

In this issue

- The church and the economy
- Battle with inflation
- Energy and lifestyle

LIGHT

Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

The church and the economy **Silence in a time of crisis**

By W. David Sapp

According to the polls, Americans are more concerned about the economy than any other issue. Their concern is understandable. Rampaging inflation and a severely devalued dollar threaten the life-styles of all Americans and the existence of some. The uncer-

Editorial

By Foy Valentine
Executive Director

Few subjects elicit more groans or yawns than economics. Few topics have received more political jawboning with less significant impact than economics.

Few issues in Christian ethics are more difficult to deal with than economics.

Yet economics affects us all more directly, more personally, and more profoundly than almost any other social issue.

There is now a developing crisis in the nation, a crisis of spirit, a crisis of national will, a crisis of character; but the crisis is peculiarly related to economics. Concern about inflation, recession, unemployment, and energy is pervasive. There is widespread anxiety about the imminence of total depression, economic collapse, and social chaos; and beyond that dreaded trauma is the even more dreaded trauma of totalitarianism which is always waiting in the wings when social disorder moves to the front and center of society's stage.

Karl Marx based much of his enormously influential thinking and writing on economic determinism, the notion that human beings are not truly free but that human destiny is essentially determined by economic laws governing the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth. Christians cannot agree with Marx that humanity is economically determined for we believe God has made us truly free. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that economics is an immensely important topic deserving far more serious study, diligent work, and redemptive action than it has been receiving from the people of God.

Though the handles are hard to find, this issue of LIGHT seeks to focus, then, on economics. Obviously, not much can be undertaken and not very much can even be said. This is a small step, to be sure, but we believe one worth taking in the Christian Life Commission's special calling of helping changed people to change the world.

tainty of our economic future is unsettling, even frightening. Many Americans have lost confidence, as our President has warned, and some are nearing panic.

In response to this crisis there seems to be only silence from the churches. We who have spoken so often about so much have said nearly nothing about the economy. Where is our word from the Lord? Does He have nothing to say about economics?

When on rare occasions the churches do say something which relates to economics, it is too often self-serving and unbiblical. Some religious demagogues, for instance, preach that God will reward the faithful with wealth, an idea that would have baffled poor Job! Others involve themselves in such endeavors as the publication of the *Christian Yellow Pages*, an index which lists businesses owned by those who claim to be born-again Christians. The idea behind this particular scheme seems to be that we can best bear our Christian witness in the workaday world by refusing to do business with non-Christians. (Who knows, perhaps we can starve them into accepting Christ!) These are approaches to economics which appeal to our selfishness. As such they are clearly foreign to biblical Christianity which calls us to lives of selflessness.

Most of us in the churches, however, have not fallen prey to such dubious approaches; we have been captured instead by silence. Who among us has preached a sermon on inflation? Where are our tracts, our news releases, our courageous statements? Where are any statements on the moral issues involved in the economy?

This silence of the church on economics is strange for an institution built on commitment to One whose most frequent topic for discourse was the relationship of human beings to money and the things it will buy. How do we account for our silence? What master has muzzled us? Here are a few thoughts.

Lack of Expertise

Faced with the tremendous complexities of international economic problems, those of us who manage nothing larger than a church budget often throw up our hands. These mysteries seem too great for us. Who understands inflation, deflation, stagflation, balance of payments, exchange rates, recessions, business cycles, or trade deficits? Apparently, not even the economists do! For the most part, the church does not. But this is no reason for silence, because it is the church's task to help the larger society identify the values which are governing our economic behavior and then to critique those values in the light of the Word of God.

We may protest that we lack expertise to speak to economic issues. But, that is nothing more than a confession that we are two steps removed from the world Jesus said we were to "go ye therefore" into all of. We speak the language of Zion with elo-

(Continued on page 2)

quence, but not much is being bought and sold in Zion these days. Much, however, is being bought and sold in America, and the task of the church in America is to apply the gospel here and now. If we do not possess technical knowledge adequate to do this, we must by the grace of God educate ourselves.

Greed

A second reason for the churches' silence about economic issues is greed. But why should greed silence us? A little background will help to clarify the point.

First, greed is the underlying cause of all our economic woes. That sounds like an oversimplification, but it is not. It is a perfectly accurate generalization which was understood long ago by the biblical writer who said, "The love of money is the root of all evils ..." (1 Timothy 6:10, RSV).

Examine, for example, the current problem of inflation. Inflation is really nothing more than the pernicious product of competitive greed. All the problems of money supply and wage-price pressures may be reduced to this: When the greed of workers, the greed of business, and the greed of government compete with one another, the result is inflation. These competing forces are so powerful that they have in the last decade produced a more or less permanent rate of inflation in the United States of six or seven percent. This year the greed of the OPEC power elite has doubled that rate. There is no getting off this inflationary spiral because getting off would require sacrifice on the part of the competing forces. The effects of inflation are to steal from us the very affluence we are seeking and, worse still, to reinforce our already powerful desire to attain the affluence at any cost. We are opposed to inflation not because of its threat to the poor and the elderly, but because of its threat to our own personal life-styles. This is the ironic trap in which we are caught: Greed causes inflation and greed motivates us to end it. Only when the word of God's judgment is brought to bear on our greed, therefore, will we ever be able to cope with inflation on a long-term basis.

Obviously, the proclamation of this dimension of God's word is the responsibility of His people. The secular world has not yet even seen that greed is the problem. Yet, Christians have been silent, and part of the reason for this silence is guilt. Christians in contemporary America are workers, executives, union members, government officials, and aspiring individuals. We too have been seduced into economic idolatry. To speak God's judgment on the greed in our society is to speak God's judgment on ourselves. Silence in such a situation is far more comfortable than prophecy.

Danger

Yet another factor accounting for our silence on the economic front is the danger involved in speaking. At first blush, economics does not appear to be a dangerous issue on which to express moral opinions. But on closer examination, it is clear that economics may well be one of the most dangerous of all subjects.

As we have just discussed, it is dangerous to speak the word of God on economics because it may be a word of judgment on ourselves. The gospel, when applied to economics, may threaten our life-styles far more potently than inflation!

But it is also dangerous for the churches to speak on economics because of the hostility the word of God can arouse in others. Jesus talked more about economics than about any other subject—and they crucified Him! This kind of money-talk alarms the vested interests and challenges life-styles. A recent interviewer told me that it was her right as an American to have access to all the gasoline she wished to use, and implied that I should not be

saying things which make people feel guilty about excessive consumption! When the President asked Americans voluntarily to restrain wages and prices, almost everyone found a reason to regard himself or herself as an exceptional case. The sad truth is that when our incomes are on the line, our faith often disappears. A courageous word about money hits most people where they live, and their wrath frightens us into silence—especially if they tithe.

"Inflation is really nothing more than the pernicious product of competitive greed . . . This is the ironic trap in which we are caught: Greed causes inflation and greed motivates us to end it."

A third danger is more subtle, but certainly no less dangerous. It is the danger that we will be ignored if we speak on such issues. Hardly anything is more painful. Perhaps people find economics uninteresting. Perhaps they are afraid of it. For whatever reasons, discussing economics from a Christian point of view is not an especially popular pastime. When the Christian Life Commission held a national seminar on economics in 1974, attendance fell off sharply from previous seminars. It is tempting indeed to soft-pedal an important dimension of the gospel because it will not draw a crowd.

These thoughts are a first effort toward understanding our silence. Perhaps understanding it can serve as a first step toward ending it. One thing is certain: Those who call themselves children of God must speak God's word of judgment on the idolatrous economic systems which have displaced God in much of our world. But if we are to speak, we must learn to speak the truth in love. Before we can apply the gospel to the economic realm, we must come to understand the words we have to offer as good news. The good news of the gospel for the world of economics is not that people are greedy sinners and economic systems tempt them to idolatry. The good news is that there is hope for those caught on the economic treadmill and for those who are oppressed by the consuming desire to "get ahead." In Jesus Christ we can be set free from the tyranny of the material and empowered to live for a higher good. In Him is to be found the security which money does not offer. ("Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst . . ." John 4:13, 14) Only when we understand God's message in these terms can we hope to find the grace to proclaim it, and only when it is proclaimed as good news can we hope that it will be heard.



W. David Sapp, director of organization for the Christian Life Commission, is responsible for the coordination of the commission's efforts in the broad area of economics and daily work. Sapp, a Ph.D. graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, also works in the areas of energy and world hunger.

LIGHT, an occasional bulletin for pastors, state and national denominational workers, and other persons who have a special interest in applied Christianity, is published by the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 460 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, Tenn. 37219. Foy Valentine, executive secretary; William M. Tillman, Jr., managing editor; David R. Wilkinson, production editor.

Battling the evils of inflation

By Arthur A. Smith

The nation's greatest economic problem is inflation. Simply but accurately stated, inflation is a condition of generally rising prices. Or if one prefers, it is equally correct to say that inflation is a condition of declining buying power of money.

Much can be said about inflation; its causes and effects; its snares, delusions, and its insidious functioning. Unfortunately economists have been inclined to confuse and befuddle more than clarify and reveal in their treatment of the subject, often unnecessarily moving it to a theoretical level beyond popular comprehension. But to the average person there is nothing theoretical about inflation; it is a very real problem for him.

History teaches us some valuable lessons about inflation, if we could only learn. Serious inflation is always a man-made condition resulting from decisions of the government's monetary authorities to create excessive amounts of money and credit. And since monetary powers are sovereign government powers, government must be held responsible for inflation, and in a republic (a representative democracy) the people in the final analysis, because they are responsible for the government.

Inflation is inherent in the economic and political philosophy that has dominated official and popular thinking in this country for at least a quarter of a century. The people themselves, wittingly or unwittingly, have bought the theory that inflation is good (even necessary and essential to reduce unemployment and promote growth of the economy) without examining carefully the long run validity of the idea or pausing to consider how inflation can be controlled under our political system.

Cure Is Known

Let no one tell you that the causes of our inflation are mysterious or unknown and that we do not know how to stop inflation. Neither is true. We do know the causes, and we know the cure.

Inflation is the result of the way the government manages its fiscal affairs. It spends more than it collects in revenue and then uses the banking system (via the Federal Reserve) to finance the deficit. The effect of this is to create money or its equivalent which the government spends. The created money increases bank reserves; and in our fractional reserve banking system, reserves enlarge the lending power of banks several fold.

What happens is that this process creates purchasing power that is not derived from production. Yet when the government spends the purchasing power, it comes into competition with purchasing power that is generated by production. Result: inflation.

Now, if the government collected in taxes enough to equal what it spent, no new money would be created. What the government spent would be taken from the rest of us, thus reducing our purchasing power. Result: no inflation.

Or if the government did run a deficit but borrowed directly from the rest of us instead of borrowing through the Federal

Reserve, there would be no created purchasing power. What the government borrowed would reduce the purchasing power of the lenders. Result: no inflation.

It is unfortunate, indeed, that many people, even many of our leaders, fail to understand that what we do not pay in taxes to balance the Federal Budget, we pay in higher prices for the things we buy, because the whole process is inflationary. Actually, inflation in its effect is the worst of all hidden taxes because the resulting burden falls heavily and unfairly upon the people who are least able to stand such a burden.

Although there have been many examples of bad inflation in world history, none was ever worse than Germany's following World War I.

Germany Offers Example

The German government borrowed heavily through the central bank which in turn issued paper money. In fact, our inflation process in the U.S. almost exactly duplicates what Germany did.

Very few persons in Germany escaped the inflation's destructive consequences. True, there were some astute individuals who correctly foresaw what would inevitably happen, and they transferred much of their capital to Switzerland, Holland, the U.S., and other places where money was stable. But the vast majority of Germans suffered severely.

Thrifty persons saw their lifetime savings wiped out. In fact, those who held assets either in cash, in savings, or in bonds, mortgages, or any fixed dollar obligations lost everything. In other words, creditors saw their claims paid off in marks whose buying power was only a small fraction of the buying power originally loaned.

Large debtors, particularly the industrialists whose companies had used long-term debt in great amounts to buy land, erect buildings, or buy equipment, gained handsomely by inflation. They were able to get inflated prices for their products, yet pay fixed debt obligations with greatly depreciated marks.

Small individual debtors did not fare so well chiefly because in most instances living costs went up so much faster than income that meeting debt payments was difficult even with inflated money. Also persons who were obliged to go into debt had to pay incredibly high interest rates, particularly in 1923 when inflation was galloping. In October and November of that year when the mark was depreciating at cyclonic speed, interest rates went as high as 20 percent per day.

The workers who made up the largest segment of the population endured great hardships from inflation, more especially the unskilled, nonunion workers whose wages fell way short of keeping up with the prices. For awhile, strong unions were able to maintain wages abreast prices but when inflation began to accelerate, they too found themselves losers.

(Continued on page 4)

Perhaps the greatest suffering from inflation was borne by Germany's once strong middle class, the professional people, merchants, salaried officials and clerks, and retired individuals depending upon pensions earned over many years. On the whole these were people least able to defend themselves, and ironically, too, they were loyal citizens who almost until the last retained confidence that somehow inflation would be overcome and the nation's currency restored to its old value.

The old people who had saved to take care of themselves in their advanced years saw their savings, pensions, and annuities melt away, and their insurance policies virtually become worthless. The sons who might have supported them had all too commonly been killed in the war.

Hundreds of thousands of educated men and women, too old or feeble or untrained to earn their own living, were abruptly faced with starvation. Many died. The others, passing from day to day without hope, survived only by the sacrifice of treasured books, furniture, jewelry, and all their saleable possessions, and at the end by domestic and foreign charity. Their suffering is one of the most genuinely pitiful effects of Germany's inflation.

History shows that the Nazi movement which spawned Hitler and ultimately led to Germany's destruction in World War II is directly traceable to the widespread desperation caused by the inflation.

People tell me that this cannot happen in the United States. I say it can and will happen, if we continue to pursue the same economic and political doctrines that have brought us to where we are now.

Inflation Like Drug Addiction

A nation addicted is like a person addicted to a drug. The longer a person is on dope the more difficult it is to quit the habit. Similarly, the longer a nation is on inflation the more difficult it is to restore price stability.

In fact, the analogy can be carried further. There is a tendency for an addict to take larger quantities of a drug as time passes. There is a like tendency for a nation to yield ultimately to greater rates of inflation.

This can be demonstrated by numerous adjustments intended to reduce the hardships of inflation suffered by various segments of the economy. For example, almost all wage contracts between union labor and employers now contain escalator clauses which automatically raise wages when the cost of living rises. Real estate lease contracts also have escalator clauses which advance rents as the price index goes up. Since wages and rent are costs of doing business, they contribute to still higher prices.

Other examples are increases in the legal minimum hourly wage passed from time to time by Congress and increases in Social Security benefits, all supported by the argument that the cost of living has gone up.

Perhaps worst of all is the behavior of many individuals and businesses seeking to hedge or even to profit from inflation by economic decisions which are made in anticipation of more inflation. These speculators seek to buy ahead of rising prices and in most instances do so with as much credit as they can borrow.

Finally, when the forces of inflation seem to have exhausted their stimulus and the economy shows some signs of turning down, new inflation forces are generated by government through fiscal and

monetary policies, and we continue as before.

So, inflation is a vicious circle that in time begins to spin faster and faster and ultimately causes the economy to collapse into a depression.

Inflation works subtly and insidiously, often producing secondary ill effects that involve values far more precious than mere material values.

Let me mention a few of these, not in order of their importance because there is no way to rank them. Inflation has caused many families to feel the need for more than one income, and married women who might otherwise have remained out of the labor market have been obliged to take jobs or have sought jobs. . . .

Similarly there is widespread amount of moonlighting for the same reason by both men and women. Family life is certain to be altered by these developments and where there are children in the family, various social problems of concern to the Church are bound to emerge.

The nation's crime rate has reached record proportions, and inflation must share some of the blame for this.

Costs of operating state and local governments have become so high because of inflation that there is need for new taxes to relieve the burden of old tax sources. . . .

Privately supported colleges and universities, many church related, as well as hospitals and charitable institutions, are financially strained today because operating costs have gone up faster than endowment income and contributions. Many will have to close, unless they can find relief somewhere.

Tuition in church-related schools has been raised so much that enrollment is discouraged, and students are turning to state-supported institutions.

So, you see, inflation is a cruel monster who can destroy our social as well as our economic values.

Who is going to stop him? The best answer is nobody until enough people understand what has been happening and what the eventual outcome will be. . . .

The principal hangup, however, is that there are too many citizens who have been duped into believing that inflation is necessary to keep the economy always moving ahead. They have been misled into believing that inflation is necessary in order to keep unemployment down.

When the bust comes, as it surely will, the masses of people robbed of their fruits of labor, like those in Germany in the early 1920's, will succumb out of desperation to the siren appeal of a dictator and will forfeit their freedom.

Loss of freedom under a totalitarian state is the dearest of all costs of inflation.



Arthur A. Smith is the retired senior vice president of the First National Bank, Dallas, and retired chairman of the Economics Department at Southern Methodist University. He presented this speech at the Christian Life Commission's seminar, "Christians Confronting the Economic Crisis."

The energy crisis and a Christian life-style

By Carlyle Marney

EDITOR'S NOTE: Carlyle Marney died July 3, 1978. The following article is a speech he delivered at the Christian Life Commission's consultation on energy, "The Energy Crisis and the Churches." It is reproduced here because of its appropriateness for this issue of *LIGHT*. It is also here for those who are unacquainted with Marney's work and for those long fascinated with and inspired by this pastor-prophet.

The energy crisis means no more or less than this: there is a wall around our garden. Creation has its edges. Those predecessors of Columbus were right, one can literally sail off the edge of the Earth. A laboratory culture really can breathe up all the air in its envelope. A species really can overrun the garden. Us bees really are killer bees and us brown rats really do get cannibalized, if crowded. The poor we *do* have always with us and we create the poor!

"You should have seen this field when God had it all to himself" runs the old farmer-preacher joke, but the line has this merit. It reminds us that even God had need for a keeper-agent-partner, responsible for Creation, too, and so, made, and commissioned a species of caretakers.

A Christian life style takes its rise not in salvation but in *Creation*—for if, as the blessed Psalter puts it, "God belongs in the heaven of the heavens," and it continues "... the earth He has given to us"—but not, surely, to make it a swampy sewer, choked with the bones of the prematurely dead, strangled on the noisome gaseous fumes of our iron horses breaking wind in their climb to the top of Mt. Athos, or Sinai, or the Moon.

I have stated swiftly and now shall explicate, or at least expatiate upon, three points:

- I. The Limits on Creation and the Ethic of *Parsimony*
- II. The Nature of Covenant and the Ethic of *Responsibility*
- III. Incarnation as Mode for an Ethic of *Identity*

I. Ethic of Parsimony

Salvation is created! This is the text of a glorious Russian anthem that Berry's great choir sometimes sang. For here, I reverse the words: *Creation is Salvation*. God's first "good, good" is a word of grace, before man or law or atonement were more than a gleam in God's eye. Christians divide, unhappily enough, into sheep and goats—and one can really tell one from the other by whether they have made the matter of our salvation a *means* or an *end*. This way of saying this I owe to Ernest Campbell, who sees too, with me, that Salvation is a stopgap to keep the keeper from running off the edge of Creation into Abyss; Redemption is a bypass to keep the traffic flow toward God's own destination, which end is the triumphant completion of Creation and all that the Maker has made, and makes, and will make.

Creation is the stage; creatures, part of Nature all, are actors. And God? God is the only audience, unless indeed there are angels.

Stages have edges, and so does Creation. This we simply have not seen. All gardens have two characteristics in common: order—some kind of order, even a studied disorder; and boundary, fence, limit. In the ancient Canaanite myth, God moved against disorder first, the Chaos—dragons; and the Jews "remembered" he did it with a garden which had limits, beyond which lay the Land of Nod, wandering, no home, no limits, darkness. But who could have believed it? Man grew up thinking and acting, ripping and tearing, using and misusing as if the Garden had no edge or limit and, as if he/she—himself/herself, were not a part of nature whose

"There is a wall around our garden. Creation has its edges."

very continual existence depended upon the state of the garden. It may be *the* heresy of all our reading of our history that we have thought ourselves above nature instead of nature-bound.

Prometheus is bound. Prometheus is beholden to the Sacrament of Limits, I have called it. Phylogenetic, biochemical, photosynthetic processes bind our species and everything that organic life exhibits. *Systems*—neural, blood, bone, and cellular; cultural, familial, political, mythic; ethical, psychic, sociobiological, philosophical, economic, and religious; *Spheres*—biosphere, zoosphere, noosphere, hemisphere and galactic contain us. No escape, we cannot get out. There is no door and here we adjust and adapt and/or die. And if we bear the cosmic burden of knowing this, it only adds to the incredible obligation we have within all this, precisely because we can/do know it.

The Sacrament of Limits is served only by acceptance of limits. Acceptance of limits imposes upon me what I have fled all my life: *discipline*. This I must buy if I continue and live long, or if even I should live well. This discipline it is, which if preservative, will be conservative. That is to say, I am pushed to an ethic of *parsimony* even while living in a cornucopia of supplies for living. Parsimony is the only ethic I know that can protect homeostasis in a context of limited creation.

But look again at my limits: stomach, bladder, bowels; heart, kidneys, head; muscle, nerve, bone; time, space, place; mind, memory, and expectation. I am surrounded, halted, stopped with minimal power to move or move out. This is the given basis for an ethic of parsimony. I have survived a systolic blood pressure of 47, but I was cold and clammy, and barely living. If that same pressure should reach 180, I am sitting on an explosion looking for a weak arterial wall where it can happen. My belly juices are no longer those of an Irish Setter. I can burn only 30 grams of carbohydrate a day, not the 380 grams of the average American's diet. I cannot live if I am more than six days from any water, and while my average is about three hours, I will be convulsive if I go too long between urinals. One-hundred and thirty days without food, three minutes without air, I need electric stimulus on a

(Continued on page 6)

mini-second interval, potassium, magnesium, salts, and metals in constant supply; and I can't live a day without love. On the average American street, they say, there is a sexual stimulus about every seven minutes, but if expressed in a breeding situation I am out of room to live in a single generation, marooned on acres of babies. How now does one live with limits? Up to my ears in crocodiles, how do I concentrate on draining the swamp?

The ethical principle involved here I call *parsimony* and this seems a crazy inversion when one has lived in an unlimited creation. The law of parsimony means both qualitatively and quantitatively *the least that will really do!*

Professor Torrence told me last week that Dr. Einstein hesitated when asked to set a salary at Princeton, then said he preferred a checking account. At the end of a year, trustees found the great mind and his wife had used \$1700! Wesley may have said, "Get all you can; give all you can," but he prescribed no more than 8 ounces of meat and 12 ounces of vegetables a day for clergy, then added, "and no more than a glass of wine." "Never take more than three items at table," he said, which may be why he weighed 120, but it's also why he could preach to 4,000 miners at Gwennup Pit at 4 a.m. when he was 84! He was even parsimonious about sleep and ordered his men to study themselves and to take no more sleep than they needed to work well.

Not frugality, which is the least I can get by with. *Not penuriousness*, which begrudges me even the minimum need of my own belly; but *parsimony*, the least that will really do.

Parsimony over creation means the shrinking of Gargantua's gullet; the constriction of the appetite of Amazon; the drastic reduction of the belly of Mammon; this is what I mean, and have sought. "One is rich in proportion to what he can do without," says Thoreau on Walden's Pond. "The House Farthest Out," sent me by Dean Sam Miller during my long convalescence, had no television. "He shall give thee thy heart's desire," said Joe Carrington to me in a tiny room in Paraguay. Mishalah really means, "God Almighty will fix your want!" Augustine, ten days a-dying with the penitential psalms, had no will; there was nothing the poor man had for disposal.

Not frugality, which is a venal sin and crime against nature; *not penuriousness*, which is a spiritual condition; but *parsimony*, an empirical, administrative, judgmental principle operative with the least that will really fulfill the end of Creation. This is what I mean—it works even, and especially even, in psychic-therapy. For here the hearer's response is properly the least that will really do. Or, as Chuck Getkin of Emory has taught me, I invade and assume another's domain and privacy and responsibility.

II. Ethic of Responsibility

Of Covenant and its concomitant responsibility, I do speak with passion. And my passion is not devoid of precedent. Gerhard Von Rad begins, "Striking decisive moments of Covenant-making by Yahweh mark Israel's epic." What a thrill it was for me twenty years ago, when I had come East from Austin to "do" my *Structures of Prejudice* in public, to find myself rooming with that covenantal monument, James Muilenberg, and hear-see him *being* that Abraham, sinking into Covenant with the Yahweh of Grace and Mercy, then to feel myself climbing with Muilenberg through all seven levels of Covenant to arrive at length at the Elohist Sinaitic material of the Jewish memory when the human partner, connected by Covenant with both Creation and Salvation, is vigorously reminded of *duty*, decision, and a necessary *declaration*. It's an ethic of *responsibility*, I find. Responsible, I am, as *imago*

"Man grew up thinking and acting, ripping and tearing, using and misusing as if the Garden had no edge or limit. . . . It may be the heresy of all our reading of history that we have thought ourselves above nature instead of nature-bound."

Dei, for the parsimonious caretaking of everything else and myself in Creation.

If, entering now the zenith of my brief arc across and within Creation, I should enter God's grand Assize Hall tomorrow, called to account for myself, I should offer this confession and defense if, indeed, I could do more than fall down. But if able to give vocal response at all, I should say this:

Thou knowest, dear Lord of our lives, that for fifty of thy years, in ignorance, zest, zeal, and sin, I lived as if Creation and I had no limits. I lived and wanted and was, as if I had forever—without regard for time, or wit, or strength, or need, or limit, or endurance, and as if sleep were a needless luxury and digestion an automatic process. But Thou, O Lord of my real love, didst snatch my bits and ride me into Thy back pasture and didst rub my nose in my vulnerability and didst split my right lung into acquiescence, and didst freeze my colon for ten days in grief and loss, and didst press me into that year of depression in the anger I had diverted against myself at a threat to my nearest and dearest. Thou didst press me to knee-drop where the only word of petition I could utter was a despair-ridden, "Open, open." Thou didst read over my shoulder my dairy of that terrible journey when I did melt before Thee as a mere creature. Thou, then, didst hear.

Hear, now, my pitiable defense: In all my sixty years I killed no creature of thine I did not use for food except for a few rattlesnakes, a jackrabbit, a turtle or two, two quail I left overlong in my coat, and three geese poisoned on bad grain in Nebraska before I shot them, plus one wood duck in Korea. In all my years, I consciously battered no child, though my own claim much need to forgive me, and consciously misused no woman. Thou knowest my aim to treat no human as thing, never to hate overlong, to pass no child without his-her eye, and my innermost wish to love as Thou dost love by seeing no shades of color or class. And Thou didst long ago hear my cry to let me go from Paducah. Thou knowest my covenant with Elizabeth in our youth and thou knowest it has been better kept than my Covenant with Thee, and wilt thou Forgive? Indeed, thou hast. Hear now my intention with grace as if it were fact. I do intend and have intended to be responsible in Creation by Covenant and where I have defaulted do Thou forgive. Forgive, too, my vicarious responsibility for all the defection from thy purpose of all thy responsible creatures, and accept Thou this my admission of utter dependence upon Thy mercy."

And this, dear friends, is as near as I wish now to come to the exposure of what I mean by responsible ethic within my limits of God's limited Creation. But there is more, much more.

III. Ethic of Identity

The Name above every name, at which every knee shall bow, has not yet been uttered. And His name is, appropriately, the content and context of my responsible identity.

I wrote, years ago, my *Suffering Servant*; and the artist, commissioned to do His dear face for the cover, smitten deaf-mute in her infancy, to the astonished eyes of her colleagues, did for Christ's face, a *self-portrait*. It's authentic and hangs in my study. But the blessed Jesus never referred to Himself by that "Suffering Servant" title. Servant? Yes. Son? Yes. Rejected? Yes. To suffer? Yes. But he never appropriated Isaiah's graphic poem as His own name.

Who, then, laid it on Him that:

"He was bruised for our iniquities
The chastisement of our peace
was laid upon Him?"

Who recognized first that:

"He was despised and rejected,
A Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief?"

That:

"All we like sheep had gone astray?"

And that:

"We had turned everyone to his own way?"

And that:

"We hid our faces from him?"

And that:

"The Lord had laid on him
The Iniquity of us all?"

Answer? The whole believing first-century community laid it on Him when they saw His Cross-Death. In unison, later, as they looked back, they said: "There, there, the Lord hath reigned from the Tree—and He is Suffering Servant."

Jesus never claimed the title—no label on Matterhorn. It waits for the onlooker to gasp and know where he is. No sign on Grand Canyon. The overlooker gasps and draws back. No placard for Suffering Servant, but the whole community of believers says: God comes and has come to us! The Divine has emptied himself!

God has become a peasant!
And still man is proud. (Augustine)

"Pass by Him, the Man, and you will come to God.
Do not seek for any other way to come to God for if
He had not vouchsafed to be the way we should
all have gone astray. Therefore, I say to you,
do not seek the way. The way has come to thee.
Rise and walk!" (Augustine)

The Christian Secret, says the aged Karl Barth, is that I know you, who you are—and you know me; our Name is "Jesus Christ," and this puts us in Church! But, and also, we know this about all those *others* out there, "whether they know it or not"—and this puts us all in Church!

And what does this mean for us here and now? It means at least this—I am not to derive my name and my identity from culturally imposed designations. My sex, race, religion, class, economic location, family, play, and education are not identification tags. My *name* is the highest I know. Jesus is the Christ is the best of breed. This imposes a higher identity for me.

**"I am pushed to an ethic of
parsimony even while living in
a cornucopia of supplies for
living. Parsimony is the only
ethic I know that can protect
homeostasis in a context of
limited creation."**

But how and with what effrontery do I assume this identity? My culture, family, class, town and region; my religion, education, and value structure; my race, economic location and national heritage, all tell me I am male, white, East Tennessean, democrat, lower class, Baptist, ordained, half educated and certified in these. Is there for me a higher identity resting on God's own memory?

Indeed, Jesus Christ *is* my species and my breed, or Incarnation is a stupid fantasy. But what happens when I know and assume this self-recognized identity?

Catastrophe! An ego-maniacal, self-aggrandizing assumption of false identity—unless I wait. Wait? Wait for you to see this. For you to name me Priest of God to You: for you to tell me whom I am, Jesus—who—has—appeared. But if I say

(Continued on page 8)

☐ I am not interested in receiving LIGHT. Please remove my name from your mailing list.

☐ The following person(s) would be interested in receiving LIGHT:

Name

Name

Street

Street

City State Zip

City State Zip

Cut out and mail to Christian Life Commission, 460 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37219. There is no subscription fee.

Have you read...?

There are two books that are quite appropriate for consideration in this issue of **LIGHT**. One is by J. Philip Wogaman. It is *The Great Economic Debate: An Ethical Analysis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977, paperback, \$5.95). You may already be acquainted with Wogaman through *A Christian Method of Moral Judgment* (Westminster, 1977) or *Guaranteed Annual Income: The Moral Issues* (Abingdon, 1968).

In *The Great Economic Debate*, Wogaman has done a great service as he studies five different economic ideologies: Marxian communism, laissez faire capitalism, social market or mixed economy capitalism, democratic socialism, and economic conservatism.

For those who resist the notion that Christianity and the marketplace are and must be cohabitants, Wogaman establishes that economics and morality cannot be separated. More importantly, he advises that any economic system should be judged as to how it is "committed to human rights and political democracy." Though I found myself wanting more in-depth discussion at points, this is an excellent book to get you on some solid footing in the quagmire of economic ignorance that abounds.

The second book is *The Predicament of the Prosperous* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978, paperback, \$4.95). This rather catchy title comes from the pens of Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen. They teamed up on another book called *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976). Oddly enough, Wogaman, Birch, and Rasmussen teach together at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

Birch and Rasmussen feel American churches are caught up in the American success story and provide religious sanction for the cultural creed. They suggest some biblical images which "acknowledge our relative power and prosperity in the world but that nevertheless assist us in seeing the crisis in which we are participants, and of which we are increasingly aware." Calling for a major transformation in the way churches think about economics, *The Predicament of the Prosperous* will remind the reader of Sider's *Rich Christians in an Hungry Age*.

The general tone of the book falls more toward the ideology

Wogaman discusses called economic conservatism. It provides yet another perspective in this increasingly popular way of thinking about economics.

WMT

Energy Crisis

(Continued from page 7)

this I disfranchise the Blessed Jesus and me. You must tell me this if it's so, and I must wait. This is the Ethic of Identity. I need you to tell me whom I am—Jesus! Mercil

And now I need a summary which defies my powers of condensation and degree of consanguinity: Jesus is my name, I am one of the *Goyim*, born out of due season, included by God's Creator Grace in all He has intended for all men, included in God's Israel, by adoption, as are all "them" peoples, and called to be Jesus when I can. I am under an ages-old covenant of responsible presence in an arena of created powers and processes over which I exercise as "me" some kind of responsible oversight, but vulnerable, limited, inhibited: victim, sinner, and recalcitrant, redundant, reluctant partner in a creative process which may or may not reach its fulfillment far beyond me. "Naked came I into the world." How I'm dressed at conclusion makes no difference: A pair of jeans or a Glasgow robe, it's samo-samo. Meantime? I mow, and cut wood, and clean ditches, and preach what is happening and listen, and wait, and want, and work, and look to see what God will do in the Earth, His limited Creation, which asks for Covenant response and glories in Redemption, as a way-station enroute to completion—Selah! I watch out always for peoples, and for babies, and little rabbits, and black snakes worth preserving, and little puppies on the road, and old folks nearby who stutter and lack, and can hear, too. Come, Lord Jesus.



At the time of his death, Carlyle Marney was director of the Interpreter's House, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.



**Christian Life
Commission**

Of The Southern Baptist Convention

460 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37219

MSN 142

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Nashville, Tennessee
Permit No. 2

Dargon-Carver Library
BSSB

Address Correction Requested