had been involved in extramarital sex. Another study concluded that by age 40 about 50 to 65 percent of husbands and 45 to 55 percent of wives become involved in an extramarital affair.^{3}

Affairs are usually more than a one-time event. A 1987 study surveyed 200 men and women and found that their affairs lasted an average of two years.^{4} In fact, affairs go through transitions over time. They may begin as romantic, sexual, or emotional relationships and may become intimate friendships. Affairs that become friendships can last decades or a lifetime.

Online affairs differ from other affairs in that they may not involve a physical component, but the emotional attachment is still there. Online affairs develop because of the dual attraction of attention and anonymity. Someone who has been ignored by a spouse (or at least perceives that he or she is ignored) suddenly becomes the center of attention in a chat room or a one-on-one e-mail exchange. A woman finds it exciting, even intoxicating, that all these men want to talk to her. And they are eager to hear what she says and needs.

Anonymity feeds this intoxication because the person on the other end of this cyberaffair is unknown. He or she can be as beautiful and intelligent as your dreams can imagine. The fantasy is fueled by the lack of information and the anonymity. No one in cyberland has bad breath, a bald head, love handles, or a bad temper. The sex is the best you can imagine. Men are warm, sensitive, caring, and communicative. Women are daring, sensual, and erotic.

Is it all too good to be true? Of course it is. Cyberaffairs are only make-believe. Usually when cyberlovers meet, there is a major letdown. No real person can compete with a dream lover. No marriage can compete with a cyberaffair. But then an

online affair can't really compete with a real relationship that provides true friendship and marital intimacy.

Nevertheless, online affairs are seductive. An Internet addict calls out to a spouse "one more minute" just as an alcoholic justifies "one more drink." Cyberaffairs provide an opportunity to become another person and chat with distant and invisible neighbors in the high-tech limbo of cyberspace. Social and emotional needs are met, flirting is allowed and even encouraged, and an illusion of intimacy feeds the addiction that has caught so many unsuspecting Internet surfers.

Motivations for Affairs

Affairs usually develop because the relationship meets various social and psychological needs. Self-esteem needs are often at the top of the list. Self-esteem needs are met through knowing, understanding, and acceptance. Psychologists say that those needs are enhanced through talking intimately about feelings, thoughts, and needs. This can take place in person or take place through the Internet.

Even though online affairs may not involve a physical component, the emotional attachment can be just as strong and even overwhelming. And when they end, this strong attachment usually leaves participants in emotional pain.

Women report feeling thrilled by their lover's interest in them physically, emotionally, and intellectually. They are also excited about the chance to know a different man (how he thinks and feels). They also feel intimate with their lovers because they can talk about their feelings openly. However, when the affair ends, they feel a great deal of guilt with regard to their husband and children. They also regret the deceit that accompanied the affair.

Men report feeling excited about the sexual experience of the

affair. They try to control their feelings in the affair and do not compete with their feelings for their wife. Often they limit the emotional involvement with their lover. Men also feel guilt and regret over deceit when an affair ends, but less so than most women.

Men and women have affairs for different reasons. Research has shown that women seek affairs in order to be loved, have a friend, and feel needed. Men seek affairs for sexual fulfillment, friendship, and fun.[{5}](#)

It appears that the percentage of women who have extramarital sex has increased the last few decades. In 1953 Alfred Kinsey found that 29 percent of married women admitted to at least one affair.[{6}](#) A *Psychology Today* survey in 1970 reported that 36 percent of their female readers had extramarital sex.[{7}](#) One study in 1987 found that 70 percent of women surveyed had been involved in an affair.[{8}](#)

It also appears that women who are employed full-time outside of the home are more likely to have an affair than full-time homemakers. Several studies come to this same conclusion. One study found that 47 percent of wives who were employed full-time and 27 percent of full-time homemakers had been involved in an affair before they were 40 years old.[{9}](#) And *New Woman* magazine found that 57 percent of employed wives who had an affair met their lover at work.[{10}](#)

Contrary to conventional wisdom, an affair will not help your marriage. In 1975, Linda Wolfe published *Playing Around* after she studied twenty-one women who were having affairs to keep their marriages intact.[{11}](#) The reasoning for many of these women was that if they could meet their own needs, their marriages would be more successful. Many said they were desperately lonely. Others were afraid, believing their husbands did not love them or were not committed to their marriage. Five years after the initial study, only three of the twenty-one women were still married.

Adultery can destroy a marriage, whether a physical affair or an online affair.

Preventing an Affair

The general outline for some of these ideas comes from family therapist Frank Pittman, author of *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, although I have added additional material. He has counseled 10,000 couples over the last forty years, and about 7,000 have experienced infidelity. He has nineteen specific suggestions for couples on how to avoid affairs.[\[12\]](#) Let's look at a few of them.

First, accept the possibility of being sexually attracted to another and of having sexual fantasies. Frank Pittman believes we should acknowledge that such thoughts can develop so that you don't scare them into hiding. But he also says you shouldn't act on them.

Second, we should hang out with monogamous people. He says, "They make a good support system." To state it negatively, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Third, work on your marriage. He says to keep your marriage sexy and work to be intimate with your spouse. He also says to make marriage an important part of your identity. "Carry your marriage with you wherever you go."

Fourth, be realistic about your marriage. Pittman says, "Don't expect your marriage to make you happy. See your partner as a source of comfort rather than a cause of unhappiness." Accept the reality of marriage; it isn't always beautiful. Also accept that you are both imperfect.

Fifth, keep the marriage equal. Share parenting duties. "If not, one partner will become the full-time parent, and the other will become a full-time child" without responsibilities, who seeks to be taken care of. And keep the relationships

equal. Pittman says, "The more equal it is, the more both partners will respect and value it."

Sixth, if you aren't already married, be careful in your choice of a marriage partner. For example, marry someone who believes in, and has a family history of, monogamy. Frank Pittman says, "It is a bad idea to become the fifth husband of a woman who has been unfaithful to her previous four." Also, marry someone who respects and likes your gender. "They will get over the specialness of you yourself and eventually consider you as part of a gender they dislike."

Seventh, call home every day you travel. "Otherwise, you begin to have a separate life." And stay faithful. "If you want your partner to (stay faithful), it is a good idea to stay faithful yourself." And make sure you are open, honest, and authentic. Lies and deception create a secret life that can allow an affair to occur.

Finally, don't overreact or exaggerate the consequences of an affair if it occurs. Pittman says, "It doesn't mean there will be a divorce, murder or suicide. Catch yourself and work your way back into the marriage."

Affairs can destroy a marriage. Take the time to affair-proof your marriage so you avoid the pain, guilt and regret that inevitably results. And if you have fallen into an affair, work your way back and rebuild your marriage.

Consequences of Affairs

When God commands, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14), He did so for our own good. There are significant social, psychological, and spiritual consequences to adultery.

A major social cost is divorce. An affair that is discovered does not have to lead to divorce, but often it does. About one-third of couples remain together after the discovery of an adulterous affair, while the other two-thirds usually

divorce.

Not surprisingly, the divorce rate is higher among people who have affairs. Annette Lawson (author of *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal*) found that spouses who did not have affairs had the lowest rate of divorce. Women who had multiple affairs (especially if they started early in the marriage) had the highest rate of divorce.

A lesser known fact is that those who divorce rarely marry the person with whom they are having the affair. For example, Dr. Jan Halper's study of successful men (executives, entrepreneurs, professionals) found that very few men who have affairs divorce their wife and marry their lovers. Only 3 percent of the 4,100 successful men surveyed eventually married their lovers.[{13}](#)

Frank Pittman has found that the divorce rate among those who married their lovers was 75 percent.[{14}](#) The reasons for the high divorce rate include: intervention of reality, guilt, expectations, a general distrust of marriage, and a distrust of the affairer.

The psychological consequences are also significant, even if they are sometimes more difficult to discern. People who pursue an affair often do so for self-esteem needs, but often further erode those feelings by violating trust, intimacy, and stability in a marriage relationship. Affairs do not stabilize a marriage, they upset it.

Affairs destroy trust. It's not surprising that marriages formed after an affair and a divorce have such a high divorce rate. If your new spouse cheated before, what guarantee do you have that this person won't begin to cheat on you? Distrust of marriage and distrust of the affairer are significant issues.

Finally, there are spiritual consequences to affairs. We grieve the Lord by our actions. We disgrace the Lord as we become one more statistic of moral failure within the body of

Christ. We threaten the sacred marriage bond between us and our spouse. We bring guilt into our lives and shame into our marriage and family. Affairs extract a tremendous price in our lives and the lives of those we love and hold dear.

And let's not forget the long-term consequences. Affairs, for example, can lead to unwanted pregnancies. According to one report, "Studies of blood typing show that as many as 1 out of every 10 babies born in North America is not the offspring of the mother's husband."[\[15\]](#) Affairs can also result in sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, or even AIDS. Many of these diseases are not curable and will last for a lifetime.

Adultery is dangerous, and so are online affairs. The popularity of the recent movie *You've Got Mail* has helped feed the fantasy that you are writing to Tom Hanks or Meg Ryan. In nearly every case, nothing could be further from the truth. An online affair could happen to you, and the plot might be more like *Fatal Attraction*.

Notes

1. Karen Peterson, "Spouses Browse Infidelity Online," *USA Today*, 6 July 1999, 1D.
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3. Maggie Scarf, *Intimate Partners* (New York: Ballantine, 1996).
4. Trish Hall, "Infidelity and Women: Shifting Patterns," *New York Times*, 1 June 1987, B8.
5. Annette Lawson, *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
6. Alfred Kinsey, et. al. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1953).
7. R. Athanasiou, et.al. "Sex: A Report to *Psychology Today* Readers," *Psychology Today*, July 1970, 39-52.
8. Shere Hite, *Women and Love* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1987).

9. Carol Travis and Susan Sadd, *The Redbook Report on Female Sexuality* (New York:Delacorte Press, 1977).
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11. Linda Wolfe, *Playing Around: Women and Extramarital Sex* (New York: WilliamMorrow, 1975).
12. "Reducing the risks of a wandering eye," *USA Today*, 6 July 1999, 10D.
13. Jan Halper, *Quiet Desperation: The Truth About Successful Men* (New York: WarnerBooks, 1988).
14. Frank Pittman, *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy* (New York: Norton,1989).
15. William Allman, "The Mating Game," *U.S. News and World Report*, 19 July 1993, 57-63.

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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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Economic Issues

Minimum Wage

Although the minimum wage law is more than 50 years old, it is still a very controversial measure. In fact, a battle over the minimum wage occurs every time Congress tries to increase it. Minimum wage seems like one of those political issues that passionate people should support. But the opposite is true. The minimum wage leads to maximum unemployment for people with few job skills trying to enter the work force.

My own experience is illustrative. I started job hunting as a teenager during a rather depressed economy. The minimum wage requirement nearly kept me from getting a job because, as an unskilled laborer entering the job market for the first time, I had nothing more to offer than a strong back and conscientious work habits. Whether I was worth the minimum wage in my first job is questionable. But after working in a machine shop and as a ditch digger, I developed skills that made me more valuable to my employer.

Back in 1938, establishing a minimum wage of 35 cents an hour seemed admirable. But today it effectively shuts less-skilled people out of the work force. In essence, the minimum wage law requires employers to discriminate against young people with few job skills. A teenager whose services are worth, say, only \$3 an hour is not going to be hired at \$4.25 an hour (plus benefits like Social Security, which raise the cost to the employer to over \$5 an hour). The choice is not between working for \$3 an hour and working for \$4.25 an hour. The real choice is between working for \$3 an hour and not working at all.

The effect of minimum wage on young people is devastating. When the lowest rung on the ladder is higher than your head, that necessary first step into a job will never be taken. The high rate of unemployment among teenagers is due in large part to the minimum wage laws that place the rungs on the ladder too high. Eliminating the minimum wage would allow more young people to get on-the-job training.

Minimum wage's effect on the poor is also troubling. Research indicates that for every 10 percent rise in the minimum wage, there is a 3 percent drop in employment among workers covered by the Fair Labor and Standards Act. In other words, if seven workers get their wages increased, three workers either get fired or can't find work. Notice how the minimum wage law has changed the nature of employment in America. More and more restaurants are switching from waiter service to self-service. Gas stations have followed suit. It explains why you see fewer ushers at movie theaters and fewer "bag boys" at supermarkets. In the past, these jobs allowed young people to develop job skills. Today, many don't exist, and young people are the losers.

Raising the minimum wage may seem compassionate. But in the end, those with limited job skills in need of work experience are the ones hurt by good intentions.

Comparable Worth

Although the idea of comparable worth has been roundly criticized, it is still gaining proponents. Like the minimum wage, it seems at first glance like an issue we should back. But it has not exactly generated a groundswell of support.

Clarence Pendleton (former chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights) called comparable worth "the looniest idea since Looney Tunes came on the screen." But even so, its proponents are resolved to make it the law of the land.

The seeds of comparable worth first found fertile ground in the judicial system. A number of years ago, Federal Judge Jack Tanner, citing a consulting firm's comparable-worth study, ruled that the state of Washington was guilty of sex discrimination. His judgment of nearly \$1 billion against the state provided impetus for a similar suit in California.

Proponents of comparable worth argue that the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are not enough and urge the adoption of comparable worth legislation. But underlying this movement are some questionable assumptions.

First is the dubious assumption that differences between male and female wages are due to discrimination. But sexism has less to do with the wage differences than with the way women participate in the economy. Many work part-time, and most leave the job market to raise children. Economist Walter Williams estimates that women on the average spend about one-third of their potential working years in the labor market and therefore have less job-related experience than men. When relevant criteria such as education, experience, and seniority are factored in, many wage disparities vanish.

A study released by the Rand Corporation demonstrates that the gap between male and female wages is decreasing steadily, and the rate of decrease has begun to accelerate in the last few years. Economists James Smith and Michael Ward show that this rise in wages is commensurate with improvements in women's education and job experience, "rather than legislation, government commissions, or political movements."

Second, the approach assumes that personnel studies can adequately compare different kinds of jobs. Yet there is no such thing as an objective scale of economic values. Economists from Marx to Ricardo have tried to devise non-market criteria for the value of labor, and there is still no consensus after 100 years of work on the project.

What will happen when the studies disagree, as they inevitably will? The potential for disputes is endless. Should nurses earn as much as doctors or paramedics? How about a secretary who can drive a car? Should she make more than a truck driver who cannot type? There simply are not enough courts to handle the many kinds of questions that will surely follow.

Third, comparable worth assumes that governmental bureaucrats should decide pay levels. Even in situations of obvious discrimination, we should question whether a bureaucracy is the best way to rectify the problem. In fact, in light of the last 25 years of research into the nature of governmental bureaucracies, one might wonder whether bureaucracies are the best way to deal with any social problem.

Wage inequity deserves attention, but the solution is not to force employers to pay wages established by bureaucrats rather than by the free market. We need better implementation of existing laws and prosecution when discrimination occurs.

Comparable worth plays a game of "worthier than thou" by trying to compare vastly dissimilar occupations without utilizing the market system and depending solely upon subjective judgments. We would do better without it.

Budget Deficits

A theme in recent campaigns has been the budget deficit. And for good reason. We are drowning in tides of red ink, and something must be done. Some candidates suggest that the way to balance the budget is to increase taxes. But that won't solve the problem and most likely will make it worse.

The problem is not that we are undertaxed but that we are overspent. Consider these budget statistics. First, taxes have continued to increase throughout this century. That's not so surprising since the cost of living has increased as well. But tax receipts as a percentage of the GNP have also steadily

increased over time.

A second way to look at the problem is to plot the increase of the federal government's budget. In 1938 the budget was \$7 billion. Today the budget exceeds \$1 trillion. That's an increase of over 14,000 percent. In comparison, in 1938 a Hershey bar cost 5 cents, a first-class stamp 3 cents, a new Ford \$600, a good suit \$40, and gold \$35 per ounce. However, if these costs increased by the same proportion as the cost of government, the prices would be astronomical. A Hershey bar would be \$7, a first-class stamp would be \$4.20, a car would sell for \$84,000, a suit for \$5,600, and an ounce of gold would be \$4,900.

Moreover, a tax increase is not a solution; it is part of the problem. Economist Walter Williams has shown that the facts simply do not square with the oft-repeated assumption that more taxes will reduce the deficit.

Williams has studied the federal budget figures for the last 25 years and found the following. The budget has been in the red 24 of the last 25 years. And in 19 of those years there have been tax increases. His studies show that for each \$1 in tax increase during that period, there was a \$1.58 spending increase. In other words, when taxes rose, deficits skyrocketed.

In 1982, when Congress passed the largest peacetime tax increase in U.S. history, the new revenues were not used to decrease the deficit. Instead, they were used to increase spending in a number of budget categories.

The solution is to cut the federal budget. Bloated bureaucracies drain America's economic competitiveness and often dole out grants to things ranging from obscure scientific projects to obscene art. Certainly it is time to begin cutting the federal budget in significant ways.

A major budget category is federal pensions. There is nothing

wrong with providing pensions to civil service employees and military retirees. But some of these pensions have grown much more lucrative than anything found in the private sector.

For example, retired Senator Al Gore was making more than his son, Al Gore, Jr., until the younger man was given a Congressional pay increase in the mid-1980s. When Gore senior retired from Congress in 1970, his salary was \$42,000. But, thanks to federal cost-of-living increases, his pension was over \$78,000, while his son's salary was only \$77,000. When a current member of Congress makes less than a retired one, something is wrong with pensions. The Grace Commission found that if federal pensions were trimmed to resemble the "best" private sector pension programs, \$58 billion in taxes could be saved over a three-year period.

The federal budget is a problem, but many are looking in the wrong places for solutions. Americans are not undertaxed. The American government is overspent. We need to cut expenses, not raise taxes.

Housing

In recent years, Congress has made significant changes in the way it funds public housing. As the next budget considerations loom in the future, we can learn a great deal from the successes of the past.

One of the most important successes was the adoption of the housing voucher concept. The argument for housing vouchers is simple. Many current federal housing policies focus on bricks and mortar. These programs provide incentives to private developers and thus place an emphasis on buildings. Direct rent assistance in the form of housing vouchers is used to replace construction subsidy programs, which often benefit contractors more than the poor. These voucher programs, therefore, direct government resources at people, not projects.

Housing vouchers given to renters utilize the free market system to bring about desired changes. When rent subsidies are allocated for construction of housing projects, we create a seller's market. When we give housing vouchers to renters, we create a buyer's market. A housing voucher system encourages landlords to improve run-down apartments.

Government housing policies make families dependent upon governmental subsidies and lock them into inadequate housing situations. In our effort to win the war on poverty, we have lost the war on independence.

To be poor is to be caught in a culture of poverty, frustrated and without choices. The voucher system provides not only a roof and walls, but choice and dignity. Although government pays only the amount of rent that exceeds 30 percent of a family's income, the family can choose to pay more than that and is free to move to a different housing situation.

A second program success has been the privatization of public housing. A few years ago a bill encouraging privatization was sponsored by conservative Jack Kemp and liberal Walter Fauntroy. Kemp, invoking memories of the Homestead Act of 1862, referred to this legislation as the "urban homesteading bill."

The bill offered tenants of the nation's 1.25 million public housing units the chance to buy their own homes and apartments at 75 percent below market value with no money down and at greatly reduced interest rates. Only units that were "modernized" were offered for sale.

The bill also empowered public housing tenants to run their own projects. Legislators recognized that tenant management would provide better management of public housing.

Inspiration for resident management came from the example of the Kenilworth-Parkside project in Washington, D.C. In 1982, Mayor Marion Barry granted self-management to the residents.

An analysis by an international accounting firm indicated that the tenants cut operating costs significantly, boosted rent collections by 77 percent, reduced the vacancy rate by two-thirds, and halved the rate of welfare dependency, thanks to jobs in the project created by the management team. These savings and new revenues, say the accountants, added close to \$10 million to Washington's tax collections.

These have been constructive changes in public housing policy. Housing vouchers provide choices and dignity and arm the poor with a mechanism to improve housing. Resident control of public housing provides for initiative and independence. We need more housing programs like this in the future.

Churches and Taxes

One of the oft-cited criticisms of Christians is that they attend churches that should be forced to pay their fair share of taxes. But once you understand the history of this issue, it is easy to see why critics of tax-exempt institutions miss the point.

When the United States was founded, the framers of the constitution wanted to protect churches from governmental influence. The first amendment to the Constitution specifically states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This protected the churches from the intrusive hand of the state.

But when Congress began to tax its citizens, a question arose. Could it tax churches? The answer then was very simple.

The first two modern income-tax statutes were the Revenue Act of 1894 and the Revenue Act of 1913. In both the laws, only "net income" was to be taxed. Churches and all other non-profit organizations had no "net income," so they were not taxed. The author of the 1913 Act, Cordell Hull, even resisted

the call for establishing explicit categories of exemptions. He argued that the law was designed to impose explicit categories of taxation, therefore, all organizations not listed would be exempt.

But that was not sufficient for many in the bureaucracy, and so, over time, the Internal Revenue Service began to define what a tax- exempt organization might be. In the IRS code, it is defined as a 501(c)(3) organization.

From the IRS's point of view, it made sense to define a church, because they began to see the rise of bogus churches with names like the "Church of the Marijuana" or the "Hot Tub Church." But from the Christian point of view it seems most unwise to have IRS agents define in legal language what the Bible provides in explicit detail. Sometimes there was a significant confrontation.

Fortunately, Congress has passed a bill which more clearly specifies the role the IRS can have in securing church records and determining whether a church qualifies under the IRS code.

Many critics of churches argue that they can unfairly compete in the marketplace because of their tax exemption. But most of that objection was answered years ago.

The Tax Reform Act of 1969 ended churches' tax exemption for income from profit-making enterprises. Before 1969, churches exempt under the IRS code did not have to pay corporate income tax on unrelated business income, but Congress closed that loophole.

Critics also argue that exemptions are given as a legislative grace in return for specified public services which government would have to provide. But the U.S. Supreme Court held in a 1970 case that traditional property-tax exemptions for churches are constitutional and rejected the notion that exemption is a legislative grace. The argument may have its merits in reference to colleges, hospitals, libraries, or

parks. But it is not applicable to churches, since government could not constitutionally set up or operate a church to provide the religious services churches provide. Despite allegations to the contrary, churches are not “getting away with something.” They do not pay taxes because they do not have net income. When they do make a profit in a business enterprise, they pay taxes on it. The rest of the time, they should be tax exempt.

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