

LIGHT

Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention
December-January 1980-81

Conformity or Non-Conformity?

Conformity at any cost is grotesque and shrivels the human spirit. Many feel guilty if their unconventionality shows too much. But, often it is the unconventional who guide the way. Several items in this *Light* call attention to the issue of conformity and nonconformity for the Christian.

In "The Difference," Julian Cave uses Eugene Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros* to illustrate the struggles of a nonconformist. David George in "Encounter with God as the Basis for Ethical Action" ably develops the concept that the strength not to conform is a part of the presence of God. Harry Hollis reminds us in "Christians Facing Frontiers in Family Life" to follow the trailblazer, Jesus Christ, into relatively unexplored areas of family life. In "What Do You Do after November 4?" Foy Valentine calls for ongoing involvement to counter immorality.

May the grace and peace of the God who appeals to the nonconformity in us be with you in this holiday season.—WMT

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What Do You Do After November 4?



The national elections have come and gone. The campaign rhetoric has faded. Yesterday's bright political promises are being reevaluated in the light of today's stark realities. President Jimmy Carter is on his way out and President-elect Ronald Reagan is on his way in. The American political pendulum has swung again; and it may be confidently expected to do so yet again and again, for our two-party political system practically guarantees it.

Christians are concerned about what we perceive to be a genuine crisis in public morality as well as private morality. What are we to do now? Our concern is as strong after November 4 as it was before November 4.

We are not to assume, if we are Republicans, that righteousness and peace have kissed each other and that after inauguration day justice will suddenly begin to roll down from Washington as water and morality as a mighty stream.

We are not to assume, if we are Democrats, that the light of all truth has gone out, that justice has been lynched, and that Satan has been loosed on the land for a season.

On the contrary, Christians are to work faithfully and pray earnestly for the recovery of moral values and ideals. These values and ideals are mandated by the Lord. They are the glue without which no nation can long hold together. That recovery is the only cure for the spirit of malaise and the general feeling of ill-being in our body politic.

What is it we really want?

The Greeks, particularly Socrates and Plato, understood the primary moral values on which all conduct turns to be prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice. The

Romans understood, in the words which Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote to his son in 44 B.C., that "all that is morally right rises from one of four sources; it is concerned either (1) with the full perception or full development of the true (WISDOM); or (2) with the conservation of organized society, with rendering to every man his due, and with the faithful discharge of obligations assumed (JUSTICE); or (3) with the greatness and strength of an invincible spirit (COURAGE); or (4) with the orderliness and moderation of everything that is said and done (TEMPERANCE)." To these basic and completely valid moral values revealed religion added faith, hope, and love. Americans today, including Christian Americans, understand these values to be represented by such concepts as freedom, integrity, character, honesty, meaningful work, health, discipline, self-sacrifice, and responsibility as well as by such social concepts as human rights, justice, and peace.

With regard to morality can there be any concord between Jerusalem and Athens, between the church and the state? Indeed there can be and there must be if our civilization survives.

If our civilization founders it will not be because of what happened or did not happen on November 4; and it will not be because of OPEC, inflation, political mismanagement, or war. It will be because of an all-pervading nerve gas of immorality unchecked by moral values and ideals.

A great and free people with the resources available to us in the 1980s can put together the ways and means for recovering these moral values and ideals.

Joy Valentine

LIGHT

Christians Facing Frontiers in Family Life

by Harry N. Hollis, Jr.

Editor's note: This is the text of an address presented during Home Mission Week at Ridgecrest Conference Center, August 1980.

American families face challenging frontiers today; the Gospel of Jesus Christ provides resources to conquer these frontiers.

The burning question we face as we look at frontiers in family life is not, "Will the family survive?" but, "How can we help the family thrive?" The Bible teaches clearly that the family will survive because it is God's institution. We are called to work to help families thrive as they are enriched by the power of Jesus Christ. We are not here to ask: "Does the family have a future?" We are here to proclaim that under God families are the future.

We are called to speak to the contemporary confusion about family in our culture. This confusion is reflected in the experience of a man who planned a duck hunting trip early one morning. The night before the hunt it stormed fiercely. The man and his wife decided to get their five-year-old daughter who was asleep and put her in their bedroom so she would not be frightened by the storm, should she awaken. At 4:00 the next morning the man and wife got up for breakfast. While they were eating they heard their daughter crying loudly in the hall. Both rushed to her and asked what was wrong. When she calmed down, the confused little girl said: "I woke up and looked in Mama's bed, and she wasn't there. Then I looked in Daddy's bed, and he wasn't there. And I went in my room and looked in my bed and I wasn't there. And I don't know where I am!"

Who Will Lead Families?

As we focus on some frontiers in family life, we need to ask who is going to take the lead in facing these frontiers. This question is crucial because there is a crisis in leadership among those dealing with family today. Individuals and groups are competing vigorously to become the leaders in saving the family. No doubt many of these people are sincere and helpful, and we can affirm them and celebrate the good they are doing.

But some appear to be taking advantage of the interest in family and the hurts of families to promote themselves or their causes. And it is to these people that we must say, "Stop using the family!"

To mercenary authors who take advantage of family needs to sell simplistic books to satisfy their own greed, we must say stop using the family.

To political operatives who seek to sanctify extremist causes by parading under the family banner, we must say stop using the family.

To television performers who exploit family fears to raise money for their own institutions, we must say stop using the family.

We must say stop using the family and start loving, helping and celebrating the family.

Para-church organizations come and go, but the church of Jesus Christ has been standing up for families for nearly 2,000 years.

The Church Can Lead Families

Not everyone carrying the family banner then is acting in ways to help solve the broad and complex range of problems families face. To whom shall we turn for leadership in facing family frontiers? Our hope for solving family problems and finding joyful fulfillment in family life lies in Jesus Christ. And the best institution to provide leadership in dealing with the family is Christ's church. Para-church organizations come and go, but the church of Jesus Christ has been standing up for families for nearly 2000 years. And it will continue to do so. During my involvement in the White House Conference on Families, I have seen many family organizations but none comes close to the church in caring for all the needs of families. Don't turn your back on the church. The church is the best organization to help families in our society.

The church can avoid the pitfalls of manipulation, of self-serving treatment of frontiers in family life by following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. We can love families as he loved families; we can serve families as he served people.

In Hebrews 12:2, there is superb guidance for us as we face frontiers in family life. Jesus is described as "Our trailblazer." Therefore, as we face these challenges in family, let us "look to Jesus, the pioneer (the trailblazer) and perfecter of our faith . . ." (Hebrews 12:2).

Christians are frontier people. Let us share the good news of Jesus Christ so that people will be changed and they can in turn change and shape those forces which affect families.

Let us demonstrate in our lives the changes that Christ can make in family. We are called to take family as seriously as the Bible does. First Timothy 5:8 gives us a view of the importance the Bible gives to family life: "If someone does not provide for his relatives, especially for members of his own family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (T.E.V.)

Now, that's a tough test for orthodoxy! Perhaps all of us should examine ourselves in relation to the heresy of neglecting our families. If Christians are going to take the

Frontiers. . .

lead in facing the challenges to family, we must first make certain that Jesus Christ is reflected in our homes and in our hearts.

Let us look at some of the frontiers that families are facing. As we do so, Jesus Christ serves as our trailblazer in these frontiers. This means that we can turn the problems caused by these frontiers into opportunities for growth and service.

Christians must vigorously combat ageism, the discrimination against older people which is widespread in our society.

Frontiers of Aging

One frontier which families face is the frontier of aging. In the year 2030, one out of six Americans will be over 65. The increase in the number of elderly people is a cause for celebration. We must work to see that the increase in the quantity of years does not lead to a decrease in the quality of years. Christians must vigorously combat "ageism," the discrimination against older people which is so widespread in our society.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we can celebrate the possibilities for enrichment of life that the elderly can bring to our congregations. We can blaze trails on this frontier by opposing the myths and stereotypes which are so entrenched in our society. We can teach that when people grow old, they are indeed still growing. We can turn to intergenerational activities in the church's worship and work to enhance our fellowship. And we can look to the elderly for wisdom and a sense of right priorities as we structure our lives.

Frontier of Biomedical Issues

Another frontier families face is the frontier of biomedical issues. Developments in this field which will have a radical impact on families include genetic engineering, the extensive prolongation of life, new forms of birth control,

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memory enhancement and memory editing, new pressures to practice euthanasia, and possibly the cloning of human tissues.

These developments in the biomedical field will have profound impact on families. If the church is going to lead the way in facing this frontier, we must encourage Christians to get involved vocationally in the biomedical field. We can affirm science's search for truth and insist that what is discovered be used responsibly. Not everything that is scientifically possible is morally permissible. Let Christians take the lead in facing this frontier so that scientific developments will enhance family life.

Frontier of Parenting

More than ever, forces outside the home are having an impact on family life. The church must take the lead in helping people with children to be the alert, sensitive, compassionate, communicating parents God calls us to be.

Some of the issues that we face on the frontier of parenting are: How to enhance intimacy, communication, and friendship between parent and child; how to help children maintain a sense of wonder in a technological world; how to provide spiritual nurture; how to enable children to develop Christian values so that they can make responsible moral decisions; how to deal with anger in the angry 80s; how to get fathers to assume more responsibility in parenting by helping them to see that both father and mother must be homemakers; how to enable mothers who pursue a career (by choice or necessity or both) to deal with the pressures they face; how to help children develop a sense of self-worth.

The church can give valuable help to families on the parenting frontier. The church is a family of families and can bring together parents to share ways to cope with and overcome parenting problems.

Frontier of Family Enrichment

The frontier of family enrichment is a challenge to the church. We must continue to help people who have family problems, but providing family therapy is not enough. We must take the lead in the church to seek to prevent problems. We can decrease the need for family therapy by increasing preventive measures.

Christians can focus on enriching and nurturing family relationships. The marriage enrichment movement has brought joy and strength to millions. As the love of Jesus Christ guides and empowers us, we can love one another in enriched family relationships.

Frontier of Concern for Social Justice

The family at its best can be a laboratory for learning justice. As children are treated justly at home, they can learn to treat people justly outside the home. In our society today, justice is still being denied so many. The resurgence

of the KKK is an indication that discrimination is very much alive and sick in America. We need color blind families because the new racists have traded in their sheets for button-down collars. They have traded their crude racial slurs for sophisticated themes of racial inferiority. But their racism is still a sin. It is idolatry, and we must combat it vigorously. The church can take the lead in helping families to look beyond themselves to involvement in the needs of their communities. Families turned inward are families turned idolatrous. Let families give attention, therefore, to such issues as economics, energy, hunger, peace, and violence.

In that excellent book, *Gift From the Sea*, Anne Morrow Lindberg says that a couple at middle age can be like an open oyster shell, facing outward together. Here is a model for all families to use. By becoming involved in the needs of others, by working to correct the injustices of society, we can find greater fulfillment in our homes, and we can contribute to a better society in which family life can flourish.

Frontier of Single Adulthood

There are growing numbers of single adults in our midst. Some are waiting later in terms of age to marry. Some are choosing not to marry at all. Many find themselves single again due to divorce or the death of a mate.

Single adults are family members, too. All of us, single or married, can have a right understanding and attitude toward singleness if we will look to Jesus Christ, as a model.

The church can take the lead in the frontier of singleness as we allow our lives to be enriched by the abilities, energy, and perspective of those who are single. And the church can take the lead as we seek to help singles cope with the pressures and problems that they face.

We ought to do more to change TV, but let's face it: much of the problem is with TV viewers.

Frontier of Television Values

Americans are watching more television than ever and it is clear that TV has a profound impact on family life. The increase in cable television in the coming days means more opportunities for uplifting programs and more danger of morally degrading programs.

It is past time for Christian families to exercise better control of television. We ought to do more to try to change TV, but let's face it: much of the problem lies with TV viewers. I suspect that there are many Christian people who are talking today more about J. R. Ewing than they are about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Television must be controlled. Otherwise we will allow the frequent teaching of alien moral values to undermine our families.

The church can take the lead in facing the sexual revolution by teaching biblical standards for sexual behavior.

Frontier of Sexual Revolution

The sexual revolution is having a profound impact on family life. If by sexuality we mean everything about a person that has to do with being male or female, then it is clear that this is a frontier to which Christians must apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Silence about sexuality would speak loudly to society that we, the people of God, have rejected God's good gift for the enrichment of human life.

The church can take the lead in facing the sexual revolution by teaching biblical standards for sexual behavior. We can provide sex education in the church and prepare resources for families to use in the home. We can affirm the biblical teaching that "in Christ there is neither male nor female," even as we emphasize the truth that sexual equality does not, cannot, and must not mean sexual identity. Let the church take the lead in facing the frontier of the sexual revolution.

Frontier of Family Evangelism

The frontier of family evangelism offers one of the most exciting and important challenges that contemporary Christians face. As families are plagued by increasing problems and pressures, they will be hungry for solutions that match their needs. They do not want simplistic formulas for family success; they want true help for the complexities of life.

This means that Christian families have an opportunity to communicate through the way they live the difference that Christ makes in a home. Let us commit ourselves to an evangelism that is interested not only in getting people into the baptism; let us practice also an evangelism that leads to getting Christianity into people's homes. Let us work to enable our families to bear witness to other families about what Jesus Christ means to us in our homes.

Christian Fulfillment in Facing Frontiers

The frontiers families face call for careful energetic leadership by Christians. As we give ourselves in service to families in need, we will find the satisfaction and fulfillment that comes in living the gospel.

American families face challenging frontiers today; the Gospel of Jesus Christ provides resources to conquer these frontiers.

Harry N. Hollis, Jr., is Associate Executive Director and Director of Family and Special Moral Concerns of the Christian Life Commission.

The Difference

by Julian A. Cave

**"But they won't get me.
I'm not joining them.
I'll take on the whole of them.
I'll put up a fight.
I am not capitulating."**

That's Berenger's final outburst in *Rhinoceros*, an inci-

sive play by Eugene Ionesco. On the surface, the drama sounds a bit absurd. It is a situation in which everyone in a small French village becomes a rhinoceros. Initially, people were repulsed by the idea. However, progressively, group pressure made this changeover an appropriate thing to do. In fact, the villagers began to see those



Yes, everybody chose to be a rhinoceros—Berenger was the single exception. He sensed pressure to be sure. Intermittently, he was attracted to the beast, but to the end he refused to capitulate.

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grotesque animals as having a strange beauty—

**Oh, how I wish I were them. . .
A smooth brow looks so ugly. I need one or two
horns to give my sagging face a lift.
My hands are so limp. Why won't they get rough?
My skin is so slack. I'd like to have a hard skin
in that wonderful dull green color. . .**

Yes, everybody chose to become a rhinoceros—Berenger was the single exception. He sensed pressure, to be sure. Intermittently, he was attracted to the beast, but to the end, he refused to capitulate.

Ionesco's play deals with the struggles of a nonconformist. To a degree, all of us can identify. By definition, the Christian assumes this posture. "In the world, but not of it," the Bible says (John 17:11-14). Being in step with a different drummer is a striking feature of our commitment. The apostle urges us to resist the environmental pressures that would make us conform (Romans 12). Yet, such out-of-sync posturing is no easy task, especially within the current milieu. Beyond having to show a contrast between Christian and non-Christian, there is the urgency to clarify the telling difference from among a broad spectrum of folks who use the same name. It is the pressure to conform to some "Christian" world that I sense most deeply the need to resist. Do you resonate to this scenario?

All three presidential candidates spoke of their "born-again" credentials. One claimed God as his campaign manager. Isn't that somewhat confusing? (A cynical resolution to the dilemma is to say they are born again in the sense that they keep reshaping themselves whenever it is expedient to do so!) Exposure to right-wing evangelicals makes me empathize with Will Barrett in Walker Percy's *The Second Coming*. Will didn't know how to express it, but he felt something was amiss with how the religionists loved Jesus. Rolfe Neill, publisher of the *Charlotte Observer*, insists Martin Luther King's fight for civil rights and James Robison's crusade against homosexuals are similar—"It's a matter of which mix of religion and politics one prefers," he says. For some reason, that assessment sounds off-key.

The Christian's Distinctive

What is the Christian's distinctive? How are we out of step? Again, it mandates a critical review of the varied claims among those who join us in singing "Amazing Grace." One must scrutinize rhetoric and spirit, methods and objectives, what people stand for and the kind of people who are standing.

A few points to ponder:

Non-Violence—A Christian Hallmark

As a starter, Christians repudiate violence. The chaplain of those airmen who dropped the first atomic bombs confessed recently that he had been brainwashed: "I was told it was necessary." At the present time, we are being heavily inundated with verbiage about the necessity of a military buildup. The notion is advanced that the greater our capacity to kill, the better our chances for staying alive. Some high-profiled religionists claim there is divine sanction for increasing our weaponry so as to safeguard those things we cherish. *Newsweek* (September 15, 1980) reports a higher percentage of evangelicals who are for increased defense spending than among the voters at large (78% vs 70%).

This inordinate show of confidence in explosives runs counter to the Christian's hallmark—a radical trust in God and gospel.

I hesitate to state categorically that we should delete all military items from the national budget, but I do believe weapons have limited value and indicate a compromising of the Christian ethic. I cannot find biblical support for killing, and resist vigorously the idea that a push for an enlarged arsenal is one spinoff of a profound faith.

The Christian is to be known for doing battle in a different warfare, fighting hate with love and overcoming evil with good. Our dominant appeal is to mankind's noble instincts. There is commitment to peace initiatives. No, this is not political naivete, but a stubborn refusal to allow the world to pressure us into believing there is no alternative to militarism. Ours is a way of life and strategies of death neither achieve nor sustain it. We cannot capitulate to another world's pressure, even if it is religious, to become too optimistic about the Pentagon. The argument for non-violence remains the Christian's best shot.

Christians are Inclusive

Christians are inclusive; that's a difference, too. Amway's gospel is at odds with the Bible because it teams with narcissism. It offers a scheme that guarantees the world's being manipulated for my success. This philosophy isn't restricted to Amway. A new breed of church folk is described as the "me generation finding religion." Don't forget that capitalism has as its inherent danger the tendency to become exclusive—fewer and fewer enjoy more and more!

Authentic Christianity begins and ends with us. It lobbies for mainstreaming the whole human family. Corporate life, economic and otherwise, is to be kept under constant surveillance so as to maintain access for everyone. "The biblical economic vision has to do with the simple life,"

The Difference. . .

wrote Jim Wallis, "with the sharing of resources, with the redistribution of income and power." The Christian ethic compels us to combat persons and structures that concentrate privilege. That is how our nonconformity is expressed.

Bob Maddox, an aide to President Carter, talked with several Charlotte ministers at my home. The group was sympathetic, but there was tough probing. One minister confessed his disappointment with the President's acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention as he omitted any reference to Third World concerns. Maddox said this was a political calculation; the convention setting was thought to be the wrong place to deal with such issues. The minister reacted, "This is an indictment on all of us, isn't it? That was probably a proper political judgement, but it's sad. What it says is that hunger doesn't get votes." I imagine a lot of those votes would have been cast by people who share our name, using our Book to justify voting that way.

Taking seriously the biblical truth forces us to be out of step with the response. The Scriptures do not allow the luxury of systemic inequities. It is not God's will that any should perish. The pressure to exclude needs to be resisted. Economic forces are the most coercive, I assure you.

Commitment to Saving People

The Christian's difference is reflected in a strong commitment to the saving of people. There are electronic spokesmen who talk a lot about saving, but one wonders whether it is people they wish to save. The crusades sound noble, but compassion is missing. The language is strident, angry and alienating. This ambivalent rhetoric isn't limited to television.

Thomas Merton warned us against loving causes more than people. It is a critical point, for a love of causes can induce a Fascist mentality, that is, a mindset that equates people with positions. People are manhandled for the sake of positions. It is illustrated by the comment of a Nazi leader made during World War II. "When I come up against an intellectual who poses as a problem, I kill the intellectual. Then, there is no problem," he said. (sic)

I sense that some who use the name Christian are anti-people, especially if those people they are against have committed particular crimes, belong to minority or ethnic groups, or have a different sex or sexual orientation. It is almost as if "who they are" and "what they have done" disqualifies them from functional membership in the human race. They are filtered out with no pangs of conscience by those eager to make a Christian society!

To be sure, I understand the complexity of the issues

associated with homosexuals, abortion, minority rights, and criminal behavior. At the same time, how one takes a position is significant, too. Process is as crucial as product. If brutalizing, physical or otherwise, is the strategy for realizing a goal, then brutalizing becomes a legitimate method to enforce it. Human values are to be safeguarded at every juncture. The pressure to use any means to reach a good end is taboo. This *modus operandi* is too hard on folks, our major asset.

Some who claim to represent the Christ are into big numbers—that really impresses segments of society enamored with the success syndrome. Many of us feel pressures, both within and outside the church, to subscribe to their aggressive style. Be cautious. A decision to say *no* is reinforced, if one takes a hard look at the people being shaped in this religious world. Ultimately, the Christian's strongest argument is that we have good news about people-making. If the difference is not evident in who we are (non-violent, inclusive, caring), then what we offer results in no more than a momentary brush with fantasy. Our models remain saints, not entrepreneurs. It is community we're after.

No capitulating, please.

Julian Cave is senior minister at St. John's Baptist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina.





ON THE ETHICS FRONT

T. Furman Hewitt

Furman Hewitt began his teaching career at Gardner-Webb College. While there he taught an ethics course. A growing interest in the discipline prompted him to focus on ethics in post-graduate work at Duke University. He had already earned the B.A. from Furman University, and the B.D., Th.M., and Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. While studying at Duke he was invited to begin teaching as associate professor of Christian ethics at nearby Southeastern Seminary in 1976.

At Southeastern, Hewitt perceives himself "as a facilitator for the students' own struggles with truth and responsibility, not as one whose personal conclusions should be imposed on students (which is, of course, impossible, anyway)." He further describes his philosophy of teaching by saying, "I believe that the seminary learning situation should be a process in which the professor learns from the students as well as from the faculty and his or her own research."

Furman Hewitt identifies the challenge of teaching Christian ethics in a Southern Baptist Seminary in a two-fold way. First, one must "find various ways to bring students to the point where they say, 'I am responsible for what goes on in the world as a whole and my Christian commitments can make a difference in the way I think about the multitude of political, social, scientific, and theoretical issues of our day.'" Second, students need to come to appreciate and apply "the attitude of grace and understanding and acceptance that should walk hand in hand with the prophetic spirit. Prophecy without love and understanding may sound noble and forceful and even faithful, but it does not have a good track record for effectiveness."

Depending upon the semester, Hewitt teaches courses dealing with introductory Christian ethics, biblical ethics, the church and social change, moral concern in American church and culture, ethics and human sexuality, and current issues in Christian ethics. Furman Hewitt feels some of the major issues to be dealt with by Christian ethicists are survival issues such as the nuclear arms race and world hunger; economic issues like inflation, leisure, and labor-management relations; singleness as a life-style; and health-care delivery. Also, he says, "As Christian ethicists, we have the additional challenge of refining a methodology for moving from our biblical and theological roots to the changing issues of the modern world."

Furman, his wife Donna, and children Tom and Kimberly are active members of the Binkley Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



Thomas A. Bland

When Tom Bland moved to Southeastern Seminary in 1956, he was the youngest person to be elected to the faculty up to that time. He came from three years of teaching at William Jewell College, where he had been chairman of the department and professor of sociology.

A North Carolinian by birth, Bland earned his undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina. He went on to Southern Seminary where he obtained the B.D. and Th.D. degrees. He has done post-doctoral study at Yale University, the University of North Carolina, and Union Theological Seminary, New York.

Describing his denominational involvement, Bland says, "I am an activist." That is not an empty claim. While in Kentucky he was on that state convention's executive board. In Missouri, he chaired the Committee on Temperance and Civic Righteousness for the Missouri Baptist Convention. He served as a member and chairman of the Christian Life Committee for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. When the state convention established an agency, the Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs, to assume the Christian Life Committee's responsibilities, Bland served two terms on that council. Denominational service has not detracted from local church involvement either. During his time at Southeastern, Bland has served thirty interim pastorates and kept an active membership at the Wake Forest Baptist Church.

Bland feels the eighties will be a particular time of challenge both for the Southern Baptist Convention and Christian ethics as "a struggle within our denomination between 'scribes' and 'prophets' comes." He thinks there will be "disillusionment within our churches when the people realize, before the decade is over, that the *slogans* of promotionalism have not contributed to the *substance* of faith, and an expansionist mentality which can only quantify 'growth' has not made for bold Christian living!"

Tom Bland offers courses dealing with introductory Christian ethics; the church and aging; several courses relating to Christian ethics and issue areas—the state, race, alcohol education, the taking of life, ecology, contemporary Christian ethics, and Christian ethics in history.

In his role as professor of Christian ethics and sociology, Bland sees himself as 'a midwife' helping in the delivery of healthy ideas and as a nurturing agent in the formation of a religious leadership that is theologically informed, ethically sensitive, and creatively at work in effective prophetic leadership as ministers of Jesus Christ."

Tom and his wife Eunice make their home in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

IN ADDITION

Telling the Truth

Not everyone has discovered Frederick Buechner. A sampling of his writing should whet your appetite for more:

"At the level of words, the prophets speak historical, political, theological, and, of course, ethical truths as powerfully as anyone has ever spoken them and as daringly. . . . Nobody before or since has ever used words to express more powerfully than they our injustice and unrighteousness, our hardness of heart, our pride, our complacency, our hypocrisy, our idolatry, our shallowness, our faithlessness.

"These particular truths that the prophets speak were crucial for their own times and are crucial also for ours, and any preacher who does not speak them in his own right, naming names including his own name, any religious person who does not heave them at the injustice and unrighteousness of his own time and of himself, runs the risk of being irrelevant, sentimental, a bag of wind. But, at the same time, they are only truths. They are not the truth that Pilate asked for just in case there happened to be any. They are not truth itself, Gospel

truth. They are not new because even in the prophets' day they were not new.

"But in addition to particular truths, the prophets spoke truth, too, and that was when they were most truly prophetic." (*Telling the Truth*. New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p. 18)

Church and Community

Larry McSwain (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) considers in a recent article that:

"Community transformation must move beyond centering and critique. A faith which never moves beyond the centering experience adopts other worldly mysticism as its social faith, as do the world-rejecting religions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

"A faith that never moves beyond critique ends in world-rejecting sectarianism with a denial of history and escapism into apocalypticism. A faith that is centered in transcendence, critical of its social milieu, and moves into a constructive strategy of community change is a faith which affirms its world through its transformation." ("Foundations for a Ministry of Community Transformation," *Review and Expositor*, Spring, 1980, page 264.)

Annual Christian Life Commission Seminar Slated for March 23-25 in Dallas, Texas

The Christian Life Commission's national seminar on current ethical issues is scheduled for March 23-25, 1981 at the Dallas Hilton (downtown) Dallas, Texas.

Speakers for the seminar include James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, D.C., Richard Barnet, director of the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C., and Roger Lovette, pastor, First Baptist Church, Clemson, South Carolina.

Registration for the seminar is \$30 and \$15 for spouses and students. For further information complete the form below and mail to W. David Sapp, Christian Life Commission, 460 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, Tennessee, 37219 or call (615) 244-2495.

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Encounter with God as the Basis for Ethical Action

by David C. George

Righteous action is only possible when we are in touch with a source of righteousness beyond ourselves. And because we know that, before we can carry out the prophet's mission we must experience the prophet's vision. And because we know that, our own efforts at righteousness themselves become evil and destructive unless they are purified by the judgment and mercy of God.

The best-known example of this is the experience of Isaiah. This giant among prophets warned, challenged, and instructed Israel for half a century under very discouraging circumstances. What motivated him? What kept him going? What gave him clarity of mind in dark and confusing times? By his own account it began with an encounter with God which shaped everything else in his life (Isa. 6:1-8).

I wish for us what John Baillie called "The Sense of the Presence of God." Perhaps we could join Isaiah and share his vision. He learned that in crisis times it is possible to look up and receive a new vision of God which will result in a new engagement with the world.

Not to do this and then to go out and do battle with evil is presumptuous and dangerous. Not to do this is to fight short, hot battles and lose long, cold wars. Not to do this is to go as far as romantic idealism can take you and then be overtaken by cynicism and despair. Not to do this is to give your best shot at clear-cut issues like race and find you have nothing left for muddy issues like energy, economics, and peace. Not to do this is to spend your twenties and thirties hacking away at the jungle and then to turn around at forty or fifty to find it has grown up again behind you and you can't hack it any more. Not to do this is to neglect the growth of the inner person out of which all else must flow.

What is it, then, that happens to us in our encounter with God? What is there about this encounter that changes us and goes on to change our world? I have come to think about it in terms of the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit, a larger context than Isaiah's vision in the temple. Like Isaiah in the temple, we in our daily lives experience the presence of God both touching and transcending our world. This presence of the Spirit of God has a very specific character which both challenges us and builds us up.

Purifying Presence

It is a purifying presence. Isaiah's intuitive response to his vision was a sense of uncleanness about himself and his fellow men. In God's presence we realize, I as I am cannot stand in the presence of God as he is, and I cannot help these people as they are. Christians with strong ethical

concerns need a clear realization of their own sin or they come across as unlovely Pharisees. But Isaiah also experienced cleansing and forgiveness.

The Spirit of God is first of all *Holy* Spirit. Paul saw that the ultimate argument against sexual immorality at Corinth was that the personality of the believer is the temple of the Spirit, a fact that makes the misuse of sex unthinkable. Jesus, in John, spoke of the power of the Spirit to convince the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. Baptists are used to thinking of the convicting work of the Spirit in relation to individual conversion, but it extends also to all of life.

Loving Presence

The presence of God is a loving presence. One of the toughest problems of Christian ethical action is how do you get the ability to love people you don't love? The biblical answer is that the love of God is put in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

When our church in a small town in Arkansas interviewed a young man with a mod hair style for a staff position, the older members were scandalized. That area had not yet seen long hair on a male. But Grandma Keller, one of the finest Christians in the church, had the answer: "His hair is long, but I know we will learn to love him anyway." In our increasingly pluralistic society this is a must.

Energizing Presence

The presence of God is an energizing presence. The promise that you will receive power when you receive the Holy Spirit is not limited to power for evangelism. It also includes power for Christian living. The power of the Spirit is power to preach, but it is also power to heal and to cast out demons. How else does a Foy Valentine keep going for twenty years in the face of rejection and criticism from those Southern Baptists who resist ethical action? It takes a lot of energy, and God is the source of energy.

Teaching Presence

The presence of God is a teaching presence. According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and he will guide believers into all truth (John 16:13). In spite of struggling through graduate study in philosophy of religion, I have come to feel that Christian ethics is the most intellectually demanding discipline to confront the human

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mind. Nowhere is harder, clearer thinking required. It can't be done without bringing trained minds into contact with the instructive Spirit of God.

Unifying Presence

Finally, the presence of God is a unifying presence. According to Ephesians 4:4, there is one body and one spirit tying all Christian experience together. Pentecost reverses Babel so that people who could not get together do get together. The experience of Isaiah in the year that King Uzziah died linked together temple and palace. Our experience of the Spirit will link together church building

and capitol building, Sunday School and public school.

It will also make our own lives whole. Head, heart, and hand will act in concert. Christian ethicists are people who see life steadily and see it as a whole. I have always been glad I learned my first lessons in ethics from an old man, T. B. Maston, in his last few years of teaching at Southwestern Seminary; because he demonstrated so well how all of life fits together in the plan of God. Ethics is not the specialty of young activists. It is the mature development of life lived in the presence of God.

I am sure that Isaiah did not mean that his vision came only once. His account is too vivid and fresh for me to think that. No, the word of God came to him again and again. It must come to us again and again. As we go forth, God's presence will go with us—if only we have the sense to realize it, the honesty to admit our imperfection, and the willingness to say, "Here am I, send me."

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