Dismantling the Electoral College

January 28, 2008

New Jersey recently became the second state to enter a compact that would effectively eliminate the power of the Electoral College to select a president. In December, the New Jersey legislature approved a measure that would deliver the state's 15 electoral votes for president to the winner of the national popular vote. Two weeks ago, Governor Corzine signed the bill which has now become law.

Maryland (with 10 electoral votes) is the only other state to pass the compact into law, but others have considered it. Governors in California and Hawaii vetoed bills to join the compact. The Colorado Senate approved the proposal, but a House committee rejected it.

Sponsors of these measures argue that the compact would ensure that all states are competitive in presidential elections and would make all votes important. A spokesman for the governor said that New Jersey "has long been on the sidelines of presidential races and this measure would help put the Garden State back into competition during a presidential campaign."

But consider that this bill now may require electors from New Jersey to vote against their constituents. So who are they representing? Certainly they are not representing the voters of their state.

Because of third parties, our last four presidential elections haven't had any candidate with a popular vote majority. The Electoral College gives them that majority. It might be worth remembering that Abraham Lincoln won less than 40 percent of the popular vote and relied on the Electoral College majority for his authority.

And with problems of election fraud, we narrow the number of states where a recount can take place. Consider the 2000 Florida recount and multiply that by 50 and you can see the problem.

Even if you are convinced that the Electoral College is a bad idea, you should go about amending the Constitution. But what is happening is a surreptitious way for some states to do so without constitutional support.

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Democratic Delegate Count

February 26, 2008

For weeks commentators have been talking about the close delegate count between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. But anyone looking at the Democratic Party's rules for delegates probably would have predicted such a situation. In fact you could say that Barack Obama's sizable delegate count is due to a decision forced on the party 20 years ago by Jesse Jackson.

Columnist Ruth Marcus writes: "The stage was set for the current stalemate over five marathon days of negotiations in June 1988. In the fifth-floor conference room of a Washington law firm, representatives of Michael Dukakis, the party's nominee, and Jesse Jackson, his unsuccessful challenger, hashed out a new set of delegate selection rules." Jackson was upset that he did not have as many delegates as his popular vote would have indicated.

Jesse Jackson's assistant was Harold M. Ickes. He argued for "proportional representation rules that would award insurgent

candidates a bigger share of delegates in future contests." Twenty years later, the rules Ickes proposed have been working against his friend, Hillary Clinton. She has won delegate-rich states like New York, New Jersey, and California. But Barack Obama has managed to stay close in those contests and pick up delegates in other contests to take the lead.

The Democratic rules give lots of weight to the losing candidate. Under the rules, three-fourths of the pledged delegates are allocated by congressional district, the remaining one-quarter according to the vote statewide. In California Hillary Clinton won 43 of the state's 53 congressional districts but only received 207 delegates to Obama's 163. If the Democrats used the Republican rules, Hillary Clinton would have received 316 delegates. Barack Obama would have received just 54.

It is quite possible that both parties will revisit their delegate rules in the next few years. The Democrats' rules hurt Hillary Clinton and the Republicans' rules helped John McCain. Now that we have seen the results, it's time for the parties to reconsider their rules.

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Candidates and Character

January 24, 2008

How important is it to elect people with character to public office? The founders of this country thought it was very important.

Over the years, I have collected various quotes from the founders about the importance of character but recently ran

across a quote from Samuel Adams. He is considered by many to be the father of the American Revolution. Certainly he understood why patriots fought and died for their freedom. He was also convinced we should elect people of character to public office.

He said: “If men of wisdom and knowledge, of moderation and temperance, of patience, fortitude and perseverance, of sobriety and true republican simplicity of manners, of zeal for the honor of the Supreme Being and the welfare of the commonwealth; if men possessed of these other excellent qualities are chosen to fill the seats of government, we may expect that our affairs will rest on a solid and permanent foundation.”

These are wise words to consider during this political season. So often my conversations with listeners revolve around whether they can vote for someone who doesn’t match their positions on key issues. I suggest they merely vote for the person who most reflects their values unless they cannot in good conscience vote for any of the candidates for that office. We are always going to have some disagreement with a candidate on some issues.

This year I am on the ballot as precinct chairman. So when I vote for myself, I will be voting for someone that I agree with 100 percent of the time. But I will probably have some disagreement with the candidates for other offices. But I will still vote for the person who most reflects my values, and you should do the same.

Samuel Adams reminds us that being right on the issues is important, but so is character. Consider the character of the candidates when you cast your vote.

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High Tech Witchcraft

April 26, 2007

Mention witchcraft and most people will think of Harry Potter. And while these books and movies have certainly been incredibly successful in promoting witchcraft, they represent only part of a larger campaign to spread the ideas of Wicca, witchcraft, and Neopaganism throughout our society.

In a recent article in *SCP Newsletter*, Marcia Montenego talked about how witchcraft has gone "high tech." Parents should not only pay attention to books and movies. They should also pay attention to the impact that computers and the Internet are having in the promoting of witchcraft. Here are just a few examples.

1.Dungeons and Dragons — has been a popular fantasy role playing game for many years. Now kids can play it on the Internet or in video or computer games. The player begins by choosing a character to role-play. Each of these characters have different traits and abilities. The game is supervised by an experienced player known as the Dungeon Master. The game uses a number of occult terms. These include: spell casting, invocation, evocation, and summon. And there are spells such as the death spell and the finger of death.

There are several books about Dungeons and Dragons that also give information and suggestions for spell casting. In one book, there is a warning of "The Cost of Magic." It says, "Wizards may have to make terrible pacts with dark powers for the knowledge they seek, priests may have to sacrifice something dear to them to invoke their deity's favor, or the spell-caster may pay an immediate price in terms of fatigue,

illness, or even a loss of sanity."

2. Magic: The Gathering – is a fantasy trading card game created in the early 1990s. The cards are linked to one of five kinds of paranormal magic: red, blue, green, white or black. Players assume the role of wizards or mages (magicians) and use their cards to defeat other players in the game. A key term that shows up in this game as well as in movies like "The Craft" is the term *mana*. It refers to a magical force or power which is essentially a vital life force.

This card game is challenging and requires intricate strategy. It also introduces the players to scary and repulsive images. There is the Bone Shaman or the Necrite (shown licking blood off a dagger) or the Soul Drinker or the Sorceress Queen. Parents should be concerned about the occult and macabre images that players in the game will see as well as the desensitization towards the occult and witchcraft.

3. Yu Gi Oh – was originally a comic created in Japan about a boy playing a card game called "Dueling Monsters." This comic eventually gave rise to a card game, movies, and video games.

The story centers around Yugi who is possessed by a 5000-year-old pharaoh, Yama Yugi, who is trying to solve an ancient puzzle. One Internet site suggests that Yugi is taken over by "dark Yugi" when it needs to work on the puzzle. Others point out that during duels, Yugi seems possessed by the spirit which deepens his voice and shadows him.

4. The Vampire Games – is another role playing game that introduces the players to the world of vampires. This includes the live action role playing games such as *Vampire: The Masquerade* and *Vampire: the Requiem*.

As you might imagine, these games involve dark and macabre situations, including drinking blood and killing innocent people. The vampires are predators on humans and described as killing machines who struggle with their baser instincts. The

vampires also have certain powers such as telepathy, psychic projection, and bodily possession.

Players often form clubs in order to play the game. Some players even imitate vampires in real life by wearing razor-sharp artificial fangs. The popularity of these games have spawned others: Werewolf: The Forsaken, Mage: The Awakening, and Sword & Sorcery.

5. World of Warcraft – is an online computer war game. It includes the typical action games strategies but also adds elements of the occult and New Age. There are four main races of beings: humans (one of the youngest races), Orcs (part of a Shamanistic society), Night Elves (who misuse magic), and the Undead Scourge (thousands of walking corpses and extra-dimensional entities).

As with many of the other games already mentioned, strategy and the use of the occult and paranormal magic are key to success in this game. Powers are summoned and spells are cast.

These various forms of "high tech" spell casting are a doorway into the occult and witchcraft. The Bible warns of the dangers of divination, sorcery, and witchcraft (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19-20; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; 1 Samuel 15:23; 2 Kings 23:24; 1 Chronicles 10:13; Isaiah 2:6; 8:19-20; 47:13-14; Ezekiel 13:20-23; Daniel 2:27-28; 5:15-17; Acts 13:7-10; 16:16-18; Galatians 5:19-20; Revelation 22:15). We should not focus our minds and attention on what is dark and dangerous. We are called to let our minds dwell on what is true, honorable, pure, and lovely (Philippians 4:8).

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Global Warming: Cool the Hype

Al Gore's film, "An Inconvenient Truth," won an Academy Award for best documentary. And Al Gore is being treated like a rock star at Hollywood parties and when he testified in front of Congress. But has Al Gore's hype and hysteria gone too far?

That's what many scientists and supporters are beginning to say. They are alarmed at his alarmism. "I don't want to pick on Al Gore," Don Easterbrook (emeritus professor of geology at Western Washington University) told hundred of experts at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America. "But there are a lot of inaccuracies in the statements we are seeing, and we have to temper that with real data."{1}

Kevin Vranes (climatologist at the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Colorado) has praised Gore for "getting the message out" but also questioned whether his presentations were "overselling our certainty about knowing the future."{2}

Global warming is the observed increase in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans in recent decades. The argument made in many science journals and in Al Gore's film is that most of the observed warming over the last fifty years is attributable to human activities. Political activists argue we must act now to prevent a global catastrophe.

These claims bring us back to the hype that many see in Al Gore's film. He argues "Humanity is sitting on a ticking time bomb" and that "we have just ten years to avert a major catastrophe that could send our entire planet into a tail-spin of epic destruction involving extreme weather, droughts, epidemics and killer heat waves beyond anything we have ever experienced."{3}

Throughout the film, Al Gore invariably will pick the most

extreme estimate to prove that we are on the edge of a catastrophe. For example, if global warming really is taking place, how much will the sea level rise? Gore says 20 feet, and then shows a dramatic animation of what it would look like if various locations on earth were flooded by a sea level rise of 20 feet.

Yet the most recent summary of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change doesn't say anything like this.{4} Even though this panel is full of policy makers who believe in global warming and argue for major policy changes, they conclude that sea levels might rise 7 to 17 inches over the course of a century. There is a vast difference between sea levels rising about one foot versus 20 feet!

Add to this the number of factual errors in many of the presentations heralding a looming catastrophe from global warming. Iain Murray documents "25 inconvenient truths for Al Gore" in his column that analyzes the scientific statements in "An Inconvenient Truth."{5} Bjorn Lomborg, author of the *Skeptical Environmentalist*, shows how the report on climate change by Nicholas Stern and the U.K. government makes sloppy errors and cherry-picks statistics.{6}

We should also mention that many scientists believe that the current warming is due to factors other than human activity. Sami Solanki (Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research, Germany) has quantitatively reconstructed the sun's activity since the last Ice Age and says the sun "is brighter than it was a few hundred years ago and this brightening started relatively recently."{7} Scientists have observed that the ice caps on Mars are melting, and Jupiter is developing a second giant red spot due to the sudden warming of our solar system's largest planet.{8}

Those who dare to criticize the global warming scenario are often compared to being the moral equivalent of a holocaust

denier.{9} In the film, Al Gore compares scientists who criticize his theory to scientists at the tobacco companies who tried to tell us that smoking was not harmful. Gore and others also say that many who are skeptical about global warming are being paid by the oil companies they say are running a disinformation campaign.

This last charge infuriated Dr. Easterbrook who told the geologists, “I’ve never been paid a nickel by an oil company.” He went on to add, “And I’m not a Republican.”

Al Gore argues that the global warming issue isn’t a political issue but rather a moral issue. Yet in his film, Al Gore argues we need the political will to confront and solve the issue. It doesn’t take much insight to realize there is a political agenda here.

The first step, say the activists, is to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This treaty calls for the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions in the United States, the European Union, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. When Al Gore was Vice President, it was brought before the U.S. Senate and defeated 95-0. It won’t pass if put up for a vote once again.

But even if it did pass, it would only be a start. Estimates are that it would cost $200 billion to $1 trillion every year. But other Kyotos treaties would have to be ratified by the developing countries. After all, there are a billion people in China and a billion people in India, and China plans on building an additional 2,200 coal plants by 2030.{10} One scientist speculated that “it might take another 30 Kyotos” to deal with global warming.{11} And what would be the impact? Critics say that even if adhered to by every signatory, it would only reduce surface temperature by 0.13° F.{12}

Even if we assume that global warming is occurring and assume that it is due only to human activity, the cost-benefit is enormous. Bjorn Lomborg established a program known as the

Copenhagen Consensus.{13} This panel (that included three Nobel Laureates in economics) evaluated strategies to deal with major problems facing humanity. When they listed these alternatives in descending order of effectiveness, things like treating communicable disease and hunger were at the top of the list while dealing with climate change were at the bottom of the list.

This suggests that *adaptation* to climate change will be more effective and less costly than *mitigation*. We need to cool the hype and let cooler heads make wise decisions.

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March 22, 2007

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The New Atheists – Kerby Anderson Blog

Kerby Anderson writes that unlike the old-style atheists who were content to merely argue that Christianity is not true, the new atheists now argue that Christianity is dangerous.

January 18, 2007

For centuries there has been conflict and debate between atheists and Christianity. But the rise of what journalists are calling "The New Atheists" represents a significant change in the nature of the debate. "The New Atheists" is part reality and part journalistic catch phrase. It identifies the new players in the ongoing battle between science and religion.

Unlike the atheists who came before them who were content to merely argue that Christianity is not true, these new atheists now argue that Christianity is dangerous. It is one thing to argue about the *error* of Christianity, it is quite another to argue about the *evil* of Christianity.

Many of these authors have books in the *New York Times* bestseller list. *Letter to a Christian Nation* by Sam Harris is one of those books in the top ten. He goes beyond the traditional argument that suffering in the world proves there is no God. He argues that belief in God actually *causes*

suffering in the world. He says, “That so much of this suffering can be directly attributed to religion—to religious hatreds, religious wars, religious delusions and religious diversions of scarce resources—is what makes atheism a moral and intellectual necessity.” He argues that unless we renounce religious faith, religious violence will soon bring civilization to an end.

Response to his book has been glowing. One reader found the book to be “a wonderful source of ammunition for those who, like me, hold to no religious doctrine.” Others enjoyed the pounding he gives Christianity. For them it “was like sitting ring side, cheering the champion, yelling ‘Yes!’ at every jab.”

But Christians are not the only target of his criticism. Harris also argues that religious moderates and even theological liberals function as “enablers” of orthodox Christianity. His book is not only a criticism of Christians, but it is a call for tolerant people in the middle to get off the fence and join these new atheists.

Another popular book is *The God Delusion* by Oxford professor Richard Dawkins. He says that religious belief is psychotic and arguments for the existence of God are nonsense. He wants to make respect for belief in God socially unacceptable.

He calls for atheists to identify themselves as such and join together to fight against the delusions of religious faith. He says, “The number of nonreligious people in the US is something nearer to 30 million than 20 million. That’s more than all the Jews in the world put together. I think we are in the same position the gay movement was in a few decades ago. There was a need for people to come out.”

Like Harris, Dawkins does not merely disagree with religious faith, but he disagrees with tolerating religious faith. He argues that religious people should not be allowed to teach

these religious “myths” to their children, which Dawkins calls the “colonization of the brains of innocent tykes.”

Dawkins hammers home the link between evolution and atheism. He believes that evolutionary theory must logically lead to atheism. And he states that he is not going to worry about the public relations consequences of tying evolution to atheism.

Daniel Dennett is another important figure and author of the book, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. He does not use the harsh and critical rhetoric of the others, but still is able to argue his case that religion must be subjected to scientific evaluation. He believes that “neutral, scientifically informed education about every religion in the world should be mandatory in school” since “if you have to hoodwink—or blindfold—your children to ensure that they confirm their faith when they are adults, your faith *ought* to go extinct.”

In addition to the books by “The New Atheists” have been a number of others that have targeted Christian conservatives. David Kuo wrote *Tempting Faith* to tell conservative Christians that they were taken for a ride by the administration that derided them behind closed doors. Add to this Michael Goldberg’s *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* and Randall Balmer’s *Thy Kingdom Come* and Kevin Phillips’ *American Theocracy*. Each put the religious right in their crosshairs and pulled the trigger.

Many of these books border on paranoia. Consider James Rudin’s book, *The Baptizing of America*. His opening paragraph says, “A specter is haunting America, and it is not socialism and certainly not communism. It is the specter of Americans kneeling in submission to a particular interpretation of a religion that has become an ideology, an all-encompassing way of life. It is the specter of our nation ruled by the extreme Christian right, who would make the United States a ‘Christian nation’ where their version of God’s law supersedes all human

law—including the Constitution. That, more than any other force in the world today, is the immediate and profound threat to our republic."

These comments move from anti-Christian bigotry to anti-Christian paranoia. Please, tell me who these dangerous Christian conservatives are so we can correct them. I interview many of the leaders and do not even hear a hint of this. If anything, these leaders want the judges to *follow* the Constitution not supercede it with another version (either secular or Christian).

Rudin goes on to argue that these Christian leaders would issue everyone a national ID card giving everyone's religious beliefs. Again, who are these people he is talking about? Frankly, I have not found anyone that wants a national ID card (either secular or Christian).

Nevertheless, Rudin maintains that "such cards would provide Christocrats with preferential treatment in many areas of life, including home ownership, student loans, employment and education." And the appointed religious censors would control all speech and outlaw dissent. Do you know we wanted to do that?

Clearly we are moving into a time in which atheists see religion as full of error and evil. And Christian conservatives are especially being singled out because of their belief in the truth of the Bible.

Christians should respond in three ways. First, we must always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15) and do it with gentleness and reverence. Second, we should trust in the power of the Gospel: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for all those who believe (Romans 1:16). Third, we should live godly lives before the world so that we may (by our good behavior) silence the ignorant talk of foolish men (1 Peter 2:15).

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Myths About Intelligent Design

January 1, 2006

In December a decision by U.S. District Judge John Jones in Dover, Pennsylvania once again put the topic of intelligent design in the news. He ruled that the school board's actions were unconstitutional and merely an attempt to smuggle religious views into a science classroom.

Media coverage of the Dover case and the broader topic of intelligent design have often been inadequate. When I have spoken on this subject, I have found that many Christians don't have an accurate perspective on this subject. So let me take a moment to address some of the myths surrounding this scientific theory.

First, proponents of intelligent design are not trying to smuggle religion into the classroom. While that may have been the intent of some of the Dover school board members, it is clear that is not the desire of scientists working on intelligent design. The Discovery Institute is one of the leading think tanks in the area of intelligent design and it actually opposes the idea of requiring it be taught in the classroom. They are pursuing it as a scientific theory not as a public school curriculum.

It might be worth noting that what Judge Jones struck down was a requirement that a short statement be read in class that mentioned the phrase "intelligent design" twice. It also

allowed students to look at a supplemental text on intelligent design titled *Of Pandas and People*. The students would be instructed from the standard biology textbook published by Prentice Hall, but would be allowed to also read from the supplemental text if they desired.

Second, intelligent design is not just the latest modified attempt to introduce creationism into the classroom. Judge Jones and the media make it seem like the same people who promoted scientific creationism in the 1970s and 1980s are the same people pushing intelligent design now. That is not the case. None of the leaders of the intelligent design movement have been involved with creationist groups like the Institute for Creation Research or Answers in Genesis or Reasons to Believe. In fact, if you go to the websites of many creation groups, you will find they are often critical of intelligent design because it does not specifically identify a creator.

Third, intelligent design is much more than a refutation of evolution. It provides a positive model that can be tested. Judge Jones argued that "the fact that a scientific theory cannot yet render an explanation on every point should not be used as a pretext to thrust an untestable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion into a science classroom."

Scientists pursuing intelligent design are doing much more than just criticizing evolution. They are proposing new ideas that can be tested. For example, Michael Behe (author of the book *Darwin's Black Box*) suggests that molecular motors within the cell exhibit what he calls irreducible complexity. He shows that the bacterial flagellum requires numerous parts to all be present simultaneously for it to function. It is a testable model that other scientists can verify or refute using scientific data.

The ruling by Judge Jones won't end the debate about intelligent design. But at least when we debate its merits or flaws, we should get our facts straight.

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“What About Those Who Cannot Believe?”

There were small children on the planes that were crashed in the 9-11 attacks on America. What happens to a baby or young child who dies? Do they go to heaven or hell?

When a young child dies, the bereaved parents will often ask, “Where is my baby now? Will my child go to heaven? The Bible does not give us a definitive answer to these questions; however, several statements seem to indicate that heaven is the destiny of those who can’t believe.

The critical issue is what God will do in His justice to those who were not able, because of age or mental inability, to respond to His revelation. If they are saved, how are they saved and on what basis are they saved? Wouldn’t the logic that says a child is saved say the same for an adult? In order to answer these questions, let us look at a few basic biblical principles.

First, God is loving (1 John 4:16), good (Nah. 1:7), just (Zeph. 3:5), compassionate, and gracious (Psalm 103:8). He “wants all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) and does not want “anyone to perish” (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, it is inconceivable that God would damn an innocent child who is incapable of belief.

When we use the word innocent in this context we are not implying that the one who cannot believe is free from sin. The Bible clearly teaches that even infants inherit a sinful

nature (Psalm 51:5; Rom. 5:12, 18-19). Their salvation comes not from being innocent from sin but rather from their ignorance of God's revelation.

Second, Christ's death on the cross for our sins was for all of us unless we refuse to accept it. God gives us the ability to decide. This means that we can either accept or reject God's love for us.

But what about those who are unable to accept or reject God? We must first realize that everyone (including those who cannot believe) is lost (Luke 19:10), perishing (John 3:16), condemned (John 3:18), and under God's wrath (John 3:36). We must also realize that Christ's death on the cross paid the debt of sin for us. His death appeases God's wrath (Rom. 5:9), and this provision is available to all unless they reject it. As Robert Lightner says in *Heaven for Those Who Can't Believe*, "Since rejection of the Savior is the final reason why men go to Hell, those who do not reject Him because they are not able to make a conscious decision enter Heaven on the basis of the finished work of Christ." [Robert P. Lightener, *Heaven for Those Who Can't Believe* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1977), 20.]

Third, there are examples in the Bible that seem to support the notion that children who die are bound for heaven. In 2 Samuel 12:22-23 David learned of the death of this son by Bathsheba. In this relationship with Bathsheba David broke four of the Ten Commandments: he coveted, he stole, he committed adultery, and he committed murder. As punishment, his child was to die. However, when he learned that the child had died, he took heart that his son was in heaven. He said, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

In Luke 18:16-17, Jesus used children as an object lesson for the kind of faith that leads to eternal life. He taught that the kingdom of God belongs to such as they (Luke 18:16) and that each believer must accept the kingdom of God as a little

child (Luke 18:17). He further taught that God was “not willing that any of these little ones should be lost” (Matt. 18:14).

Fourth, there are no biblical references that even hint that children will be in hell. While there are many references to adults in hell, there are none to children. This is admittedly an argument from silence. But in other passages in which the context might warrant such a reference, none is found. Consider, for example, the accounts of the death of mankind in the Flood (Gen. 7:21-23), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25), the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt (Exod. 12:29-30), the destruction of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:3), and the slaying of the little boys in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).

The character of God is such that He would not damn to hell those who cannot believe. Further, Christ’s death on the cross paid the debt of man’s sin and is available to all unless they reject it. We can declare with some certainty that those who cannot believe go to heaven when they die.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

“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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