

LIGHT

Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

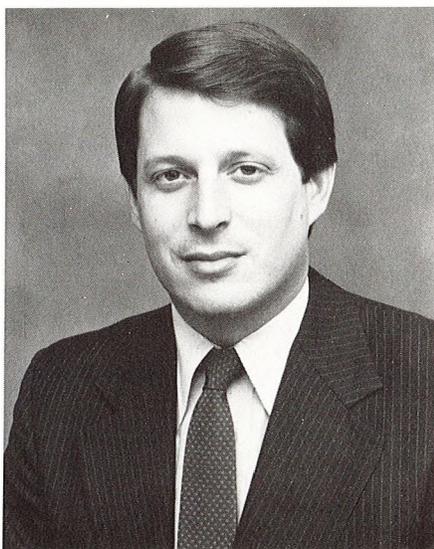
March-April 1983

Congress, Nuclear Weapons and the Freeze: What Next?

by U.S. Representative Albert Gore, Jr.

During the next two years, the Congress of the United States, and the House of Representatives in particular, is likely to be the scene of a major crisis in our nation's defense policy. Enormous federal deficits will demand major reductions in government spending. Those cuts are not all going to come out of social programs, and therefore many will come out of the military budget. In the military budget, nothing is more visible and vulnerable than the nuclear weapons program. It involves big-ticket items whose value to the national security has been sharply challenged by the Freeze movement.

Among the nuclear weapons programs, the one with the least chance for survival is clearly the MX missile. Last December, Congress voted to hold up production funds and limited research and development funds for the MX until a basing mode is approved by Congress. There are already indications other programs, including the Pershing II missile for NATO and the B-1 bomber, will be challenged. Other programs, including cruise missiles and the Trident D-5 submarine-launched missile, have



Albert Gore, Jr.

their critics too, but are not as likely—for the time being, at least—to be at the center of controversy.

We can expect the President to show very little flexibility in this area. He will insist that the country requires all of these weapons systems, and he will charge that if the Congress refuses to fund them, then the Congress must take responsibility for weakening the national security, for diminishing Soviet interest in

arms control and ultimately for increasing the hazard of war.

Proponents of the Freeze reject this logic and are likely to have enough votes in the Congress to assure that the President's arguments for major nuclear weapons programs across the board are rejected.

This having been done, however, members of Congress will then have to face some hard facts: (1) President Reagan will not adopt the Freeze program as his own, because to do so requires him to abjure everything he believes about dealing with the Soviets; (2) funding decisions for nuclear weapons programs will have to be made by the Congress without benefit of an arms control framework; (3) new or modified Soviet nuclear weapons systems will continue to appear and to be deployed; and (4) public opinion, which has been inspired to doubt the value of nuclear superiority, has never lost its repugnance for conceding this superiority to the Soviet Union by unilateral actions.

What looms ahead for the Congress, therefore, is a protracted

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NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Thirty Years Helping Changed People Change the World

Because 1983 marks the completion of 30 years in Christian Life service for Foy Valentine, the Commission's executive director, LIGHT here presents an interview that draws out some of the dimensions of his personal life and work.

1. Tell briefly of your conversion to Christ.

As a boy not yet 12, I came under very real conviction for my sin. In a summer revival at the open country East Texas Baptist church where my deacon daddy was the song leader and my deeply committed Christian mother taught Sunday School, the visiting preacher, who was taking a meal in our home, spoke to me privately after lunch. Without any high pressuring at all, he laid the claims of Christ strongly before me. I made no commitment to him; and, as I recall, he asked for none. Nevertheless, before the week was over I made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, publicly professed my faith in him, and was baptized in what was clearly the most important week of my life.

2. What person or persons have had the greatest influence for good upon your life?

My mother and father, without any doubt, have had the greatest influence for good on my life. That influence was started before I can remember and lasted until they both died in their eightieth years about a decade ago. My mother carefully studied the Bible and conscientiously sought to lead me to do so, too. My father, sometimes to my dismay, would talk with me from time to time about honesty, race, morals, uprightness, character and integrity. Both carefully and consistently sought to lead their sons, as I said in the preface to the first book I ever wrote, to "believe and behave." Not a day now passes but that I rise up and call them blessed.

3. What do you consider to be the greatest service rendered by the contemporary church?

The greatest service rendered to me by the contemporary church is *koinonia*. I consider this brothering and sistering, this fellowship, this celebrating of "the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love," to be the first function of the Christian church. As other believers and I are thus drawn together, I find myself rejuvenated for the church's other functions of *diakonia* or deaconing and *kerugma* or preaching, as well as for the kingdom-extending things which His people are called to do in the world.

4. What do you consider to be the greatest weakness of the contemporary church?

The greatest weakness of the contemporary church is inauthentic evangelism. By cheap methods and cheap tricks, the church has sometimes communicated a heretical notion that the gospel of God in Christ Jesus is cheap. If the church will pay the price to find its way back to authentic evangelism, we can find our way back to authentic morality; and we can recover our lost radiance and experience again great power and effectiveness in the world.

5. Have you had some experience, or experiences, with the Holy Spirit since your conversion to Christ which has brought a new dimension to your life?

The deepest experience of my entire Christian life was a call to preach so crystal clear and so unmistakably plain that in 40 years there has never been a minute of wavering in my mind, in my heart, or in my will regarding that call. That overwhelming sense of special calling has been a steadying gyroscope for an otherwise tumultuous life and ministry, 30 years of which have been spent in the special calling I am still pursuing with the Christian Life Commission.

6. Would you share something of your own pilgrimage related to Christian social concern and Christian social action?

I deeply believe that the Christian faith is both personal and social. There was never a time in my life when I did not believe that. I believe that no greater heresy has ever beset the Christian church than that which has separated evangelism from ethics, faith from works, words from deeds. I believe Christians are compelled to see the personal and the social as two sides of one coin, two edges of one sword, each as incomplete without the other, both as divine imperatives. I believe that if God's good news gets through to the lost world, both imperatives must be kept in sharp focus. For my entire Christian life and particularly for the last 30 years, this conviction has undergirded me.

7. If you had your life to live over again, what changes would you make?

Multitudes! Multitudes! Mainly, however, I think now I would try to make three main changes. (1) Recognizing that the kingdom of God is the kingdom of right relationships, I would make more time for growing stronger ties, building better friendships, and establishing closer bonds both with my own family and with others in the larger Christian and human families. (2) Understanding my own human limitations, I would undertake fewer tasks in my special Christian calling and would concentrate on doing them better. (3) Realizing the transience of my earthly pilgrimage, I would seek more conscientiously to love God with my whole being and my neighbor as myself (Matt. 22:37-40) and to so live and work under the realization that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11) that there would be no really major regrets.

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struggle over the future of nuclear weapons, on a system-by-system basis, without benefit of any common framework for evaluating each one and debating its merits in relation to an agreed upon national strategic plan.

Missing: A Common Framework

The President's philosophy will not further this goal and it is instructive to look at his detailed proposals to see why.

The President's statements have emphasized the goal of enhanced stability, but there is reason to doubt whether his specific proposals for arms control, as well as for new weapons, work together as advertised; that is, whether his combined approach is a plausible means for achieving a more stable nuclear balance at lower levels of armament.

Regrettably, the administration has not produced anything to demonstrate that this would be the case. All we know is that, in his Eureka speech, the President announced a proposal for 5,000 ballistic missile warheads for each side, on no more than 850 missiles, with not more than 2,500 of the warheads to be land-based. Since then, there has been a regrettable absence of reasoned argument on how the United States and the Soviet Union can find mutual solutions to their strategic problems within this framework. Meanwhile, knowledgeable analysts and thoughtful citizens outside the administration have begun to do their own analytical work, which has led many to the belief that the President's START proposal would actually diminish, rather than enhance, strategic stability.

But while the President's plan will not give us a common framework to evaluate a national strategic plan we must also realize that the Freeze movement, in spite of its merits, does not provide us with such guidance either.

If the House passes a resolution affirming its desire for a mutual, bilateral freeze with the Soviet Union, it must nevertheless continue to decide the fate of U.S. nuclear weapons in the absence of such an

mier weapons system.

Many in this country already fear that our ICBMs are at least theoretically vulnerable to attack by virtue of the Soviet Union having gradually deployed successive generations of

“... the United States still remains unsure how to proceed, having in view neither a weapons program nor an arms control agreement that provides a solution.”

agreement, or even of the hope for one while President Reagan is in office.

Congressional advocates of a nuclear freeze will face an especially painful dilemma. A pattern of negative votes against nuclear weapons programs adds up to unrequited concessions to the Soviet Union. But a pattern of votes in favor of nuclear weapons systems adds up to approval of a process which will rapidly erode chances for preserving the freeze as a viable policy in future administrations.

Needed: A Standard for Judgment

What we lack today, and what this Congress urgently needs, is a standard that will help us reach better informed judgments as to what kind of nuclear posture we should have, as to what kinds of nuclear weapons programs are compatible with that posture and as to how these decisions impact the stability of the nuclear balance and on prospects for reaching an agreement with the Soviets.

Recently I joined with four other members of the House—Representatives Aspin, Downey, Pritchard and Hamilton—to introduce a resolution suggesting what this standard ought to be.

In our opinion, the United States and the Soviet Union are heading toward a situation in which each will have the ability to menace a significant portion of the other's nuclear forces; specifically, the other's land-based ICBMs, which are the most accurate and in many ways the pre-

large, land-based missiles, carrying increasingly accurate and numerous multiple independently targetable warheads. U.S. weapons programs and U.S. approaches to arms control have reflected a deep concern about the vulnerability of our ICBM force to Soviet attack. Today, the Soviet Union possesses enough weapons of the requisite quality to destroy a very large proportion of our ICBM force while using up only a fraction of the Soviet Union's inventory; leaving them with a large reserve to use for purposes of coercion, the so-called counterforce scenario. Many students of nuclear weaponry doubt that Soviet leaders would ever seriously entertain the idea of such an attack, but that judgment does not offset the fact that the Soviets own the means for carrying it out, and have paid dearly to acquire it for reasons that invite apprehension.

The concern about this problem has strongly influenced debate over the U.S. nuclear program for at least 10 years, even as it has strongly affected our approach to arms control. Today, however, the United States still remains unsure how to proceed, having in view neither a weapons program nor an arms control agreement that provides a solution.

Our response to this problem has been the development of two generations of ballistic missiles: the MX, for deployment on land, and the Trident II D-5, for deployment at sea. Each of these missile systems will mark an increase in the number and accuracy of U.S. ballistic missile warheads, such that either system, and certainly

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the two together, will constitute a threat for the first time to all Soviet ICBM silos. There are indications that the Soviets, looking ahead to the deployment of these systems, recognize that they are facing a big problem, even bigger than ours, in view of the very high proportion of Soviet warheads that are deployed on land-based systems.

The increasing vulnerability of U.S. land-based forces and the coming vulnerability of Soviet land-based forces are trends that are fraught with danger. Mutual fear of a first strike is highly destabilizing and markedly increases the risk of nuclear war, while putting at risk any prospect for meaningful arms control.

Congress should recognize this fear of a first strike for what it is; the central issue in judging whether existing deployments are adequate; for deciding what new developments make sense and for assessing whether arms control is on the right track. We must urge the next Congress to keep this issue foremost in its deliberations about nuclear weapons programs, and we should urge the administration to base both its nuclear programming and its nego-

tiating efforts around the same concern. We must urgently search for measures that can produce stability in the strategic relationship by insuring that a first strike would not confer upon the aggressor nation even a hypothetical advantage. In the highly charged tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, even a hypothetical advantage to be gained by striking first is dangerous and destabilizing, because it generates fear and raises the specter of political intimidation.

The resolution which we introduced in the House states this in simple, clear terms:

"Resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That as part of the START strategic arms reduction negotiations, the United States and the Soviet Union: (1) should place the highest priority on efforts to reduce and eliminate the fear by either nation of a nuclear first strike against it by the other; and (2) should seek a verifiable agreement that produces stability in the strategic relationship between the two nations by ensuring that neither nation possesses capabilities which would confer upon it even the hypothetical advantages of a first strike."

Such an approach ought not to be beyond the President's reach. To grasp this framework and apply it, he need not repudiate his view of the world but rather modify and refine it. In theory, this Congress might seek to bind the President to freeze measures by threatening to block major spending bills until he gives in. It is to be hoped that we will avoid that kind of confrontation, but to do so requires the development of a bipartisan consensus on the nuclear problem rather than polarization of the debate.

Our resolution is offered in that spirit. The freeze resolution, which I have supported, states an ideal we are not going to see realized, or even pursued, by the present administration. Meanwhile, the Congress and the country will need some basis for a discriminating and, in the end, cathartic debate over our course of action. Given the right outcome, we might find areas of agreement strong enough to put consensus, rather than controversy, behind the President in his dealings with the Soviet Union.

Albert Gore, Jr. (Dem.), represents the Fourth Congressional District of Tennessee. Gore is an active Baptist layman.

Bioethical Issues in Christian Perspective

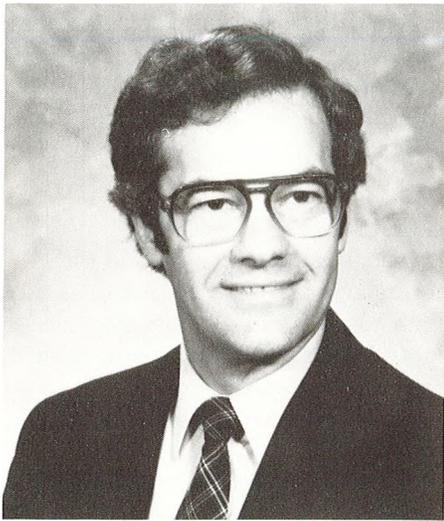
by Paul D. Simmons

Bioethics is an area in which the interests of science and religion meet. It is often assumed that science deals with technical questions, while religion deals with values which are important to human beings. Common to each discipline, however, are such foundational questions as the nature of personhood, the meaning of human well-being, concepts of wholeness and health and the model of the human

with which we work and toward which we strive.

Rapid developments in the area of science in the past half century have posed critical questions for religious thinkers. New definitions of life and death and new possibilities for pursuing the human future and for modifying the very nature of what it means to be human are causing a reexamination of many religious assumptions and of the ways in which Christians might relate critically but positively to the scientific enterprise.

At the same time, science is reminded in a pointed way that it is not a value-free enterprise. The crisis that confronts us in the area of the natural sciences, for instance, both with regard to ecology and the prospect of nuclear war, is a reminder of the way in which focusing on technique can be extremely hazardous to human health and the future of the planet. Thus, while the future may be shaped largely by the scientific enterprise, we do well to guard against sacrificing vitally important



Paul D. Simmons

values as even more sophisticated techniques of experimentation and manipulation are developed.

The Bible will be a crucial source of guidance for Christians who attempt to be engaged in the dialogue on bioethical issues. That the Bible is authoritative for us in all areas of moral considerations and theological perspectives is an important and critical factor in the present debate.

Even so, it is not at all obvious how the Bible helps us deal with some of the issues in bioethics. Both because the biblical witness is far removed from the present scientific-oriented world and because of the very nature of faith, present-day Christians must develop a creative way to move from the biblical witness to specific problems. Work needs to be done in the area of method in biblical studies so as to show the ways in which biblical authority is critical and foundational for perspectives in bioethics.

There are at least four components of Christian decision making in which the Bible furnishes authoritative guidance. These are: (1) the formation of Christian character, out of which all action flows; (2) providing moral principles which give content to the requirements of Christian stewardship; (3) theological perspectives which provide understanding of the nature of God and humanity, a vision of the world and its future and doctrinal grounds upon which all

moral principles are built; and (4) insight into the importance and use of data. Of significant importance as we move from the Bible to bioethics will be those theological perspectives that deal with the nature of humanity, the central model for what it means to be human, the relationship of God to the processes of nature, the requirements of Christian stewardship and the eschatological vision of the future.

These elements are important, for instance, as such topics as abortion, euthanasia, biotechnical parenting and genetics are considered. The present debate about abortion, for instance, focuses the critical issue of personhood. Those who wish to forbid abortion for almost any reason, operate with the (religious) assumption that a fetus (usually from the moment of conception) is to be regarded as of equal moral value with the woman. This is extremely problematic in the biblical perspective that makes a clear distinction between the woman and the fetus. Exodus 21:22-25 deals with an accidental miscarriage. The penalty levied for the destruction of the fetus is monetary, while the penalty for injury to the woman is under the law of *lex talionis*. Thus, a clear distinction in value is drawn between the two. The fetus certainly has value, but not the same value or protection under the law as the woman.

Other critical issues in the debate concern the one who is primarily responsible as the decision maker in the matter of abortion, and whether

woman. The silence in the Bible regarding elective abortion seems also to indicate this was the Hebrew attitude. Otherwise, it becomes extremely difficult to explain why Paul never prohibited access to pregnancy termination.

Relating abortion to the moral concept of the will of God is in some ways related also to God's will regarding our stewardship of human fertility. Apparently, God requires that every couple exercise careful and responsible stewardship of their procreative powers. This means not only the decision concerning whether or not to have children, but the number we decide to have. These, in turn, must be related to our awareness of the population explosion. The future of humanity itself must be considered as part of procreative stewardship.

The Bible also provides perspectives regarding proposed legislation to prohibit abortion. Basing laws on the idea that a fetus is a person from the moment of conception seems to pose a direct threat to constitutional guarantees of religious liberty. Many believe these are attempts to legislate a religious dogma by which all religious groups would be forced to live. The biblical teachings on personhood and the soul competency of the believer seem to require that decisions about parenthood remain with the Christian couple. This is a sacred choice requiring responsible decision making before God.

Euthanasia poses questions of a Christian theology of death as well as

“Apparently, God requires that every couple exercise careful and responsible stewardship of their procreative powers.”

or not the will of God may ever permit or even require abortion. Because the biblical stress on personhood plainly lies with those who are responsible directly to God, and because of the New Testament emphasis on the priesthood of every believer, the primary responsibility seemingly falls directly upon the

whether or not individuals ever have responsibility for deciding to set the terms with death, whether their own or others. In the Bible, death is not an absolute evil, but is seen in a paradoxical way. For one thing, sin plainly affects the way that people experience death. Death has a sting.

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It produces anxiety as we anticipate our own death and grief as we experience the death of others. On the other hand, death is a gift from God, both for the cessation of pain and our transition into eternal life.

There are numerous instances in the Bible in which people decided to "set the terms with death" from Saul to Judas. Each is described without moral judgment. Apparently, the Bible places responsibility for such decision making under the umbrella of human stewardship of life and death. Aiding another person to die, of course, is fraught with tragedy and terrible moral burden. It also involves the possibility of legal consequences. Even so, some people feel that the biblical demands of mercy and of love may at times require that we aid another person's escape from unbearable and unrelievable pain. Such decisions may well be the direct consequence of and testimony to our profound faith in God, who has given us a hope for life beyond.

Surrogate parenting and in-vitro fertilization have both been in the news lately as have various other types of biotechnical parenting.

The birth of children by in-vitro fertilization may well be regarded as contemporary miracles from God. God's will that people cooperate with him in perpetuating the human race, and that they share the joys and responsibilities of parenting as a part of their Christian calling are here underscored. Christians can well celebrate this gift which science seems to be making possible.

Genetic engineering poses the far more complex problem of whether or not we should break the code and manipulate the material that forms the basis of human life and personality. It seems a bogus and unbiblical solution to use the story of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15-17) to argue that scientists ought not do genetic research. The knowledge of the Garden was moral, not technical, in nature.

We know that the future of the human race is jeopardized by genetic deterioration. Genetic diseases and deformities are rapidly increasing. Some geneticists are alarmed as they examine the prospects for what the human race will be in the not-too-distant future. God wills that humanity be stronger and that we realize the completion of his salvation (Romans 8). We also know that humanity is not a finished product. Thus, we have no static definition of

of genetic disease and our determination not to allow the human race to degenerate from genetic pollution, all seem to mandate a recovery of the biblical vision of God's future for humanity.

For better or worse, the future of humanity is tied to the world of technology and science. If that is to be a better future, enhancing the human race and blessing our children, it will be necessary that Christians fashion a response to contemporary trends and science that is positive, useful and based upon solid moral and theological grounds. A naive assumption that science will bless us even if we remain passive, surely spells disaster for the human future. At the same time, an aggressive and negative response that only curses or blames science out of fear for what it is doing to us, will be rejected as medieval superstition or unthinking anxiety.

A more positive way is to recognize the dangers inherent in scientific research and application, and to include a positive vision of the future that requires constraints against the evil potentiality while giving support for the helpful possibilities. Science, as every other human enterprise, has the potential of either blessing or cursing humanity. The biblical revelation can enable contemporary Christians to assure that science will primarily benefit rather than profoundly injure God's good creation. Such a response to the sovereignty of God will be moral in and of itself. To refuse to accept responsibility is to act as unworthy and irresponsible stewards at a critical juncture in history.

"All of humanity is required, under God, to pursue the future which God has set before us."

These raise thorny legal problems. They seem to be, however, contemporary paradigms of the biblical struggle with human infertility. The stories of Abraham and Sarah, of Jacob and Rachel, and of Elkanah and Hannah all show the human misery associated with infertility.

As God enabled the patriarchs to overcome this human dilemma and personal frustration, so we may also cooperate with God through scientific procedures to bypass infertility.

personhood to impose upon science. Again, science may help us prevent a genetic apocalypse and pursue the future which God has promised.

Biblical eschatology is here brought to bear upon the prospects of the future of humanity itself. All of humanity is required, under God, to pursue the future which God has set before us. Our concern for individuals severely handicapped because of genetic deformity, the widespread incidence of human suffering because

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Christian Citizenship

Foundations for Christian Citizenship

by James Leo Garrett, Jr.

Baptists especially are people of the Bible. We affirm the Bible as our "supreme rule of faith and practice"; that is, of doctrine and ethics. To interpret the Bible correctly, we must keep one foot in the ancient world and the other in our own time. In doing so we cannot afford to ignore the intervening centuries. It is important to probe the Old Testament, the New Testament and Christian history since the apostolic age if we are to understand our role as Christians in the civic order today.

Old Testament

- Israel was a people in covenant with the Lord (Yahweh) before it was a nation in a governmental or political order (see Genesis 12:1-3 and Exodus 19:3-6).
- The Exodus was the first struggle recorded in scripture in which the people of God stood over against an oppressive political order.
- The law (Torah) was given to Israel before Israel had a king (Saul), and there was a league of tribes before Israel had its king.
- Unlike most of her neighbors, Israel did not deify its kings.
- Israel and Judah had good kings (for example, Uzziah, Josiah) and evil kings (for example, Jeroboam II, Manasseh). The prophets, especially of the eighth century B.C., directed criticism against the civil rulers in the name of the Lord. See Nathan against David (2 Samuel 12).
- The prophets with their faith in Yahweh as the only God of all the earth protested social injustice and called for righteousness in society.
- The Lord was said in the Psalms and the prophets to be sovereign over both the covenant people and all the nations.



James Leo Garrett, Jr.

- From the time of their Babylonian captivity, the Jews learned that loyalty to the Lord (Yahweh) was not always consistent with, indeed could be contrary to, obedience to civil rulers. See Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3).
- Judah had a divinely given mission to the nations but, despite the embracing of proselytes and god-fearers, did not adequately fulfil it.
- The prophets looked forward to the coming of a messianic king (Isaiah 9), and the apocalyptists to "one like a son of man," to whom would be given a universal and everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7).

New Testament

- Jesus in his wilderness temptations and later in his ministry up to his trial before Pilate turned away from an earthly, political messiahship and kingdom.
- One of the 12 chosen by Jesus had seemingly been one of the Zealots, the Jewish party favoring a revolutionary overthrow of the Roman rule. This was Simon the Cananean (the

Aramaic equivalent of the Greek "Zealot").

- The ensnaring question concerning paying taxes to Caesar which was put to Jesus by a consortium of Pharisees and Herodians was answered by him in his oft-quoted utterance, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17).
- Jesus' response to the "two swords" utterance of his disciples in Gethsemane (Luke 22:38) was wrongly used for centuries to enforce the doctrine of "two powers" and is being misused today by those who would misidentify Jesus as a Zealot in order to give sanctions to terrorism, guerrilla warfare and revolutionary violence.
- Jesus was tried and put to death under both Jewish and Roman authorities.
- According to Paul (Romans 13:1-7) and to Peter (1 Peter 2:13-17), Christians ought to obey civil rulers as "ministers" and "servants" of God, for government is ordained by God.
- According to Paul (1 Timothy 2:1-3), Christians ought to pray to God on behalf of civil rulers.
- Paul admonished the Corinthian Christians (1 Corinthians 6:1-11) not to take their disputes with fellow believers to court presided over by unbelieving judges but to settle these within the community of believers.
- Although the early Christians had no active participation in the process of government by the Roman Empire, Paul relied upon his Roman citizenship for protective purposes.
- Whatever the modern interpreter's approach to the New Testament

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book of Revelation may be, the central conflict portrayed in that apocalypse was/is/will be between the religious and the political, between the Lamb and the beast, between Christ and Caesar.

Christian History

- Christians living in the Roman Empire endured 10 major persecutions before the time of Emperor Constantine—from Nero's to Diocletian's—yet Christianity spread during and after such persecutions. Tertullian wrote of “the blood of martyrs” as “seed.”
- The first city-state to have Christianity as its established religion was Edessa at the end of the second century A.D. The first kingdom to have Christianity as its established religion was Armenia (A.D. 301). The first empire to have Christianity as its established faith was the Roman under Emperor Theodosius I (A.D. 380). Constantine had made Christianity a favored religion, and Ambrose, bishop of Milan, was asserting the independence of the church. The West would look to the bishop of Rome for its authority, whereas the East would look to the emperor of the Roman (later Byzantine) Empire.
- After Augustine of Hippo Regius

siastical sword was exercised by the church, whereas the civil sword, coming from God through the church to the state, was exercised for the church by the state. The state later began to have its defenders when Dante, Marsilius of Padua, and William of Ockham asserted that the civil sword was derived by civil rulers directly from God, not mediately through pope or church.

- Although Western medieval civilization (*Corpus Christianum*) was unified in philosophy, language, economics, art and architecture and the like, schismatics, heretics, apostates, Jews and pagans were proscribed and were the objects of severe discrimination. Augustine justified coercion against the Donatists and Thomas Aquinas sanctioned it against the Albigenses.
- Although Anabaptists formed congregations apart from the political structures, most of the Protestant Reformers perpetuated the pattern of established churches.
- John Calvin in his holy commonwealth of Geneva taught that tyrants must be obeyed, but subsequently John Knox in Edinburgh allowed citizens the right to revolt against “idolatrous” rulers. Yet for the peace churches—Mennonite, Quaker, Brethren—obedience to the state stopped short of participation in and support of war.
- Religious freedom for all men, not

Western world, differing from the fascist states, which were dominated either by clericalism or by totalitarianism, and from the socialist states, chiefly of the Marxist-Leninist type. Christians in the democratic states had the opportunity for the first time in history to choose their governors, their lawmakers and their judges and to help to shape the political order. Unlike their Anabaptist predecessors, Baptists held that Christians could in conformity with the will of God hold public office.

- The United States of America was constituted a secular state in that no religion, such as Christianity, was declared to be the official or established religion, and yet the state must not “prohibit the free exercise” of any religion. The people of this nation were mostly theist, indeed many were Christians, and the values and the laws of this nation were largely derived from the Judeo-Christian heritage.
- Christians—both evangelicals and the advocates of the social gospel—have been in the vanguard of great societal reforms in the modern era; for example, the abolition of the slave trade and of human slavery (William Wilberforce, the Anglican), the temperance or anti-liquor movement (Frances E. Willard, the Methodist), the civil rights or racial justice movement (Martin Luther King, Jr., the Baptist), and the political independence movement in Africa (graduates of missionary schools).

These themes from the Bible and from the post-biblical history of Christianity can serve as the foundation for and prelude to our consideration of the challenges and responsibilities which Christians as citizens face today.

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“Christians—both evangelicals and the advocates of the social gospel—have been in the vanguard of great societal reforms in the modern era . . . ”

had contrasted two distinct societies existing throughout history, “the earthly city” and “the city of God”—terms which should not be equated with the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church—Pope Gelasius I expounded the concept of two authorities, the civil and the priestly. His medieval successors elaborated on the idea until Pope Boniface VIII could say (A.D. 1302) that the eccle-

merely religious toleration as advocated by John Locke, began to be advocated by Balthasar Hubmaier, Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams and William Penn. Even Vatican Council II in 1965 would agree.

- After the rejection of the “divine right of kings” and on the basis of fundamental human rights, democratic states were constituted in the

Why Biblical Ethics in a Baptist University Curriculum?

by Dick Rader



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Recently some Baptist universities have been increasing their offerings of courses in biblical ethics. Perhaps no course in a Baptist university's curriculum fits more appropriately. Courses in Bible, usually Old and New Testament surveys, have traditionally been required courses at Baptist colleges and universities.

Some might argue that a course in biblical ethics is unnecessary if the Bible survey courses are taught properly. Others may contend that it is not needed because ethics should be included in the teaching of every discipline. Another group may feel the matter of ethics can be covered adequately in philosophy courses. Still a few would feel that ethics is a personal matter which each individual must discover and develop and which therefore cannot be taught.

Are there valid reasons for the inclusion of biblical ethics in the curriculum? Yes, there are several very definite reasons. These reasons can be articulated from traditional perspectives: theological, educational, practical, ecclesiastical and personal.

Reasons for a Biblical Ethics Course

A Theological Perspective. A fundamental Baptist axiom is that each individual is competent under God in matters of religion and therefore capable of a personal relationship with God. As a result of this individual ability, we have the freedom to accept or reject God's offer of forgiveness and reconciliation. However, this axiom assumes that individuals are not only free to make this decision but also responsible to make other decisions as well. As Baptists we have historically maintained the freedom of the individual and have insisted on this inherent responsibility. This leads us to a realization that each individual is faced with choices and decisions. Our axiom says we

are competent—we can do it—we do not need an intermediary.

However, does this competency mean that we inherently know the right answer to complex issues which face us constantly? No. We do have the capacity for choice—that is at least one aspect of our creation in the image of God—but our competency must be informed. We are free to make the decision, but we may not be equipped to make the best decision. We have the right to our opinion but will that opinion reflect a consistency with our basic theology?

This axiom which says the responsible soul is free forms the basis for all ethics.¹ At our Baptist universities we are seeking to inform and make each individual more competent. As I perceive our purpose, it is to educate people to be responsible decision makers. We base our approach to education on the theological premise that students are free, responsible people who need to be equipped for life. Biblical ethics seeks to focus a biblical perspective on life issues which trouble today's society. The ethical content of the biblical material offers a unique and logical basis for

applying workable Christian principles to these issues. The Baptist university affords the ideal setting for this kind of preparation for living.

An Educational Perspective. Educators across this nation have called attention to the need for value education in our schools and colleges. Marvin Stone reports that the Character Education Curriculum which is designed for school children is spreading across the nation.² Gil Sewall reports in *Newsweek* that in 1980 6,000 schools were offering "values development" programs in which the stated purpose is "to help youngsters learn the difference between *what is* and *what should be*."³ Sewall goes on to report that teachers who have used the sophisticated system developed by Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg insist that students become more socially responsible and principled in their thinking.⁴ Critics of such programs argue that homes and churches, not schools, should teach values. However, as Robert Monks has pointed out, "By default, in many cases, the school becomes the institution which must teach values, ethics, and moral reasoning." He says, "Values are too important to be left to chance and indirect teaching."⁵

Steven Muller, president of Johns Hopkins University said recently, "The biggest failing in higher education today is that we fall short in exposing students to values." He goes on to say that he feels many highly specialized, well-trained students "will begin to feel a tremendous sense of alienation and insecurity because they lack a values structure." He further contends:

The failure to rally around a set of values means that universities are turning out potentially highly skilled barbarians: People

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who are very expert in the laboratory or at the computer or in surgery or in the law courts but who have no real understanding of their own society.⁶

Kenneth Pope, in a recent edition of the *Southern Baptist Educator*, has also highlighted this need by quoting from both Muller and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching which has concluded that colleges cannot help but have an influence on the development of student values.⁷

As these various levels of education have signaled an alert to the problems facing our youth, Baptist universities stand in an ideal position to fill this gap. I agree with Kenneth Pope when he says he is not satisfied with the way Steven Muller, the Carnegie Foundation and others have sought to provide a basis for filling the "value void."⁸ Most writers, like Muller, advocate a return to "humanistic values, . . . the values of democracy, . . . the values of a free market rather than a controlled market."⁹ These values, says Pope, have no real basis and are, to use the phrase of Elton Trueblood, "merely a cut-flower brand of value system that cannot last, because it really has no basis and no roots."¹⁰ Arthur Walker, also in the *Educator*, challenges Southern Baptist colleges to offer "courses which give students

an understanding of values and of morality. . . ."¹¹

Biblical ethics provides both exposure to ethical issues and a solid basis upon which to build a relevant value system. Baptist universities can teach unapologetically biblical principles which equip students to deal competently with problems and issues. During the liberal arts experience students are confronted with many life-challenging problems which they have never previously considered. It certainly is not appropriate for instructors simply to give their own personal answers to the students. Nor is it good for the students to be left without some help in finding appropriate answers. As Muller concludes:

The worst thing that can happen is that the need will be satisfied either by drinking or watching the boob tube or seeing shrinks, which is what too many of us are doing now in large numbers.¹²

A course in biblical ethics offers the opportunity to tie together the entire university experience. Courses in history, English literature, philosophy, science or business can be tied to the ethical teachings of Christ and his word in order to equip persons as competent, responsible decision makers.

A Practical Perspective. Students on our Baptist campuses are preparing for vocations in many different directions. Regardless of the field in which they are studying they need

preparation in ethics as it relates to that particular profession.

Students entering any area of business need a sense of personal integrity based on definite ethical principles. Secretaries and corporate executives alike need standards to serve as a compass to guide them in daily business dealings. Salesmen, shop-keepers, or labor unionists all deserve training in what is right and how a person can know what is right. The task of biblical ethics for business students is to provide a basis for personal ethics. Such emphasis will strengthen our graduates when they face the temptations of the business world.

Doctors, nurses and technicians in many biomedical fields need not only a strong foundation in personal ethics but also an awareness of the many ethical issues related to the biomedical field. Students preparing to enter these careers should be exposed to the intricate questions surrounding abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, cloning and many other related issues. These students need to be challenged to relate their Christian faith and theology to these areas of concern. There is an urgent need today for Christian biomedical researchers who can influence the use of the many new discoveries being made. This may be our only safeguard against terrible devastation which could result from irresponsible uses of medical science.

Ethical equipping is equally important in teaching law, pharmacy,

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farming, architecture or whatever profession a student may enter. Learning how to apply biblical Christian faith to life is a primary task of biblical ethics. As students learn about their specialized field they must also discover how their Christian faith affects their vocation, or else they become the "highly skilled barbarians" of whom Muller spoke. What does it mean to be not just a doctor, lawyer or teacher, but to be a Christian doctor, Christian lawyer or Christian teacher? This is the distinctive task of biblical ethics.

An Ecclesiastical Perspective. One reason many churches today do not become involved in social concerns or take a stand on social issues is because their members are uninformed and consequently unconcerned. Students on our Baptist campuses are some of the future leaders in Baptist churches. If we can stir the minds of these students to be aware of and interested in social concerns during their college days they may be more likely to be involved in community issues later.

University education generally stimulates awareness of new issues, many of which involve broad social concerns such as poverty, world hunger, war and peace and capital punishment. Most of our churches never deal with these issues despite the fact that traditionally the church has been involved in such concerns. Baptist students who have had to relate their Christian experience to these and other issues may later serve as church leaders who will stimulate others to make a Christian response. An informed Baptist membership could save our churches from the inertia and lack of concern about social issues which have gripped us for so long.

A substantial segment of our Baptist university population is composed of ministerial students and others preparing for one of many different ministries. Some of these will proceed to one of our seminaries for additional training which will no doubt include a course in Christian

"If our future pastors are not equipped to deal with ethical issues . . . we have failed to prepare them adequately."

ethics. Many others will never reach the seminary campus. Both groups need, while still in college, the introduction to ethical principles and issues which a course in biblical ethics can give. Pastors, ministers of music, ministers of education, ministers to various age groups and missionaries—all those who lead our churches—should be equipped to struggle with the complex issues they will face either in a local church or on a mission field. These God-called ministers of the gospel must know how the Bible relates, not only to their own personal lives, but also to the issues with which their church members are struggling. That is not to say they learn to issue a prescription for any and all moral ills. However, they should be able to give some biblical guidance for those weary travelers who are desperately seeking solutions to today's pressing moral problems. Pastors especially need the exposure to ethical issues and biblical response so their preaching can capture some of the prophetic element now lacking in far too many modern-day pulpits. Sermons that echo the clarion call of the Old Testament prophets call for an awareness of the tragic sinfulness permeating both individuals and the institutions of our society. If our future pastors are not equipped to deal with ethical issues during their days at our Baptist universities, we have failed to prepare them adequately.

A Personal Perspective. Our Baptist universities are in the business of training young people to live in today's world. We must teach people to cope, not only in their chosen professions, but in family life and personal lifestyle. With the rapid disintegration of families it is more important than ever to teach the bib-

lical ideals for Christian marriage. Distinctive Christian lifestyles are definitely needed in these days of increasing pluralism and declining Christian proportions. C. Welton Gaddy—in his article "Who Speaks for Par?"¹³—points out the need for understanding the meaning of commitment and integrity. He says, "If there is no substance to belief and behavior, there is no par." John Garvey, in examining the teachings conveyed in much popular literature, finds next to nothing about choice and commitment.¹⁴ On the other hand, the biblical message is founded in choice and commitment. The biblical ideal of marriage, for example, is based on the idea of covenant. College students need to be equipped with a Christian perspective toward divorce in their families, human suffering among acquaintances, abortions by their friends, temptations to engage in premarital sex and other matters involving personal integrity and Christian character.

An Approach to Biblical Ethics

An introductory course in biblical ethics should benefit university students whenever they confront moral complexities in their own lives and in society. Students need to learn how divine revelation applies to the very real and complex issues in life. They need not only exposure to the problems of society but they need to learn the ability to formulate their own Christian convictions. They need to learn, as Gaddy says, "God sets par and speaks for par. At the same time, he expects his people to speak for par as well as to respect it and to attempt by grace to achieve it."¹⁵ This does not mean that a teacher of biblical ethics or a textbook on the subject should provide simplistic answers to every question. Such rigid, although seemingly secure, methodology will not provide lasting solutions because every situation provides a new set of circumstances. Nevertheless, the situation cannot completely govern the deci-

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sion making process. As Gaddy said, "Just as closed-mindedness which misses new truth is wrong, open-mindedness which knows no conviction is wrong."¹⁶ Our axiom of individual competency under God moves us to a position of informing the individual but allowing the individual the freedom of choice in decision making.

At Oklahoma Baptist University we have found two of T. B. Maston's books ideally suited for the course in biblical ethics: *Biblical Ethics* (Waco: Word Books) and *Why Live the Christian Life?* (Nashville: Broadman Press). *Biblical Ethics* gives an excellent survey of the ethical content of both the Old and New Testaments in a very readable style. *Why Live the Christian Life?* is a valuable book which helps students formulate their own personal ethic. After laying a biblical foundation, the second half of the course focuses on issues related to human sexuality, marriage, and a variety of social issues such as poverty, capital punishment and biomedical concerns. Premed and nursing students have special interest in such topics as genetic engineering, abortion and euthanasia. Most students respond favorably to an in-depth research paper on a current ethical issue as a course requirement. This paper allows the student to study one topic at a greater depth and to apply biblical principles in formulating a Christian response.

At Oklahoma Baptist University, biblical ethics is offered as an option with either Old or New Testament as part of our unified studies requirements. Students must take both Bible survey courses or one survey course and biblical ethics. Biblical ethics is offered for junior and senior students after they have completed their required courses in western civilization history and literature in which ethical questions often arise. These students are thus more aware of the problems of society and are

usually better prepared to deal effectively with difficult ethical issues.

A course in biblical ethics is certainly not a panacea for all the problems faced by students on our Baptist campuses. Not all students who complete the course are equipped for every situation. However, we believe a study of biblical ethics can provide an integral part of the quality Christian educational preparation which we endeavor to provide.

Footnotes

¹Herschel H. Hobbs and E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), p. 111.

²Marvin Stone, "Ethics—Making a Comeback," *U.S. News & World Report*, December 8, 1980, p. 84.

³Gil Sewall, "Do Moral Values Belong in School?" *Newsweek*, June 2, 1980, p. 58.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Robert Monks, "Value Education in the 1980s," *Education Digest*, October, 1980, p. 45.

⁶Steven Muller, "Universities Are Turning Out Highly Skilled Barbarians," *U.S. News & World Report*, November 10, 1980, p. 57.

⁷Kenneth H. Pope, "Filling the Value Void," *The Southern Baptist Educator*, September-October, 1981, p. 3

⁸Ibid.

⁹Muller, p. 58.

¹⁰Pope, p. 3.

¹¹Arthur L. Walker, Jr., "Comment: A Time for Change," *The Southern Baptist Educator*, September-October, 1981, p. 16.

¹²Muller, p. 58.

¹³C. Welton Gaddy, "Who Speaks for Par?" *Light*, November, 1981, p. 6.

¹⁴John Garvey, "The Voice of Blume: An Orthodoxy That Doesn't Recognize Itself," *Commonweal*, July 4, 1980, p. 393.

¹⁵Gaddy, p. 6.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 5.

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