

LIGHT

Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

July-August 1983

A Biblical Focus for Viewing the Alcohol Problem

Galatians 5:1, 16-23

—by Doug Ezell—

All of us, regardless of persuasion, can find in the Bible references to support the goodness of wine (Psalm 104:14-15), or passages to denounce drunkenness (Proverbs 23:29-33), or texts to support total abstinence (Numbers 6:4, Daniel 1:8, Luke 1:13-15). None of us with eyes that see, however, can deny the destruction wrought by alcohol in our culture.

All of the Hebraic tradition cries out for a concern for the community at large and not just the individual. Proverbs 31:4-5 calls for kings not to drink strong drink lest they forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of the afflicted. The blatant individualism of our day is a relatively recent development and has issued in socially irresponsible statements like, "I don't care what you think or do; just let me do my thing." This is as unrealistic today as it was in Bible times, though due to our pervasive permissiveness we might be more hesitant to call it into question in our culture. We are all linked together in a sinking world and no person can

long live with the illusion that he or she is an island.

When Jesus spoke of loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, he was pointing to a tradition that declares we *are* our "brother's keeper." We must protect, as much as possible, the innocent from the folly of others; and we must deal with the social factors that produce the suffering, loneliness, and frustration that often incubate the alcoholic. Issues such as poverty, loss of social identity, absence of community, racial discrimination, inadequate education, and pathological family life all must be addressed if we are to conquer alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

Just as we, depending upon our persuasion, can make a case "for" or "against" the use of alcohol, based on selected biblical texts, we can argue on either side of the street in regard to the nature of alcoholism. Some argue that alcoholism is physiological all the way. Others argue that it is a disease but that it is psychological. Still others see it more in

terms of a sociocultural problem.

Some label it "sin" and just seek the alcoholic's salvation. The interrelatedness of these factors is complicated.

With all this in mind, I would like to come at the question of a biblical perspective on alcohol from a different direction. I would like to set it in the broader context of our human predicament.

I would like to start with an affirmation that our theology needs to start with Creation and not the Fall. God created all things, and creation was declared good. This establishes that in the beginning all that was, was good. Creation can be used for good or for bad. In making that statement, we have moved from Creation to our stewardship of Creation. No longer are we dealing just with what is but rather with what is done with what is.

This declaration that Creation is good also establishes that God's creation of humanity is good. Humankind was created good.

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. . .Alcohol

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Things are really peachy keen as long as God's hand is the only one stirring the stew. This brings us to the fallenness of humankind. The image of God is marred. It is not, however, obliterated. Bad people do good things and good people do bad things. Humans are the distorters of Creation, not the victims of Creation. We are free to misuse as well as to use appropriately all that is under our dominion, *including ourselves*.

There is a roughhouse nature to our environment. In some sense we may be as free in it as God himself. The difference is in our character. We felt limited and therefore insignificant. We sought to be like God. We couldn't handle the role. We did what even God would not do. We sought to add to ourselves by experiencing evil. We could have known the nature of evil by inference from God's goodness. We thought knowing experientially would make us more, but it actually made us less.

We tasted and saw that evil was terrible and we hated ourselves for it. In light of "the stolen experience," we seemed to believe we had to steal back the good. We no longer saw the gifts of God as gifts. We wanted them by right of conquest. Thinking the gift of life could only be stolen back once lost, we initially turned to false gods, not the living One. We now love darkness rather than light. This did something to our hearts, Jesus says in Matthew 15:19-20, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man. . . ." Our hearts are now set on the affections of the world; no longer do our hearts seek God only, or even first. Now we listen to our rational minds and our physical bodies.

In Ephesians 2:3, Paul declares that we all once lived in the passions

Thank God It's Monday

I love my work. If I could manage it, I would gladly pay the Christian Life Commission people for the privilege of working here. I've now begun my twenty-fourth year in this same job; and in many ways it's more exciting and fulfilling to me now than it has ever been. It's like a Roman candle; the rockets keep going off. There may be something wrong with me to feel so good about my work; but I think not. In the providence of God this job and I got hooked up together, "hard-wired" I believe they're starting to say; and it is turning out to be an interesting journey with splendid prospects for exciting challenges in the future.

A farmer plowing a straight furrow is a rousing spectacle; a trumpeter successfully blowing his horn is a rousing spectacle; and a cook properly fixing a good mess

of corn bread is a rousing spectacle. So is any person doing his or her work in the will of God, "as unto the Lord." There is simple but huge dignity in work well done.

In this time just before Labor Day, let us give thanks for work. Even if our jobs don't exactly make roses blossom in our cheeks, let us be grateful to God that he permits us to be laborers together with him in the work place where we find ourselves. So when the world sighs, TGIF (Thank God It's Friday), let us as the people of God, rejoicing in honorable work, choose rather to exult, TGIM (Thank God It's Monday). To the work. To the work.

Joy Valentine

of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind so that we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of humanity. Now that puts us all in the same vat. Each body and each mind did not fixate on the same thing; but each body and each mind began to dictate to the person what it desired and where to place its affections. I take this passage as a good statement of how body and mind work together to give us all our disease. One body may seek out a substance to fill the dependency needs that have left the individual with feelings of worthlessness and a sense of powerlessness and a poor self-image. Another may seek other addictions to gratify bodily cravings or mental cravings. Regardless of what kind of addiction we experience, fragmented mark-missers must become sound-minded to become whole persons.

Paul, in Ephesians 4:17-18, talks about *the futility of our minds* and the ignorance in us due to *the hard-*

ness of our hearts until we come to a sense of faith in God through Christ. His being is something outside ourselves and the material things in which we futilely seek out life.

In Ephesians 1:18, Paul calls for *the eyes of our hearts* to be enlightened, that we may know what is the hope which is ours, what is the riches of our inheritance, what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us.

In Ephesians 4:23, Paul states that we are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. Since we all are hooked by our bodies and by our minds, we all need to deal with each other quite gently, yet firmly at times although never with any self-righteousness or judgment as though looking down on, rather than standing alongside of, our neighbor. "Paraclete" is a word used of the Holy Spirit meant to come alongside of us in our need. If this Spirit be in us, we are to do likewise in coming alongside of all who are trapped by their own de-

mons, whether they are physical or mental, whether it is alcohol or any of a thousand other substitutes for wholeness. Even religion can become an object of our affection rather than an aid to our access to God.

Such renewing of the mind as Paul talks about can be ours only as we "set our minds on things above" (Colossians 3:1-3). As our consciousness is focused on the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22), these slowly filter into our subconscious and root out the affections of the heart set upon the illusions of this world (1 John 2:15-17). It is as though our conscious mind must be renewed in the Spirit through faith in the love and truth of God by a consistent dwelling upon these things of God. Slowly the affections of the heart are turned from the passions of this world to a passion for God. Seek God and all these other things you actually need will be added unto you (Matthew 6:33). But the futility of our minds unaided by grace through faith, the cravings of our bodies, and the hardness of our hearts cause us to believe in the half-truths and deceptions of our own personal demons. This does not change until our minds are renewed in the love and truth of God. To the extent that we resist the renewal of our minds and bodies we are trapped as victims of our own personal brands of misery and evil.

The use of alcohol is evil to the extent that it destroys the person, physically, psychologically, socially, or relationally. This is health-producing doctrine. It is doctrine that moves in the direction of salvation. Alcohol is destructive to the extent that it alters rationality, awareness, consciousness, and ethical sensitivity. This is also true of the many other illusions not related to a chemical dependency which are hurtful to the individual and those around the individual.

The body tendency toward chemical dependency and the mind tendency toward psychological dependency must both be addressed. A

reinvestment in life and truth and love can give the strength to say no to the body's physical cravings or addictions and the mind's psychological cravings or addictions.

What God said to Cain, "Thou mayest choose," he says to us. We have a choice. We have a responsibility to face reality and to grow in character. This will only be done when a person is able to see something of greater value than the false gods previously served. Jesus dealt with the real on the cross and would not accept the "wine mingled with myrrh" (Mark 15:23). This is a symbol for any of the illusions that claim the affections of our hearts. Scripturally, any addiction is a form of idolatry, whether it is addiction to food, family dependency, power, or fame. When something other than God is made the object of highest value and ultimate concern, it is a form of idolizing; and though we may believe the idol cares for us, in reality we carry it on our backs.

Change will not occur because rules are levied. Change occurs out of the awareness of an acceptance, in spite of our failings, not because of our goodness. We all have failings and we all have a tendency toward a pretension of goodness.

Freedom comes with the falling away of the chains of our illusions that bind us to self-destructive behavior. Freedom is not indulgence. True freedom always bears the marks of social responsibility. Freedom within bounds is a blessing. So as we seek to work with the fallen, the diseased, we must also seek to protect others from the failure and folly of us all. As the change is facilitated in individuals, regulations for the good of all are necessary in this fragile and fallen world. Stop signs, speed limits, prohibitions, even taxes have good intentions.

God in his love grants us the freedom of the responsibility to face our rationalizations, cowardice, and laziness in avoiding our illusions. We cannot just capitulate to society's mores and experience wholeness.

But God, while calling forth the

necessity of social restraints against our own failings, desires to reach beyond external rules to our hearts with a consistent, loving forgiveness toward those who violate themselves and his best hope for them. Such unconditional love, such total acceptance, such reaching out to heal is invariably the way of authentic redemption. When one comes back to his or her best self, one listens not to the body or mind, but to the true self that desires health and not disease as God's objective. This model must be our way of facilitating change.

This is a redemptive stance toward those who use alcohol to abuse themselves and others. Its abuse, misuse, and even its use must be understood like all other things in our world as a potential way of death and not life.

Christians also need to be compassionate in a tough-love kind of way to enable those caught in the disease of alcoholism to find their best self within themselves and to hear and to heed the call of God Almighty to wholeness and not disintegration. We need to realize that all of our addictions destroy us internally before they wreak their havoc on others. We need to look beyond the disease to the health that is dormant or deluded by chemicals or thoughts or actions and call forth more wholeness, more humanity, more freedom, more responsibility, more independence from self-imposed chains. Oh, to hear the sound of falling chains. Let us all say and practice, "With the help of God, I am freeing myself from security addictions, from sensation addictions, and from power addictions that make me forcefully try to control situations in my life, and thus destroy my serenity and keep me from loving myself and others." Let it be so!

Doug Ezell is a counselor in Arlington, Texas. He is former professor of New Testament and Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Reagan at Kansas State

Civil Religion in the Service of the New Right

by Robert D. Linder

President Ronald Reagan scored a dazzling personal triumph this past September 9, when he visited Kansas State University to deliver a prestigious Landon Lecture. A crowd of more than 11,500—mostly university students, Landon Lecture Patrons, and grade school children, with a sprinkling of KSU faculty and staff—wildly cheered the President before, during, and after his address. Ovation-counters noted that nearly 30 rounds of sustained applause punctuated Reagan's 25-minute speech.

Reagan was the second sitting president to deliver a Landon Lecture—Richard Nixon was the first in 1970. The lectures were inaugurated in 1966 in honor of former Kansas Governor Alf Landon, who as the GOP standard bearer had unsuccessfully opposed Franklin Roosevelt in the 1936 presidential election.

Any presidential visit nowadays generates great excitement. The excitement was heightened in this case, because sitting presidents seldom visit sparsely populated states like Kansas, where there are few votes and there is little real political power. The President did not disappoint those who longed to see a real, live chief executive. Reagan and his entourage swooped in from the skies aboard five helicopters, landing in a football stadium near the Ahearn Field House, where he was to speak. The crowd in the field house, entertained with appropriate music before his arrival, broke into ecstatic cheering and sustained applause when at last the President stepped onto the lecture stage. The "Imperial Presidency" had obviously survived the Nixon era: a religio-mythic aura still

surrounded the person in that office.

If the setting was that of the Imperial Presidency, the speech was that of a high priest of American civil religion. Reagan's lecture contained nothing really new. Portions of several previous speeches and press statements were put together in an interesting fashion to emphasize religious, moral, and patriotic themes. About a fourth of his speech involved public relations asides, about a fourth centered on domestic economic policies, and about half was devoted to civil religion.

Civil Religion: Religious Sentiments and Political Purposes

What is meant by "civil religion"? It is that generalized form of national faith which mixes religious metaphors with nationalistic aspiration; it is the state's use of consensus religious sentiments, concepts, and symbols for its own purposes. It transcends specific denominations and mixes piety with patriotism and traditional religion with national life until it is impossible to distinguish between them.

A number of scholars have pointed out that there seem to be two forms of civil religion: the prophetic and the priestly. In the prophetic variety, a transcendent reference point stands outside the nation and the national experience. It is the kind of civic faith in which, according to historian Sidney Mead, "its ideals and aspirations stand in constant judgment over the passing shenanigans of the people, reminding them of the standards by which their current practices

and those of their nation are ever being judged and found wanting." The key concept in this type of civil religion is "judgment."

In the second kind of civil religion, the President acts as "high priest" for his people. Using bland and general religious terms such as faith, belief, sacrifice, courage, hope, renewal, and spirit, he projects the image of a priest comforting his people, assuring them of their basic goodness, and striving to enhance their self-esteem. The key attitudes in this sort of civil religion are national pride and elitism. It was this second kind of civil religion that President Reagan's Landon Lecture emphasized, and he played his priestly role with all the skill of a veteran performer.

First, the President used the appropriate "God-words," calculated to give the speech a religious cast and appeal to religious people without being specific. For example, there were references to both God and "the Man from Galilee," there was allusion to America as "a nation under God," and there was a presidential appeal for God's blessing upon the country—but no specific mention of Jesus Christ. Moreover, there was a great deal of priestly stroking of the assembled throng. Speaking of those who have criticized past American policies and who now warn of the possibility of decline in the future, the President affirmed: "Already Americans are proving every one of those predictions wrong. So many so-called experts lack faith in the American people. They just don't seem to understand that there is no limit to what a proud, free people can achieve."

Civil Religion: The Current Agenda

Further, social issues were defined in terms of abortion, school prayer, and the need for a balanced national budget. Little or nothing was said of poverty, racism, social justice, sexual and social oppression, or civil rights. The President also called for the recovery of the country's spiritual heritage and insisted that the nation address its problems from the perspective of an historic national faith. He clearly identified the will of God with the welfare of the state. In this conjunction, the "chosen-nation" theme emerged in full splendor. Reagan entitled his speech "Believe In Her Mission" and urged his hearers:

Be proud of the red, white, and blue, and believe in her mission. In a world wracked by hatred, economic crisis and political tension, America remains mankind's best hope. The eyes of mankind are on us, counting on us to protect the peace, promote new prosperity, and provide for them a far better world. All this we can do if we remember the great gifts of our revolution: that we are one Nation, under God, believing in liberty and justice for all.

And again: "We must mobilize every asset we have—spiritual, moral, educational, economic, and military—in a crusade for national renewal."

Later, at a September 14 working luncheon for members of the religious press in Washington, D.C., someone asked presidential counselor Edwin Meese III about those parts of Reagan's KSU speech in which he declared: "I said that we were a nation under God. I have always believed this blessed land was set apart in a special way, that a divine plan placed this great continent here between the oceans to be found by people from every corner of the earth who have a special love for freedom. . . ." These and similar passages suggested that the President really believed that the US was a chosen nation in the sense that Israel was selected as God's special

people in the Old Testament.

Meese denied that the President had meant that America was set apart in any theological sense. Mr. Reagan was referring only to his own deep personal conviction that the nation had the historical "potential" to carry out a great world mission for the common good. Unfortunately, however, the context of the chief executive's remarks and the tone of his lecture did not appear to bear this out. Moreover, Reagan's speeches and interviews in the past have been laced with similar allusions to America's chosen status under God, including occasions when he identified the "my people" of the 2 Chronicles 7:14 passage with the people of the United States rather than with the people of God in the United States.

Perhaps most important, the specific issues stressed by Reagan in the civil religion portions of his speech were mostly from the social agenda of the New Religious Right. He called for renewed American military strength in order to save the world from communism; he condemned abortion and called for legislative action to protect the unborn child; he pledged his office to war on the drug traffic; and he stressed his support for a prayer amendment to put God back into the public schools. It was his discussion of the school prayer amendment which most clearly illustrated civil religion in the service of the New Right.

The President's argument was a familiar one: "No one will ever convince me that a moment of voluntary prayer can harm a child or threaten a school or state." Among others, US Senator John Danforth of Missouri, himself an ordained Episcopal clergyman, has raised the counter-question: How is America or religion served by the embarrassment of children who must choose between insincere compliance with, or conscientious abstention from, such a ritual? Further, many of those who adhere to biblical Christianity worry that the proposed prayer amendment represents government infringement

on the prerogatives of religion, thus damaging "the wall" of separation of church and state they have long supported.

It is revealing to note that according to some recent polls, more Americans favor prayer in schools than regularly pray in church. This is the civil-religion mentality—that there is something magical about making sure that God is on America's side through ritual acts of piety in public places. It is the ancient mind-set of tribalism in which the people try to make certain that God is their God, the special God of a particular people—in this case, the American nation.

Whatever the pros and cons of this issue, I suggest that the push to add a school prayer amendment to the Constitution is an act of civil religion. Some may argue in favor of the amendment and civil religion, but few can dispute the intended practical benefits of such a constitutional revision for the state. In this context, it seems to me that the arguments against the school prayer amendment can apply both to it and to civil religion: (1) it clearly diminishes the force of the First Amendment—some would say, subverts it—and makes less clear the meaning of separation of church and state in our society; (2) it is undemocratic from the standpoint of making it more difficult for our political and social institutions to work in an increasingly pluralistic society; and (3) it is not in the best interest of either vital religion or the children who would be exposed to government-sanctioned praying.

Civil Religion: Alive, Well, and Virile

From the foregoing discussion, then, it is apparent that civil religion is not only alive and well, but more virile than ever, at least in the American heartland. The current President's speech at Kansas State was a classic exercise in the political use of

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religious language and symbols in a political cause. To be sure, there is an American civil religion which genuinely recognizes the Transcendent, which recognizes the moral restraints on the use of political power, which recognizes the religious foundations of the state. But this is not it. This is not the prophetic variety; this is the

priestly kind. The Judeo-Christian metaphors of the American heritage are being abused in order to advance the agenda of both the religious and political right. Will not the civil religion outlined by the President in his Landon Lecture compromise the integrity of genuine religion by setting up an officially sanctioned public cult marked by the absence of interior devotion and true public piety, thereby undermining the voluntarist, free-church tradition of American Christianity? The mood of the times,

together with the popular linkage of piety and prayer with politics and power—all in the service of the New Right—does not bode well for either the integrity of Christianity or the future of America.

Robert D. Linder is a professor of history at Kansas State University in Manhattan. His article is reprinted with the permission of *The Reformed Journal*.

Does Your Teenager Have A Drinking Problem?

More than 3.3 million teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17, or 19 percent, have some kind of drinking problem. Approximately 70 percent of teenagers drink and on the average those teens take their first drink at age 12.

No Family Is Immune

No family is immune to the growing menace of alcohol abuse. Alcohol is the number one drug problem in the United States and 50 million people each year are hurt by alcohol-related problems which affect one of every five families in the country.

Each year 25,000 persons are killed and 750,000 are injured in alcohol-related traffic accidents.

In response to this alarming and growing problem, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has published *Alcohol Awareness: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Parents*.

This 32-page teaching/learning guide is designed for use in the local church by groups of youth and/or adults and for use in the home by families and individuals.

Additional resources available for the study are listed below.

Plan now to schedule an alcohol awareness study for teenagers and their parents in your church or encourage families to conduct a study at home.

Please place your order for *Alcohol Awareness: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Parents* and supporting resources on the form below and mail it today.

Alcohol Awareness Order Form

Mail to: Christian Life Commission, 460 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37219

On all cash orders add the following amounts for handling and delivery:

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Orders for \$35.01 or more . . . add \$4
 Minimum order \$2. On charge orders postage and handling will be added to billing. All orders will be shipped third or fourth class. If first class is requested, additional charges will be added to the bill.

Quan.	Booklet	Price	Total
	The Bible Speaks on Alcohol	10 for 80¢	
	Issues & Answers: Alcohol	10 for \$1	
	A Case for Abstinence	10 for \$1.50	
	Alcohol Awareness: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Parents	\$3.50 each or 10 for \$29.50	
	Alcohol Awareness Study (wall poster)	4 for \$1	

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Christian Disciples Waging Peace

by Jim Wallis

Editor's Note: The following address was delivered at the Christian Life Commission annual seminar in Louisville, Kentucky, March 21-23, 1983.

I'd like to share a story that happened to me a few days ago. I was in St. Louis on Friday and part of the day I was being interviewed by the newspapers. One of the reporters asked me a question that was, I thought, pretty extraordinary. It took me a little off guard. He said, "I've been reading some of your stuff. What's this thing about the camel and the needle?" So I explained how Jesus said that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. He said, "Yeah, that's right. That's it. Jesus said that, huh?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Is that your position?"

How do you answer that question?

That got me to thinking a lot and I was reflecting on how the position of Jesus—even on the street, even with unchurched folks, even with ordinary people who do not have the advantage or disadvantage of theological education—on questions like the one with which I'm going to deal is quite clear. The position of the church, on the other hand, is not so clear. So I'm grateful for this conference and its theme, "Discipleship and Ethics," because for me this is the heart of the question.

It seems to me that the most controversial question still in the church is, "Are we going to follow Jesus? Is our Christian faith going to have anything to do with Jesus?" I'm sad to say that tonight I believe that Jesus still remains quite obscure in America. There probably is no country in the history of the world where his name is more frequently mentioned. His name is everywhere—on bill-

boards, bumper stickers, on television, on the radio. His name is everywhere but the following: the walking down the road, the path of discipleship. That's harder to find. Sometimes I think that all that remains of Jesus in America is his name.

A Personal Conversion

I was a student at an evangelical seminary; and we were very zealous young students when we got together that fall of 1971. Some of us decided to make a study of the Bible to find every scriptural reference to the poor, to God's demand of justice for the oppressed. We found literally several thousand verses of Bible teaching on the subject. In the Old Testament we found this was the second most prominent theme, the first being idolatry. The two were usually connected. In the New Testament we found that one out of every, I believe it was, nine verses in the synoptic gospels was about the poor. In Luke it was one out of every seven. In James, one out of every four.

We found that the Bible is filled with the compassion of God for the suffering and the afflicted. We found that passage which was for me in the anti-war movement, the civil rights struggle, the one that became my conversion passage. It is Matthew 25 where Jesus is to be found among the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned; and all the people who heard that were astonished and said, "Lord, we didn't know it was you. Had we known it was you, we would have done something differently. We would have done better. But, Lord, we didn't know it was you." And Jesus said, "As you've done it not to one of the least of these my little ones, you've done it not to me." We

found the Bible full of the poor.

Now after we made that thorough study of the Bible, one of the members of our group had an idea, something he wanted to try. He got out an old Bible and then he took a pair of scissors and he cut out of the Bible every single reference to the poor. He cut it right out. It took him a very long time. When he was finished, we were left with a Bible that was literally in shreds. It would not hold together. It was falling apart at the seams.

We could make a similar study of everything the Bible says about peace, about the making of peace, about reconciliation, about the power of love over the power of hate, about how God wants us to live together in unity as brothers and sisters, and we would find again the Bible filled with God's great hunger for peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers," says Jesus, "for these are the ones who will be called the sons and daughters of God." Others succumb to hysteria and hate and fear. Others rush to war, but those who will make peace, says Jesus, will be called God's very own children.

"You've heard it said that you shall love your friends and hate your enemies, but I say to you," says Jesus, "love your enemies." Why? Because that's what God did for us.

I remember growing up in my little evangelical church and I was told that we had made ourselves the enemies of God because of our selfishness, sin, and our rebellion, but that God loved us so much that God sent Jesus to die for us, to save us, to show us how to live and to reconcile us back to God and with each other. If anyone tells you that peace is simply a political issue, a public policy question and no more, you tell them that Jesus died for the peace of which we speak—peace with God,

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peace with our neighbor, and yes, even peace with our enemy.

Now you could take that same pair of scissors and cut out every reference to peace in the Bible and you would have a Bible that was even more in shreds—whole chunks and sections just taken right out. If you cut out everything the Bible says about the poor, cut out everything the Bible says about peace, remove God's demands for justice, remove God's great work of reconciliation, there is not much left of the Bible at all. The Bible is full of holes.

I used to carry that old Bible around with me when I would go out to preach. I used to hold that Bible high in the air, full of holes, and I would say, "Brothers and sisters, this is the American Bible, a Bible full of holes, for all that we have left out, all that we have left unheeded, forgotten—literally torn apart. The Bible in America is in shreds." I find that to be true across the whole spectrum of the church's life, even in places where they talk long and hard into the night about the Bible, where conferences are held about the Bible—how much they love and esteem the Bible. Yet that Bible, with all that has been taken out, is full of holes.

Resources and the Arms Race

Instead of listening to the Bible, we have accumulated many possessions and we have not listened to the cry of the poor. Instead of listening to the Bible, we have built walls of hatred and fear and hostility between ourselves and the people of the world. Now we have amassed great arsenals by which we can, and every day threaten to, destroy one another. More than half of our public resources are now devoted to preparing for war. More than half of our scientific and engineering talent is being devoted to that same cause.

The momentum of our technology, the genius of our science, and the human capacity for evil have now brought us to the precipice of total war, and now our weapons are ultimate. Our children, our world, God's creation will not likely survive their use.

For the first time, the very first time, our human technology of war has the potential to destroy the creation itself and all that God has made. We have never been able to threaten to do that before, but now we can. It is almost as if with our nuclear weapons we have taken, or we have tried to take, the power of life and death into our own hands; which is to say with our nuclear weapons we have tried to take the place of God. That's why I believe the arms race is not merely a political problem. The arms race is a rebellion, is a blasphemy, is an idolatry, is a sin against God. This is a sin, not only against the earth; this is a sin against heaven itself.

All the while we have forgotten that there is a war being waged right now—a war against the poor. Precious resources are being robbed from hungry people to fuel the machines of war. It is now a national economic policy to save a sinking economic ship by throwing overboard those who are most vulnerable, most defenseless, least able to defend themselves. When the government tightens its belt, it does so around the necks of poor people.

Every Saturday morning a line begins to form about 6:00 across the street from where I live. Our food distribution opens at 8:30 or 9:00 and after the 2,000 pounds of food are gone, the line is still there. These are not chronic street people who have been on the street for a long time. These are families, mostly women and children, who have fallen on very hard times. There is never enough to go around.

I live one mile and a half from the White House. Every morning when I look out the window at that line and I listen to news reports about how the economic recovery is already in

motion, I ask myself, "How is it that we as Christians, confronted by the Word of God which is so much clearer on these subjects than any of us really dare to be—how is it that we continue to accept the national policies of spending billions and billions?" I heard from Secretary Weinberger that now it is two trillion dollars to be spent on defense in the next five years, while people around us are hungry and homeless and unemployed, out of luck, out of jobs, out of housing, out of hope.

I don't much like statistics. They can be used and abused easily, but this one startled me. It was a UN study that concluded that all the money it would take to house and educate and clothe and feed and provide health care for all the people in the world for a whole year was the same amount of money the world spends every two weeks on weapons.

What About the Russians?

Jesus says, "Love your neighbor and love your enemy." For centuries most of us in the churches have refused to take Jesus' command to love our enemies very specifically. We have said, "Love your enemies unless they happen to be the Russians or Cubans or Iranians or whomever our government identifies as the adversary of the moment." We say, "Love your enemies unless they threaten you, and then you are released from the command to love them. You may hate and do whatever is necessary to secure your position over theirs." But what about the Russians? "What about the Russians?" continues to be the most often asked question whenever the subject of nuclear weapons comes up, even in the churches. The Soviet threat gets more attention than the words of Jesus.

I think the question is the right question, "What about the Russians?" But we have been asking the question tragically in the wrong way. What about the Russians? What about the Russian people and their

children? What about the Russian Christians and their churches? What would become of them in a nuclear exchange? What about the hundreds of millions of God's children that we seem quite ready to destroy in the name of freedom, national security, and democracy? I often wonder what our great causes will mean to us after they and we are no longer here. We've been taught not to think of Soviet children or Soviet families, but only of Russians and only of Communists as if they have no children. Our enemies have become only threatening and fearful images and, of course, the Russians view us in much the same way.

I was in Scandinavia last fall and I talked with a group of Nordic women who had made a peace pilgrimage into the Soviet Union. Everyplace they went, they told me, they met ordinary Russian people who said things like this: "We would like peace. We desire peace, we as Russian people, but you know how the Americans are. You simply can't trust them. If we let down our guard for a moment, they would overwhelm and dominate us, so we have to continue to do what we are doing." It's an old tape. Wind it up and play it in Leningrad or Dallas or Minneapolis. The tape is the same. The fear is the same. The threatening images of each other are the same. The Russians view us in much the same way as we view them. If they are the lumbering bear about to devour the world, we, in their minds and their eyes, are the reckless cowboy willing to start a war for a fast buck.

Both governments have behaved in ways that give substance to those caricatures—two giants, playing the same game with what we call the nuclear arms race, both accusing the other of escalation, both continuing to escalate, both justifying their escalation by appealing to the other's escalation. It's an old story—one that we should have had some intuition about from our reading of the Bible. Superpowers out to shape the world in their own image, each accusing the other of doing what they them-

selves are doing, each using violence and manipulation and power recklessly and arrogantly proclaiming its cause to be righteous.

Jesus says, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye."

Behind all the images of Russians and Americans, put out by both governments, are very real people. Did you know that 20 percent of Soviet people are considered active church members? Only 10 percent in Britain are so classified. People are much more alike than different. But that's what the two governments want to keep their people from seeing. It's far easier to build fear and justify an arms race while you're offering very threatening images of the enemy. It would be, I would suppose, very difficult to raise popular support for increased military spending by passing around the country snapshots, pictures of the enemy's children. We look at our own children, but do we ever see each other's children? What if we could? What if we could sit in each other's homes, eat at each other's tables? Our governments would not want us to do that because if we did and if we laughed while we watched our children playing together, we might decide that our differences were not worth killing each other over, much less threatening the whole of the world for.

What About Us?

The real question we should be asking is, "What has become of us? What has become of the people who are willing to tolerate the daily contemplation of what must be called a willingness to commit mass murder against enemy populations whom we describe with words like 'collateral

damage,' 'acceptable losses'?" You see, for some things there are no reasons good enough. This, for me, is a deeply theological issue because I believe that we as Americans have elevated our nation and our system and our principles above everything else, including even the survival of God's creation. Our national loyalty has preempted our loyalty to the body of Christ and we have allowed multitudes of nuclear warheads to be aimed at Russian Christians with whom we share a common faith and a common Lord.

Jesus never said we'd have no enemies. Nor did he say they would never be a threat. I don't find in Jesus a lack of realism. What Jesus offers us is a new way to deal with our enemies, a different way of responding that has the potential to break the endless cycle of violence and counterviolence which now threatens all of us with ultimate violence.

The realistic approach, so-called, I would submit, has not worked so well. What is realism now in the face of nuclear war? Which strategy must now be called naive? To continue to think that both real and imagined threats can be countered with nuclear weapons—that, I submit, is the height of naivete and unreality. Nuclear weapons cannot defend us. They can only destroy us. We have reached a dead end. To continue down our same path is to continue to court disaster.

For 38 years the Japanese people have tried to get us to see their pained faces since the atomic bombings. But we have been afraid to look, afraid of what we might see—the agony and the shock and the horror. To look is to see what we have done. To look is to see our future and even our children's future written on their faces. Try to imagine Hiroshima. Try to imagine from all the things you've heard, all the things you've seen. Try to imagine the devastation and the horror we wreaked on Hiroshima and its sister city of

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Nagasaki. It is indeed beyond imagination. The agony lives on in those who lost family members and in those who live still with the effects of cancer and radiation sickness, discovering the legacy of bombings in generations of children ever since.

Try to imagine now 1,600,000 Hiroshimas. That is now what we have the capacity to create. That is the size of our arsenal. How have we come this far? We have come this far by not looking at the faces of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and by not looking at the faces of those whom we now call our enemies.

An Israeli soldier in Lebanon said of the people he was ordered to kill, "It's so hard when I'm up close. When I can see their faces, I can't bring myself to kill them. But when I'm farther away and I'm just shooting artillery shells, then I can do it."

A young American in a missile silo, one of many with his finger on the nuclear button, said, "I don't know if I could ever kill anyone up close. This way I never have to see who my missile hits."

Our missiles are aimed at Soviet threats and Russian systems and godless communism. But our missiles will hit children and families and churches—hundreds of millions of people just like those at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They will kill millions of sisters and brothers who are one with us in the body of Christ.

It is a historical irony that there were Catholics on the bombing crew that bombed Nagasaki, Japan's first and largest Catholic city. Ground Zero that day on August 9 for the bomb, a target for the bomb, was the spire of the Catholic cathedral in Nagasaki. Among the victims that day were hundreds of worshipers killed at worship, and three orders of Catholic women utterly destroyed.

The faces of Hiroshima and Naga-

saki look at us quietly, patiently, earnestly, to show us what we never see, which is the human face of nuclear war. They refuse to turn their eyes away from ours as we have turned our eyes away from them. It is as if their faces say to us, "See what you have done. See what is the fate of the earth unless you stop your present course."

Peace and the Cross

Brothers and sisters, in the name of national security or any other name, we can no longer turn away from our own flesh. The words of the Apostle Paul speak right to the heart of our problem: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end" (Ephesians 2:13-16, RSV).

When those words were written, it was the Gentiles and the Jews who were "far off" from each other. Today when we think of those who are farthest off from American Christians, it is invariably the poor whom we have abandoned, and our enemy—specifically the Russians whose faces we never see. The Russians are feared, caricatured, unknown, and inhuman to us. As I understand the meaning of this passage, the Russians have been brought near to us by the blood of Jesus Christ.

If that be true, then there is no peace through strength, no peace through military superiority, no peace through balances of terror, no peace through new generations of nuclear weapons. There is only peace through a cross. The hostility which God has put to death our governments would stir up, and in so doing

have set themselves against the work of the cross of Jesus Christ.

The arms race, I am convinced, will not come to an end until we have come to terms with those whom we call our enemies. And the only way to do that at its root; the only way the distrust and the fear and the hatred will be overcome, is by way of a cross.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ." If we belong to Jesus Christ, then the work of reconciliation is our vocation. Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus continually told his disciples that sharing his life means sharing his suffering. Sharing his life means a willingness to get lynched yourself. His way inevitably leads to Jerusalem and to conflict with the world.

All the way along the disciples resisted, just as we do. They sought to avoid the implications of Jesus' vocation, and ultimately of their own. But Paul confirms in his epistles that, indeed, to follow Jesus means to follow the way of the cross. We are called to imitate Jesus. We are never called, all of us, to imitate him in his carpentry or his celibacy. We are called to imitate him in his sufferings. Paul says that there is no glory without suffering. To share in Jesus' glory the disciples must be prepared to share in his way, and his way is the way of the cross. "He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood the point so very well, as he showed us in his own life. Bonhoeffer said, "When Jesus calls a man, or a woman, he bids them come and die." We have no reason and we have no right to choose any other way than God chose in Jesus Christ. The cross is both the symbol of our salvation and the pattern for our discipleship. We are joined to Christ in his ministry of reconciliation, which has now been entrusted to us.

The cross, I believe, is going to be rediscovered by the church, by the people of God, in this nuclear age. The sign of the nuclear age is the Bomb. The sign of Christ is the Cross. The Bomb is the countersign to the Cross. It arrogantly threatens to undo the work that the Cross has done. In the Cross, all things are reconciled; in the Bomb, all things are destroyed. In the Cross, violence is defeated; in the Bomb, violence is victorious. In the Cross, evil has been overcome; in the Bomb, evil had dominion. In the Cross, death is swallowed up; in the Bomb, death reigns supreme. Which will hold sway in our times? Will we choose to live under the sign of the Cross or the sign of the Bomb? Finally, which sign will the church choose for its own life? I believe the great evangelistic task in a nuclear age is the conversion, first of all, of the church from the Bomb to the Cross.

The Church and Waging Peace

We need not leave our Bibles in shreds. We can listen again to the Bible. Over the words of hate and fear and war and destruction we can again listen to the Word of God. That is always what converts us. The growing prospect of nuclear war and the abandonment of the poor call for nothing less than revival, a revival of faith. Only conversion will save us now.

In the early decades of the last century we saw a revival in this country. It was called the "Great Awakening" and it was marked by a mighty outpouring of evangelical faith and the conversion of many to Jesus. Central to that revival, that great awakening, was an unswerving opposition to one of the greatest evils ever devised by human beings, the institution of slavery. As far as these revivalists were concerned—these men and women who traversed this country preaching the gospel—to turn to Jesus Christ meant to turn away from slavery. Conversion in the biblical narrative always means a

turning from and a turning to. A good question to ask of any evangelist or any sermon is whether what is being turned from and what is being turned to is being made very clear. Wherever revivalists preached, cadres of abolitionist societies would spring up in the wake of that preaching.

Thousands of Christians from diverse traditions came to see that slavery was an evil that challenged the very heart of their faith. These Christians began to preach that to follow Christ meant to turn away from the institution of slavery, to refuse any longer to cooperate with it, and to work for its abolition. That seemed like an absurd, unattainable idea. People protested that the economy was built on slavery. Slavery was essential to the survival of western civilization. People could not imagine a world without slavery except a few who had the eyes to see that world without slavery, and they saw through the eyes of faith. They were called idealists and fools, unrealistic, unreasonable. But they were those who had learned that the words of Paul were true when he says, "The foolishness of God is stronger than all the wisdom of this world." They insisted that God required nothing less than the abolition of slavery and they came to be called abolitionists.

Today there are thousands of Christians from diverse traditions who have come to believe that the nuclear arms race and the plight of the poor are not simply political issues either, any more than slavery was, but are matters which challenge the very heart of our faith.

I would like to close with a simple story. It was in May of 1978 when 140 people began to occupy some railroad tracks leading to the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons facility, located in a very stark and desolate area about 16 miles northwest of Denver. This stark bomb factory makes all the plutonium triggers for every single nuclear warhead produced in this country. Plutonium is shipped along the tracks on which

we were sitting. We were there, looking foolish to many, I am sure, but there to try and obstruct with our bodies, to become a nonviolent obstacle to those trains and to the continuing production of nuclear weapons.

Just after we walked onto the tracks, rain began to fall before we got tents and tarps set up. We were soaked right to the bone and I couldn't remember being so wet in a long time. A quick mountain weather change which is very common to that part of the country turned that rain very quickly into sleet and then to snow which lasted throughout the night. I didn't recall anytime that I had ever felt so cold. As we sat on those tracks throughout that wet and bitter night, I thought about what it would mean to wage peace. I had in mind a vivid picture of centuries of soldiers sitting out in the rain and the cold just like we were that night. People have always left home, left jobs, left economic security, left loved ones, left their normal lives, and endured hardships, discomfort, danger, risking their very lives, all to make war.

I wondered that night, "Could the cause of peace cost us any less than the making of war?" I wondered if we were willing to sacrifice for peace in the way that so many have sacrificed for war. You know, Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are the peacelovers." He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." And he showed us in his life the consequence of making peace. And the cross is the enduring reminder to us that peace and reconciliation never will come easily or cheaply.

The church, I believe with all my heart, could lead the way to peace. The people of God could unite to create the kind of world force to stop the insanity of the world's present direction. Christians could withdraw their consent, refuse to collaborate, obstruct the war-making plans, point to alternatives, and lead us to a new day.

But the way of peace will be the
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way of the cross for those who would choose to be peacemakers. It was for Jesus and it will be for all those who will follow in his path. If we are to rediscover the way of peacemaking, we will certainly rediscover the cross. No longer an ancient relic or a piece of religious symbolism in our sanctuaries, the cross will again become for us the sign of our lives.

The political realists and media pundits cannot imagine a world without nuclear weapons. Only those with the eyes of faith will be able to see it. But if we persist, as our abolitionist forebears did, then eventually many others will also come to see their way free of a world under the cloud of nuclear weapons. I believe it is time for us to wage peace with all of our energy, all of our hearts, all of our lives. The brightest spot to me in the darkening picture in the growing prospects for nuclear war is what is happening in the churches. Christians across the length and breadth of the church are being led to the firm conviction that repentance in a nuclear age means non-cooperation with their country's preparations for nuclear war. It would be a divine irony, indeed, if something as horrible as the prospect of nuclear weapons became an occasion for the renewal of faith in the church's life; and yet that is exactly what is happening.

There is a conversion to peace now beginning everywhere in the life of the church. A new "peace church" is taking hold at the local level. The signs of it are everywhere. This could unite us as nothing has done for a very long time. Catholics are working alongside Mennonites and Southern Baptists, evangelicals with mainline Protestants. Church leaders are speaking out. Whole congregations are mobilizing around the question of peace. Many are challenging and changing the fundamental facts of

their own lives, and I believe the American churches and the American government are headed on a collision course over this matter of peace.

A Miracle Needed

Yet, with all that, I would submit that the political chances of the arms race ending easily or soon are not good. I believe it will take, in fact, a miracle to end the arms race, which is simply to say that the best leadership in the peace movement will come from those who believe in miracles. Does the church still believe in miracles? More importantly, are we willing to bet our lives on those miracles being true? If we are, then someday we might be called the new abolitionists.

We must never lose sight of the victory of Jesus Christ, even in the present nuclear crisis. His victory in history is assured. It has been won for us and we must only be the kind of people who can see the world in light of it, who can demonstrate that we believe it by how we live our lives, who demonstrate that victory in our homes and our churches and our communities and our work places, in the corridors of power, and even in the streets.

The victory of Jesus is the basis for our hope, and I am convinced that the nuclear arms race will not be ended by an appeal to fear. Fear is its own basis, and only hope will prevail against it. Christian hope is realistic. It sees the world with no false optimism, but it sees the victory of Christ also realistically.

Hope, for me, is best defined by believing, in spite of the evidence, and then watching the evidence change. Biblical hope knows that the life of God which has been planted in us is stronger than all those forces around us. It is not simply that we shall overcome; it is that this is the day of the Lord and he shall overcome. Despite the pretensions of the nuclear powers, the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. Hallelujah! Amen.

Jim Wallis is editor of Sojourners magazine.

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