

# Light

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMISSION OF THE SOUTHERN

BAPTIST CONVENTION

MARCH 1985

## THE VIOLENCE CONNECTION



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Are Not Exempt**

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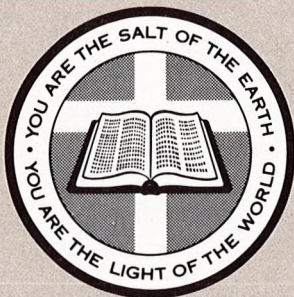
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## A Case for Creativity

J.R.R. Tolkien was sitting in his study at Oxford correcting a student's thesis. The year was 1926. For some reason, the student had turned in a blank page. When Tolkien came to it, he picked up his pen and wrote on the page, "In a hole in a ground there lived a hobbit," thus launching one of the most remarkable literary careers of our time. On being asked why he did it, Tolkien replied, "It popped into my head."

Creativity is God-like.

No amount of technology, no matter how intricate, can produce a single truly creative act. No matter how complex our computers, we remember that they are nothing more than state-of-the-art adding machines that can print out only those choices that have been programmed in.

In creativity, there is joy and excitement. In the process of the original creation, God kept making things about which he joyously said, "It is good."

Parents marvel in the presence of their new baby. The preacher feels splendidly emptied at the end of a Spirit-blessed sermon. The author feels strangely peaceful when the piece or the book or the poem is finished. A gardener finds deep pleasure in his orderly rows. An artist is delivered when the painting is done. The musician can rest when the music has been performed properly. A cook savors with satisfaction a dish that came out just right.

Stiflers of creativity are on every hand. They are anti-Christ.

Materialism leads the pack. The heavy hand of mammon presses down hard on the free spirit of creativity; but authentic faith guarantees deliverance.

**Conservatism also has its terrors.** The inclination to conserve the creativities of the past can become such a compelling obsession that nothing new can ever pop into our heads. One of the tragedies of fundamentalism is that it is a joyless, argumentative, dogmatic, fighting neurosis that squelches freedom and quinsches creativity. Khomini scowls but seems incapable of a hearty laugh. Revealed religion, we bear in mind, calls for innovation as well as conservation.

Hedonism comes to mind. The search for new nerve endings to stimulate is an ultimately futile pursuit. The limits to appetite are found all too quickly when the creative impulse is turned inward to sensate impulses. An antidote is self-giving love.

**Poverty, too much work, too little work, injustice, harassment, crowding, noise, sickness, hunger and frustration** can all contribute to the stifling of our creative impulses. Both the individual and society have a stake in resisting these and thereby providing creativity a chance to soar.

Since creativity is God-like, I wanted to say it. Also, it popped into my mind. ■

*Foy Valentine*

Foy Valentine  
Executive Director

# THE VIOLENCE CONNECTION

## Insights from Biblical Teaching

By Robert L. Newton

A narrow focus on the issue of violence conveniently avoids questions about the "violence connection"—the possible interrelationships between different forms of violence. As Christians, however, we must view violence holistically. We have to hammer out a working definition of violence and subject it to biblical, ethical and theological scrutiny. We must explore not only individual acts of violence but also the "climate of violence" that has pervaded our common life since the beginning of humanity.

**Defining violence** is not difficult. Webster's unabridged dictionary gives several definitions, each of which is relevant:

1. The use of force (physical or otherwise) in such a way as to cause harm or injury;
2. An unjust use of force or power; and
3. Desecration (treating as not sacred) or profanation (treating with irreverence or contempt).

It is interesting to apply these definitions both to contemporary violent situations and to events in the Bible which shed light on our own times. Some of the situations are personal in nature; others are institutional or structural. But they have several elements in common: power or force is used to cause harm; oppression and inequality are inherent; and the sacredness and dignity of the person are denied.

**The Bible sees** violence early in its beginnings and depicts it as widespread in scope. In Gen. 4:5-9 the story of the first deed of violence is etiologically explained in the account of Cain's murder of Abel.

Anger, the source of the first murder, has continued as the main motivation for all subsequent acts of violence. A recent article in *Time*, for instance, referred to rape as the "sexual expression of aggression.

Some men rape as a way of expressing anger, and often these rapes include beatings."

In Gen. 4:19-24, sin is depicted as corrupting the whole culture, including family life. Violence is seen as begetting itself, with strong, almost irresistible carry-over "from one generation to another."

**Thus, the stage** is set for the spread of violence. The Noah narratives note that "the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence" (*Gen. 6:11*).<sup>1</sup> God said, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them" (*Gen. 6:13*). Divine mercy prevailed, but so did man's bent for violence.

In the patriarchal narratives, sibling conflict is often motivated by parental favoritism. The story of Jacob and Esau is one example. The Joseph cycle sounds a similar theme. Joseph, having incited his brothers' jealous rage, is almost killed by them but instead is sold into slavery.

**Tribal conflict** with kinship overtones is found throughout these patriarchal narratives. It is summed up in the patriarchal blessing in Gen. 49:5-6. "Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company; for in their anger they slay men."

This "violence connection" continues in our own day. Consider the following:

- Rape crisis lines are handling record numbers of calls. Women continue to experience severe trauma, not only from the assault, but sometimes as a result of the treatment in hospitals, police stations and courts.

- Absentee landlords refuse to provide heat for tenants, and entire families are found frozen to death.

- Incidences of muggings and housebreakings are rising even in small towns. Churches in some communities have suspended eve-

ning services and programs; people are afraid to leave their homes.

- After a long hiatus, convicted prisoners are once more being executed in this country.

- Missing children now number over one million per year. Of 3,000 unidentifiable bodies discovered annually, hundreds are children.

- Shelters for battered women now operate in most cities and in many countries. They remain full, seeking to help the estimated one wife in six for whom the home is a dangerous place.

- The U.S. military budget continues to expand, at the expense of human needs programs.

- Armed conflict rages in more than 40 countries. Articles on "Children of War" and a TV presentation, "Children of the Crossfire," remind us of the impact of these conflicts on the world's innocent children.

- Physical abuse of children is recognized as a widespread phenomenon. Sexual abuse is far from an isolated experience.

Even this limited listing underscores the fact that violence is varied and widespread, affecting every segment of society. The "violence connection" lies in the dynamics of in-

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***What mitigates against violence? Shared power, commitment to equality, clarity of values, sense of community.***

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justice and misuse of power present in each situation.

In citing the factors of power, control, force and injustice, another question arises: what mitigates against violence? The answer turns the coin over: justice, shared power, commitment to equality, clarity regarding values and a sense of community.

**These are deeply held** religious-ethical concepts with roots in biblical tradition. The Bible views violence realistically. It is seen as one manifestation of our human situation when viewed in the setting of God's eternal will. Yet the biblical message also offers hope and a positive response to the devastating problem of violence.

In Ex. 1:15-22, violence against a



whole people is noted. The "Pharaoh who knew not Joseph" seeks the genocide of the Hebrew slave populace. Divine providence, not further human violence, spares a people who are to be the instruments of the covenant purpose.

**War, of course,** is the ultimate group violence. Roland Bainton, Yale church historian, has noted that Christian attitudes toward war have moved between these views: pacifism; the crusade (holy war); and the Just War theory.

Of these, the most tragic and lingering in its effects is the idea of the holy war. Our missionary efforts in the Moslem world have been limited by the remembered violence of the Christian crusades in the holy land. A recent undersecretary of state, George Ball, said the most persistent scenes of warfare in recent times have religious roots. As Bainton tersely pointed out, "War is more humane when God is left out of it."

In Joshua and Judges, God was seen as "the Lord of Hosts," driving out the non-covenant people who occupied the promised land. The judges felt they were commissioned to "devote" the entire enemy populace—men, women and children—and all their possessions to the Lord.

The devotees of the holy war march through the Old Testament into the inter-testamental period with its Maccabean revolt and on through the New Testament, where the Zealots are always lurking in the shadows of the events of the new covenant.

**The same crusading spirit** moved through the pages of the church's history. Medieval crusades were launched with the cry, "Deus Vult," God wills it. There were no limiting standards of a Just War in fighting the infidel. One crusader of Antioch sent to the Greek emperor a whole cargo of noses and thumbs sliced from the pagan Saracens. A favorite text was, "Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood" (Jer. 48:10, KJV).

Wars of religion followed the otherwise great period of the Reformation. Later came Cromwell and the Puritan Revolution. When Christianity came to the Americas, believers thought the aborigines (Indians) needed to

make way for the new Israel in the "new world." Violence followed.

Since that era, violence has overwhelmingly marred the pages of American history. It has taken many forms: feud, lynch and mob violence; the violence of racial, ethnic and religious prejudice; political assassination, the violence of the revolutionary, civil and Indian wars; agrarian uprisings; labor management strife. Even today, sadly enough, there are Christian voices calling for a Holy War against "Godless Communism," even in a time of potential nuclear holocaust.

Other categories of violence from the pages of the Bible also illuminate the traumas of our day. Suicide, called the "ultimate form of self-abusive behavior" is the tragic climax

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### ***Domestic violence appears in the Bible as both neglect and abuse.***

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of the Saul narratives. The despairing first king of Israel, feeling his plight was hopeless, falls on his sword.

The prophets often denounce economic violence. Micah 2:1-2 scorns those who "perform it because it is in the power of their hands. They covet fields, and seize them; and houses and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance." Amos sounds a similar note in 8:4-6.

**Religious persecution** is often a result of faithful discipleship. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake" (Matt. 5:10) spells out the consequences of kingdom life and service. Hebrews 11:33-38 gives numerous examples of those who suffered violence for the kingdom. In Mark 13, "the little Apocalypse," the approach of the eschaton is marked by violence in the international arena, the natural order, religious life and even the family. Little wonder Jesus introduced the new age with the words "from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Matt. 11:12).

Domestic violence appears in the Bible as both neglect and abuse. In Acts 6 the Greek widows felt they

were shortchanged as to the care of the church. Fortunately, deacons were chosen to serve in meeting this neglect.

Jesus warned "Children are not to be hindered" (Matt. 19:14). He cited neglect when the religious casuistry of the time condoned those who neglected the care of their own parents.

**Two other biblical areas** also deserve attention. One is the New Testament idea of submission in family relationships. Unfortunately, this biblical concept has sometimes been distorted, leading to actual abuse on occasion. Mutual "yielding in love" is submission's true guide and goal, as John Howell notes in his fine study.<sup>2</sup>

The other area is the biblical view of discipline. It does not involve, as its primary method, abusive punishment, but focuses rather on redemptive discipline.

As we proclaim the good news of God's love in Christ in word and in deed, we need sensitive understanding and concern for the abuser and compassion for the abused. As we address this problem of violence in the light of our life and faith as Christians, we look to what the Bible calls the messianic age, the new age, when God's gracious rule shall prevail on earth.

The image of the Peaceful Kingdom (Isa. 11:5-9) where God rules with justice and integrity, where wolves and sheep, babies and snakes may live and play together without fear, is a powerful reminder of our responsibility to join with God in working for a non-violent, just and communal world. ■

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup>John Howell, *Equality and Submission in Marriage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981).

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*Newton is director of the department of Christian family life, Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.*

**T**he tragic problem of child abuse has been depicted accurately as a vast wasteland, a debris heap of human resources and potential.

Most of the effort toward curbing child abuse, however, has consisted of responding to the problem after the fact. Not enough energy has been directed toward the underlying factors of parental attitudes and values leading to maltreatment of children.

If church leaders and other Christians hope to deal effectively with this social issue, then we must recognize that parental attitudes and values are fundamental factors in the behavior patterns of child abusers. We must also recognize that the problem is not confined to non-Christian families; it also plagues the homes of professing Christians in our churches.

Several strategies may be employed by pastors and churches to improve parental values.

*First, raise the conscience level of the congregation.*

Awareness should result in caring enough to become involved. A part of conscience raising is to change

the attitude of "It's none of my business," to "It is a matter of concern for me."

Another part of conscience raising is congregational recognition that conversion is not enough. The new disciple must learn the meaning of living under the lordship of Christ who taught that children have a God-given dignity that is not to be undervalued or destroyed. Children are not owned by parents to be treated as property but are gifts in stewardship to be guarded in love and guided toward maturity and freedom.

*Second, recognize the parent as the primary model for the child.*

Several values are an important part of this relationship between parent and child.

- *The value of bonding.* When parents are under great personal stress or do not want their babies, they do not react to them in a normal way.

When the mother is isolated from a premature or sick infant, she may have difficulty forming a maternal bond. Failure on the part of either parent to develop a normal relationship with the newborn may lead to

later abuse or neglect. Values of love and trust are developed early through the bonding process. The child soon feels loved or rejected, secure or fearful, according to parental attitudes and actions within

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### ***Parental attitudes and values are fundamental factors in the behavior of child abusers.***

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the first several weeks after birth.

- *The value of high self-esteem.* Parents must seek to develop high self-esteem in the child by bolstering her confidence in achieving realistic expectations. Parents often have unrealistic expectations of their children which lead to frustration, explosive anger and abusive behavior in the name of discipline. The parent may blame or belittle the child, creating low self-esteem and guilt. Consequently, the child may become rebellious, defiant, devious, distrustful and antisocial.

Churches may provide comprehensive and positive parenting programs to give information about child development, to suggest alternative discipline techniques and to stress adequate communications skills and a proper perception of the child's needs at any given point.

Parent training is being reemphasized among Southern Baptists under a new concept, "Parenting by Grace," developed by the Family Ministry Department of the Baptist Sunday School Board. Low self-esteem is the number one American family disease. "Parenting by Grace" is an excellent approach to help cure it.

- *The value of handling anger constructively.* Fatigue, fear and frustration are three common enemies to parent-child relationships. Parenting often must be done with the leftovers of energy from exhaustive duties of homemaking, career work or both. Most parents fear they will do something wrong. Children sometimes can be very exasperating. Though love is not easily provoked, annoyance can give way to irritation and volcanic anger.

Anger may be handled irresponsibly and destructively by (1) being

## **Parental Values Provide Key To Helping Through Prevention**

# **CHILD ABUSE**

—By J. Clark Hensley





repressed and thus becoming resentment that leads to withdrawal or depression, or (2) being allowed to turn to rage.

Constructive handling of anger involves (1) recognizing and admitting the feeling, (2) expressing it, but (3) directing the anger toward the *behavior* of the child and not the child himself. Anger must not be used for manipulative control, i.e., "Mother will be mad at you if you do \_\_\_\_\_," or worse, "God will not love you if you are bad."

• *The value of discipline as an act of love.* Again, it must be emphasized that proper discipline focuses on the *behavior* and not on the *personhood* of the child. Discipline involves responding positively to the child's appropriate behavior as well as reprimanding inappropriate conduct. The parent should not im-

pose aversive consequences for the child's misbehavior in a situation where the child does not know what is appropriate.

When parents settle differences between parent and child only by

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***We must recognize the problem also plagues the homes of professing Christians in our churches.***

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physical force, the child learns that might makes right. He eventually comes to feel that he deserves to be whipped or to "have some sense beaten into him." Then this abusive model is readily repeated when the child becomes a parent.

*Third, realize the value of support systems.*

It really helps when the pastor or some caring person reminds the new mother that babies cry a lot and nerves get on edge, but that this, too, shall pass. When this kind of understanding is carried over into groups, it becomes even more supportive.

**Families in which** abuse and neglect occur are typically isolated in the community due to social distrust and feelings of inadequacy. They sometimes withdraw to escape detection. In their isolation, the children do not learn proper respect for others. Often they are led to feel that society should care for them. They become users of other people and at first may not accept at face value any help offered by a support group.

In spite of this, pastors and other care-givers can take the high risk of winning their friendship, becoming a part of their extended family and teaching a more excellent way.

**Support groups** may be more organized, such as groups for single parent families, divorced parents and their families, new parents and community newcomers. Programs such as after school care, Mother's Day out, parents night out and other services can help to alleviate stress and frustration.

Observant, caring people can find ways to introduce preventive intervention. A Texas church publication, *A Covenant to Care*, suggests individuals may help reduce frustration and isolation of parents we meet in

## ETHICS LIBRARY

### Works in Applied Christianity

**Is the Bible Sexist? Beyond Feminism and Patriarchalism**, by Donald G. Bloesch. Crossway, 1982. Truly balanced approach to subjects of feminism, women in the church, male-female relationships and marriage and family from a sound, biblical and evangelical point of view. "Present controversy" of feminism vs. patriarchalism reviewed historically to give reader quick handle on nature of the problem. Bloesch argues neither feminism nor patriarchalism does justice to biblical truth.

Hermeneutically, author helps us see clear balance between culturally relative and abidingly valid truths of God's Word. Mutual and voluntary subordination set forth in context of Servant image which transcends cultural patterns of male-female relationships. Key biblical passages carefully and thoroughly exegeted.

Question of "women ministers" answered forthrightly in context of biblical theology and historical context. Chapter "A Biblical Alternative" is meat of the book. Bloesch's position is "coventalism" which sees

our vocation as determined not by sex or blood or race, but by faith.

Must reading for pastors struggling with matter of women in the church.

—Guy Greenfield

**Communicating Christian Values in the Home**, by Janice and Mahan Siler. Convention Press, 1984.

Practical, insightful effort to help parents be more knowledgeable, intentional and creative in communicating Christian values in the home. Distills best of decades of professional training and parental experience of the Mahans. Builds on solid theological base and thorough understanding of developmental process of value formation. Book is "user friendly" (to borrow from computer jargon) with an engaging style. Practical advice and how-to sections "ring true" to experience. Excellent resource for parents and anyone who ministers to families.

—David Wilkinson

REVIEWERS—Greenfield teaches Christian ethics at Southwestern Seminary; Wilkinson is editor of LIGHT.

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***Proper discipline focuses on the behavior and not on the personhood of the child.***

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everyday life by offering caring attention, illustrating by example.

"When you see a harried mother struggling with a child in the grocery store, say something supportive and understanding such as, 'I always feel I need six pairs of eyes when I take a four-year-old to the store, but I guess



Several parent enrichment programs are available to Southern Baptist churches through the Family Enrichment Section of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Many churches will conduct Christian Home Week in May, utilizing resources related to the theme "Parents: Building a Christian Home." In 1986 the theme for Christian Home Emphasis is "Discipleship in the Home." Through the study of related resources, parents will learn how to share their faith with their children.

A more comprehensive program of parent enrichment, "Parenting by Grace," will become available to churches in October 1986. ■

we should feel lucky to know the kids are so lively and curious.' " Such a comment may break the growing anger and embarrassment, let the mother know she is not alone in her difficulties and at the same time affirm the value and personhood of the child.

**Essentially the values** we teach and demonstrate may be called the Family Moral Code. We need to say to the child abusers, "You don't have to stay the way you are; you can be changed." When they answer, "How?" we may reply, "Learn a new set of values, adopt and live by a different family moral code."

Some may protest, "What about the power of Christ to change?" Yes—absolutely yes! But unfortunately, some child abusers are professing Christian parents who have not been taught the values inherent in Christian morality for families. In other words, it is high time to preach and to teach the ethical implications of the gospel. ■

*Hensley is executive director emeritus of the Christian Action Commission and family ministry consultant, Mississippi Baptist Convention.*

## Making Progress

By Robert Parham

Last fall the television pictures of the African famine invaded the living rooms of America. Pictures of emaciated mothers, dying babies and withered families sliced to the bone of the American conscience. While the pictures mobilized hunger groups with millions of dollars, they also threatened to immobilize the public with despair.

The dollars, of course, enhance the work of hunger relief and development efforts. But the sense of despair can cripple the long-term response to the crisis of world hunger.

**The crisis of world hunger** is almost unfathomable: 200 people die from hunger related problems every day in Ethiopia; 15 million infants and children die every year due to diseases when weakened by malnutrition; 150 million Africans (a third of Africa's total population) may be affected by drought in 1985.

The despair which accompanies the world hunger crisis numbs and immobilizes the compassionate. Despair becomes another hunger-related problem.

**Despair among Southern Baptists**, however, may be tempered by the recognition that we are doing something about the crisis. Let us remember from whence we have come. Remembering that we have made some progress can bring hope in the midst of the darkness.

Our steps forward are numerous. They are financial, intellectual, spiritual, political and benevolent steps.

• *Southern Baptists are giving more money for the world's hungry.* Hunger relief gifts have soared from \$81,000 in 1971 to more than \$7,000,000 in 1984. Southern Baptists last year gave a million dollars more than we did in 1983.

• *Southern Baptists are writing and thinking more about the complexity of global hunger.* Denominational publications have increased dramatically their coverage of the hunger crisis. A review of the *Southern Baptist Periodical Index*

reveals that the number of articles listed under the entry of "hunger" has increased from a total of 8 between 1970-1974 to 216 between 1980-1983.

• *Southern Baptists are praying and preaching more about the hungry and the sources of poverty, injustice and exploitation.* Under the leadership of the Christian Life Commission, Southern Baptist churches have observed World Hunger Day for the last seven years. World Hunger Day—set on the denominational calendar for the second Sunday in October—is now a permanent fixture on the convention's landscape. While special attention is given to this important observance, many churches also are expanding their approaches to include week-long emphases and year-round education and action.

• *Southern Baptists are offering more leadership to the social movement against hunger.* Southern Baptists, for example, now chair the top two positions on the board of directors of Bread for the World, a national Christian citizens' lobbying group against hunger. Many more Southern Baptists are members of this strategic organization.

• *Southern Baptists are doing more at the grass roots level to address the hunger problem.* From church soup kitchens to Baptist state convention overseas water projects, from food banks to hunger walks, Southern Baptists of all ages are taking personal and communal initiatives on behalf of the hungry.

**Actions such as these** indicate that Southern Baptists have made hunger a major moral and social commitment. Remembering our advances checks the despair which does nothing for the victims of hunger and nothing for those perplexed by the crisis of hunger. Remembering where we are informs us of how much more we must do. Realizing where we must go causes us to tighten our belt of commitment for the hungry of our world. ■

*Parham is director of hunger concerns for the Christian Life Commission.*



# ABORTION ISSUE

## A Baptist Ethicist Shares His Insights

*EDITOR'S NOTE: During 25 years as executive director of the Christian Life Commission, Foy Valentine has addressed a variety of ethical issues through his ministry of preaching, teaching and writing. In an interview with LIGHT, the Christian ethicist shared some of his personal views related to abortion.*

**LIGHT:** Do you personally view abortion as an important social issue as well as a matter of personal morality?

**Valentine:** Yes, I do. It is both personal and social as are all the other great moral issues of life.

**LIGHT:** What factors have brought America to the current level of rhetoric and activity related to the abortion issue?

**Valentine:** For many years, the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in America have been pressing hard for official public policy that would reflect the Roman Catholic dogma which leads them to oppose all abortion, even to save the life of the mother. Then when the old political right brought the New Religious Right into being as a political tool to help them achieve their political agenda, opposition to abortion was one of the issues chosen with which they decided to try to galvanize their constituency. Together, the Roman Catholic Church and the New Religious Right have built a political lobby which for a variety of reasons and in a number of ways has now embraced others including many Southern Baptists who share their basic opposition either to all abortion or to abortion on demand.

I am neither a Roman Catholic nor a New Religious Right partisan; but I absolutely reject abortion as a morally justifiable means of birth control. I maintain a high view of the sacredness of life, including fetal life.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1973 in the *Roe vs. Wade* case that under federal law abortion was legally permissible during a woman's first

trimester of pregnancy and that afterward the states could legally involve themselves in the regulation of abortion. The notion that society has no stake in the termination of a pregnancy and that the matter is merely a decision as to what a woman chooses to do with her own body leaves the issue on a much more radically individualized basis than I think society could be justified in tolerating.

**LIGHT:** When does life begin?

**Valentine:** I think life began for humanity with creation at the hands of God: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27); and that all human life is an extension in an unbroken chain from Adam and Eve to every single human being alive today. An unfertilized human female egg is alive, an unattached male sperm is alive, the conceptus is alive when the egg and the sperm come together, the microscopic embryo is alive when it attaches itself to the uterine wall about a week later, the embryo is alive before quickening, and the fetus is alive after quickening.

When the newborn baby starts to breathe, life's continuum has moved through yet another stage. A child is alive, an adolescent is alive, a young adult is alive, a middle-aged person is alive, and the feeble old woman is alive. Then when the breathing stops, as it will for us all, life goes on in the providence of God until the resurrection when body and spirit will be reunited, after which I believe we shall ever live with the Lord.

I have made here a faith declaration, of course. I have responded theologically. I have spoken out of my Christian experience and conviction. The ambiguities of the age-old debate about abortion and about when life begins are being wrestled with on an ongoing basis by experts in the fields of law, medicine, philosophy, and government, as well as theology.

**LIGHT:** What does the Bible say?

**Valentine:** The Bible says practically nothing about abortion. The other day I got a copy of a letter purporting to list several dozen verses forbidding abortion; but on checking them out, it became clear that not one of them, not a single one, referred to abortion. Job 3:16, Ecclesiastes 6:3-5, and Psalm 58:8 are the three Bible passages that use the Hebrew word "nephel" which can be translated as "untimely birth," "miscarriage," or "abortion." In each of these three instances, as with Jeremiah 20:17, the writers are lamenting the fact that they were born and conjuring up images of a fate that seemed to them would have been preferable to the miseries they were experiencing in life at the time they wrote.

Exodus 21:22-25 spells out the requirements of Jewish law when a pregnant woman miscarries because of harm suffered when two men have been fighting in her presence.

The Bible nevertheless informs our understanding of the abortion issue. I deeply believe that its principles are everlastingly relevant to this issue and to all other moral issues. It teaches that God is the source of all life, that life is sacred, that sex is sacred, that children are the gift of God, and that conception and birth

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*The Bible's principles are everlastingly relevant to this moral issue and to all other moral issues.*

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are in the providence of God. We ought to let the Bible inform and guide our response to the issue of abortion without resorting to the shoddy practice of proof-texting Scriptures to prop up our opinions.

**LIGHT:** Is abortion always wrong?

**Valentine:** Since I am not the Judge of all the earth, I cannot answer that. I know it is always tragic. But like war, it is sometimes the lesser of available evils. Finite mortals often have to choose between the lesser of two evils while living in this sinful world.

Life is sacred because we are



created in God's image, after his likeness. Sex is sacred because our sexuality is God's gift by which humanity maintains the chain of life through time and history. Marriage is sacred, "the marriage bed" of sexual intercourse is sacred, and every child is, in the providence of God, also sacred. It follows that human beings ought never to profane any of these sacred things, that sexual intercourse ought to take place only in the bonds of holy matrimony, that the commandment not to commit adultery which was given to humanity for our good ought to be obeyed, and that abortion as a method of birth control ought to be rejected both by individuals and by society.

America's pluralistic society has not mandated the absolute prohibition of abortion which the Roman Catholic bishops want but which even predominantly Roman Catholic Italy has voted down in a national referendum. There is a developing moral consensus, however, in opposition to the present legal permissiveness regarding abortion.

**LIGHT: How can a Christian deal responsibly with the abortion issue?**

**Valentine:** Individuals who are seeking to think carefully and act responsibly about the abortion issue are obligated to do so prayerfully and with all of the help that can be found from the Holy Spirit, the church, the Bible, personal study, and the informed support of Christians who have studied, trained, written, and worked to develop special expertise related to this issue.

I think Christians can support a public policy which maintains a responsibly conservative position that rejects abortion as a means of birth control but that allows for the possibility of abortion as the lesser of evils in those cases involving rape, incest, gross deformity of the fetus, and clear danger to the mother's physical health or mental well-being. In the latter category I would include a twelve-year-old girl impregnated by a thirteen-year-old boy.

Christians have a responsibility to contribute to the public discussion about the various dimensions of the abortion issue, including alternatives to abortion. We can engage in

healthy debate without resorting to inflammatory rhetoric and rash actions which lead only to further polarization. It is especially important now, in the context of a wave of bombings perpetrated in the name of "the right to life," that Christians help to moderate the increasing extremism that now surrounds this issue.

**LIGHT: Do you personally support a constitutional amendment to prohibit abortions except to save the life of the mother?**

**Valentine:** No.

**LIGHT: What about the Southern Baptist Convention's response to this issue?**

**Valentine:** In 1971, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution about abortion; and the issue has been dealt with by nearly all of the conventions since then. Every one of these resolutions has expressed a conservative opinion about abortion. Not one of them, however, including those of 1982 and 1984, has followed the current Roman Catholic dogma to declare that from the moment of conception a fetus is a person whose rights are absolutely equal to the rights of the woman carrying it. I have no quarrel under the sun with the Roman Catholic bishops who take this position as a matter of religious faith, though as with the authority of the Pope and the notion of the immaculate conception or sinlessness of Mary, I do not as a Baptist share their beliefs at these points.

All of the Southern Baptist Convention resolutions have held to a very high view of life, including fetal life. All have positioned the various conventions as being strongly opposed to a frivolous view of this grave moral issue. All have stood strongly against abortion as a morally acceptable means of birth control.

**LIGHT: What do you think of the resolution passed at the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City calling for setting a Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on the denominational calendar?**

**Valentine:** A denominational emphasis on the value of life could be helpful. It could call attention to

biblical ideals and Christian values. It could give us an important reminder not to be conformed to this world, with its cheap views of life, of sex, of family, and of the home. Southern Baptists ought not, however, to jump into every moral crusade promoted by every special interest group that comes along. I think we should not signal the political action committees which are pushing the observance of a Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on the third Sunday in January, that we are jumping on their bandwagon and becoming tools in their political power plays. Southern Baptists could appropriately, however, choose a date and design an emphasis that would both help Southern Baptists and bear some significant witness to the society around us.

**LIGHT: Why hasn't the Christian Life Commission done more about this issue?**

**Valentine:** Why haven't we done more about dozens of important issues? Because we are too small

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*All of the SBC resolutions have held to a very high view of life, including fetal life.*

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and too poor to get around to all the important work that needs to be done in helping Southern Baptists apply Christian principles in every area and relationship of life. Our staff beats the protoplasm of life about as thin as we can get it in order to spread the Commission's emphasis on applied Christianity as widely as possible.

You can't trot out a moral issue, including abortion, on which I don't think we should be doing far, far more than we are doing. While I am still not eager to help Jerry Falwell get his political choices elected to public office nor am I willing to shape public policy to the demands of the Roman Catholic bishops, I am nevertheless convinced that the issue deserves the careful attention which is being given to it by the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. ■



# KEEPING UP with the CHERNENKOS

## 'Mind Wars' Represent One Version of Superpowers 'Game'

By Larry Braidfoot

The game was originally called "Keeping up with the Joneses." Played American style, it involved cars, boats, fur coats, TVs, bigger houses, expensive vacations and almost anything else subject to personal whim.

The game has proven so popular that the world's superpowers have devised their own version. The number of items with which the game can be played is almost limitless. It is even possible to play with some "fairly serious" things, like nuclear weapons.

The United States and its allies are locked in a deadly game of military expansion with the Soviet Union and its allies. The race gets more expensive each year as first one nation then the other increases the amount of its resources allocated to military spending.

The results are questionable at best. Not only are we faced with threats of a nuclear winter and other disasters, we also are faced with the inevitable outcome: regardless of how hard we try, the Joneses—or, in this case, the Chernenkos—manage to keep up with us. A recent study indicated that the relative strength of the two superpower blocs has remained about the same in spite of four years of heavy escalation in mili-

tary spending by both governments.

Perhaps the most bizarre illustration of the "Keeping up with the Chernenkos" game, however, involves something other than nuclear weapons. Would you believe—psychic research?

*Mind Wars* is a book written by Ron McRae, a former associate of newspaper columnist Jack Anderson. The book might have escaped my attention if it had not been reviewed in "The Friday Review of Defense Literature," a newsletter prepared by the Air Force for the Department of Defense.

McRae tells a startling tale. Because of the reluctance of military officials to speak openly about the issue, his description of the ongoing flirtation with psychic research for military purposes is constructed almost entirely without official response or comment.

McRae estimates the United States may be spending as much as \$6 million annually on research of potential military applications of "psychic" powers. Among the activities he reported, a few stand out:

- The Office of Naval Intelligence has paid at least 34 psychics to try to help track Soviet submarines.

- NASA has explored the viability of telepathy as a system of communication in case of trouble with

electronic equipment in space.

- The CIA has funded experiments in remote viewing.

- The National Security Agency has used psychics in attempts to break intelligence codes.

- The U.S. Army has a special group called the First Earth Battalion headed by Lt. Col. Jim Channon. Channon has been on the staff of the Army War College, and First Earth Battalion materials have been used in Army curricula. The goal of the Battalion is to be a group of "warrior monks" trained in psychic powers who can function with flexibility in a situation of military crisis.

This kind of activity has been going on intermittently since the end of World War II. Apparently the results have been meager at best or more official recognition would have been given to it. At present, the matter is treated so delicately that the phrase "psychic research" isn't even used.

So why is the U.S. military investigating psychic research? Because

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*The U.S. is spending millions annually on research of potential military applications of 'psychic' powers.*

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there have been constant rumors that the Russians are investigating it. The CIA has been unable to verify Russian involvement, though it will not dismiss the possibility.

Stealth bombers, cruise missiles, chemical weapons, "star wars" weapons and—warrior monks! Where will it stop?

After reading *Mind Wars*, I am even more convinced that Christians need to pray and work for peace with justice, for negotiations to halt the senseless arms race, and—as Billy Graham has stated—for "SALT 10," the destruction of all nuclear arms. ■

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*Braidfoot is general counsel and director of Christian citizenship development for the Christian Life Commission. He coordinates the agency's work in the area of peace with justice.*



## Experts Search for Clues To Increase in Teen Suicides

The tragic dimensions of a nationwide "suicide epidemic" among young people continue to haunt American society.

Experts throughout the country are studying the problem, trying to isolate reasons for the fact that suicide among Americans age 15 to 24 rose 136% between 1960 and 1980, the last year for which complete statistics are available.

In 1960 the suicide rate for that age group was 5.2 per 100,000 young people. In 1980 the rate was 12.3 per 100,000.

One in every five suicides in 1980 involved victims in the 15-to-24-year age group. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in this age group.

Last year young Americans killed themselves at a rate of 100 per week—a total of 5,200. More than 500,000 attempted suicide.

Incidents of "cluster suicides," strings of conceivably "copycat" suicides, have attracted particular attention.

Psychologists have cited increasing child abuse, fear of nuclear holocaust, alcoholism and family dissolution as causes for suicidal behavior.

But experts also are pointing to another factor: the availability of firearms in the home. Nearly two-thirds of teens who kill themselves use guns, and four-fifths of them use handguns, according to experts.

—Compiled from news sources

## More Pain than Gain For Many U.S. Farmers

An ominous cloud hangs stubbornly over the heads of many American farmers.

"The rural economy hasn't been in such bad shape since Herbert Hoover left office," reports the *Texas Observer*. "In 1983, inflation-adjusted net farm income

plummeted to the lowest level of this century. In the same year, the cost of government farm programs reached record highs, exceeding in one year the combined costs of the programs during the eight years of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations."

A senior economist at the Federal Reserve Board estimates that more than a third of the nation's commercial farmers are in serious financial trouble and that many will go under.

An American Bankers Association study in 1983 found that 17% of farmers with outstanding loans could not make payments in 1984; the figure is sure to rise in 1985.

According to the *Economist*, the next big shock wave to hit the U.S. economy will be from farm loans. The publication reported that farmers owe "well over \$190 billion—much of it to small agricultural banks, almost 7% of which had losses in 1983." Over a quarter of the loans to the Farmers Home Administration were delinquent in 1983.

—The Washington Spectator

## American Wealth: The Few Continue to Have the Most

America's household wealth increasingly is being concentrated in the coffers of a small number of families with high annual incomes.

The richest 2% of American households—those whose wealth totaled more than \$455,000 per family—held 28% of the country's household wealth in 1983, according to a survey conducted by the Federal Reserve Board and six other federal agencies.

Other findings:

- The wealthiest 2% owned 71% of all tax-exempt municipal bonds, 38% of all taxable bonds, 22% of individual checking accounts, 13% of money-market accounts, 23% of certificates of deposit and 12% of money in savings

accounts. They also owned 62% of all stocks in private hands and 42% of all real estate purchased as investments.

- The typical American family had a net worth of a little under \$25,000—an increase of 18% over the 1977 figure, even after adjusting for inflation.

- More than 17% of all American families had a net worth of more than \$100,000.

—Parade Magazine

## Literacy Rate Declines, But Actual Numbers Grow

The worldwide illiteracy rate has been reduced from about 32% to about 28% in the past decade.

But the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which released the estimates, added that the absolute numbers keep increasing because of population growth in developing nations.

UNESCO said there are more than 800 million illiterates in the world today.

—Baptist World Alliance

## Sun Belt Benefits From Population Shift

The South and West attracted 94% of the nation's growth between 1980-83, largely at the expense of the Midwest, according to a U.S. Census Bureau report.

The population shift to the Sun Belt "has been even more pronounced in the first three years of this decade" than during the 1970s, the report added.

Why? "People are moving to where the jobs are," said a Census Bureau demographer.

California had the most growth, up 1.5 million. Texas was a close second, rising 1.4 million.

Meanwhile, Michigan experienced the biggest loss—193,000 persons or 2.1% of the state's population.

—USA Today

## SEND THE LIGHT

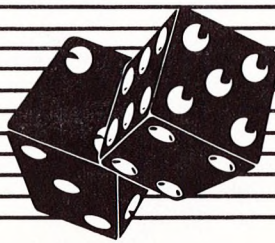
\_\_\_\_\_ The following persons would be interested in receiving LIGHT.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please remove my name from your mailing list.

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Street			Street		
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City	State	Zip	City	State	Zip

Cut out and mail to Christian Life Commission, 901 Commerce, #550, Nashville, TN 37203-3620.





## A Real Life Horror Story

A horror story is unfolding in the United States at this very hour. Tragically it is being ignored by the majority of churches and citizens and is being glorified by many members of the mass media and extolled by naive or cooperating state and national legislators.

This horror story involves the legalization of all forms of gambling which is a \$60 billion self-serving and destructive industry which preys on the poor, the uneducated, the aging, the young and on minorities.

Gambling is billed as an exciting game of chance and high stake winners but in reality it destroys families, pushes some to commit suicide and corrupts nearly everyone and everything it touches.

Christians have a moral responsibility to fight this growing menace with its false promise of lower taxes and exciting recreation. The following resources were designed especially for Southern Baptists and other Christians who want to know more about this menace and how they and their churches can turn back this insidious menace to society.

**The Gambling Menace**—This 16mm, 28½ minute film, released in 1985, is an excellent resource to show in states where legalized gambling is being considered. The film rents for \$38 and is available from the nearest Baptist Film Center or from **Broadman Film Library, Christian Film Service, P.O. Box 8204, Orlando, Florida 32856.**

The following resources are available by writing or calling **The Christian Life Commission, 901 Commerce, #550, Nashville, Tennessee 37203-3620, phone (615) 244-2495:**

**The Gambling Menace**—is a resource paper which gives an overview of the gambling problem. **Single copies 20 cents each.**

**Gambling Fact and Fiction**—is a 5½" x 8½" bulletin insert or flyer which gives facts and misconceptions about gambling. **20 for \$1.00.**

**Gambling Awareness/Action Guide**—is designed for personal awareness or as a four-session emphasis in the local church. The guide and supporting booklets can also be used as background material with local and state legislators to resist further legalization of gambling. **Single copies \$1.25.**

**Biblical Insights on Gambling**—gives major biblical insights related to gambling. **Single copies 20 cents each.**

**Lotteries**—examines moral, social and economic implications of lotteries. **Single copies 20 cents each.**

**Pari-Mutuel Gambling**—examines moral, social and economic implications of pari-mutuel gambling. **Single copies 20 cents each.**

**Videotape—Christians Confronting the Gambling Crisis**—this new videotape outlines the growing threat of gambling and is excellent for a special awareness/action emphasis in the church. **Videotapes are available for a \$10 service fee per showing in either ½" VHS or ¾" U-Matic formats. Videotapes can be purchased for \$25 in ½" VHS format or \$35 in ¾" U-Matic format.**

Send payment with order and save the cost of postage. Actual shipping charges will be added to orders to be billed.



**Christian Life  
Commission  
Of The Southern  
Baptist Convention**

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