

YOUR CALLING AND YOUR VOCATION

Sermon by

J. Robert H. Hamill

January 20, 1974

Genesis 3:17-19

Ecclesiasticus 38:31-34

Ephesians 4:1-6

Students have recently renewed their concern about their vocations. Many students feel they cannot afford the time or the money for "unproductive" studies; the humanities, the classics and languages feel like luxuries.

They turn therefore to more tangible careers in law, medicine, ministry, business, teaching, engineering -- to the places where there are jobs that pay salaries! They call these "vocations".

The word 'vocation' comes from Latin vocatio, to call; hence the English word 'calling'. What do these words mean in popular usage? If you 'miss your -calling' does that mean you should be doing some other work more suited to your talents? Does 'vocation' mean some craft you learn in "vocational" or "trade" school, as contrasted to a university?

The Calling of a Christian

In the Christian life, calling, or vocation, is a fundamental idea. The Christian calling is something God does. God calls you by name to a responsible life before him.

A recent creed declares that God "calls the worlds into being" and by his creative act he calls forth all created beings, including human beings. God calls to Adam, to everyman, 'Where are you? Are you hiding? Why are you afraid?' God called to Abraham, 'Go out'. To Moses, 'Go down to Egypt'. To Jeremiah, 'Go tear down and destroy, then plant and build.' To Amos, 'Go prophesy to my people'. To all the enslaved people of Israel God called, 'Come out.' In turn, his Son Jesus Christ called disciples. He called Matthew from the tax collector's table, Peter from his fishing nets. He called to the persecuting Pharisee, "Saul, Saul, why...?", which caused that man to say later he was "called to be an apostle." The call goes out to all persons, and those who are called together become the con-vocatio, the called-together, the church. They were "called to be saints," meaning called apart from the ratrace

of the human race to be used by God to extend his love and righteousness to all man kind. "For he who was free when called is a slave of Christ." (1 Cor. 7:22-23). Thereafter it was often true, as Bonhoeffer put it in our time, "The call to discipleship is the call to die" -- at least a call to serve, and at most a call to suffer on behalf of the suffering.*

Thus, to be called is to have a vocation, to be addressed by God and called to a task. Calling, vocation -- that is what the Christian life is all about.

First corruption: calling means a religious career

Unhappily this Christian understanding of calling has been corrupted, in two directions. First, the calling came to mean a call to a religious career, a call to the priesthood, to convent or monastery. The priestly or monastic life was thought to be superior to all other human activity; that alone constituted the true calling of God.

Martin Luther, himself a monk at one time, contended vehemently against that perversion. Everyone is a priest, he insisted, whether he be a pastor, a shoemaker or housewife. God calls people to work because he works, said Luther. He works at common occupations, no less. God is a tailor who makes for the deer a coat that lasts a lifetime. God is a shoemaker who provides hoofs that no animal can outwear. God is the cook and butler who sets a feast for the sparrows, and works the fields even when the farmer is resting. And Christ worked as a carpenter. The Virgin Mary worked, and when she heard the astonishing news that she was to become the mother of the Savior, she did not vaunt herself but went back home and milked the cows and scoured the kettles like any housemaid.

Peter worked as fisherman and was proud of his skill, but not too proud to take a suggestion from Jesus that he cast on the other side of the boat.

The shepherds worked; they had the mean job of watching their flocks by night, but after seeing the Babe in Bethlehem they went back. It does not say they went and shaved their heads, fasted, counted their rosaries and prayed; instead, the shepherds returned, it says. Where to? To their sheep, to the long hours and dreary work of keeping sheep by night.

So, Luther concludes, as God and Christ and the Virgin and Peter and the shepherds all worked, so we must work in our callings. God has no hands and feet of his own; he continues his work through human people.**

Luther here is arguing that every person has his responsible work to do; none is superior to others. The magistrate has his calling, the pastor his calling; each serves God according to his office. One calling is not better than another. Luther is not saying the pastor is no higher than the farmer; he is saying the farmer is every bit as high as the pastor. Luther did not downgrade the religious calling, he upgraded every calling. Every person is a priest, regardless of his daily work!

And despite our continuing perversions of this truth -- such as the habit of calling the pastor the "man" or woman-of-God and saying the pastor must have some special call from God -- despite all that, it still is the Christian truth that God calls everyone to a responsible life, and his vocation is his response to that call in some responsible daily work.

Peasant or pastor, his work is a prayer, a form of ministry. The more devotedly a person gives himself to his work, the more clearly he demonstrates his love for God and neighbor.

Second corruption: daily work takes the place of faith

The second corruption, the more common one, is the tendency to make daily work the dominant and defining experience in life. The daily job takes the place of faith. A person lets the job decide -- his questions of right and wrong. He takes his satisfactions from his job. Work becomes his religion! This too is a corruption of the Christian understanding of vocation. It is commonly felt that the Protestant work ethic means: you work to please God, therefore work, work, work hard, hard, hard! Furthermore, if you prosper that proves God is pleased with your work! Prosperity is something to be proud of! To be prosperous, be honest, frugal, punctual, diligent, energetic. Thus the original idea of calling got perverted, and vocation was thought to be nothing else than a consuming passion to work hard and get rich.

The end result of this perversion has often been tragic. Work became no longer an expression of true religion, it became religion itself. People trusted their daily job to give meaning to life; they let the job determine their morals, and they measured their own worth by their paychecks. Work, meant to be a part of life, began to take over all life; work was not primarily a thing one did to live, but the thing one lived to do. Work became God. Also, work served as escape from the self; busy with his tools and account books, a person did not need to confront himself, and he could dodge questions about his inner soul. His overcommitment to the job consumed so much energy he neglected his duties as citi-

zen, parent or friend. He began to feel guilty about leisure; he felt it sinful to play and to "waste time". Doing nothing was the hardest thing to do!

But the most damaging result of the Protestant work ethic as it came to be perverted was this: it gave no defense against the lack of work, or the lack of meaningful work. If calling consists of daily work as one's service to God, how can calling have any reality for people without work -- the unemployed, the not-yet-employed, and the unemployable? If I have no job, or am not able to hold a job, have I missed my calling? Have I no vocation? And what about all the drudgery, routine, boredom in today's work? The decline of craftsmanship in various trades and the replacement of people by machines and computers -- how can I feel called in such a world as this? Even suppose I do hold a job; is my response to God to be measured by my paycheck, by net profits, by classroom hours taught, by grades earned on exams? Can daily work so secularized, so dehumanized, so demanding -- can such work be the calling of God? In Martin Luther's day the "called" shoemaker hand-crafted boots for a certain neighbor; and the housewife baked bread for her family and sat by the fireplace each night mending their clothes. Such people could say their prayers and offer their daily work to the glory of God, but how many people today can honestly feel the work they do is ad gloriam Dei?

Recovering the Protestant work ethic

Consequently there is a lot of shoddy work being done, and work not being done that is paid for, and loafing on the job, and downright cheating and fraud. When people no longer work for the glory of God, they wonder why should they be honest, or frugal, or diligent or energetic? So now, in the interest of restoring some dignity to daily work, we need to consider again the original Protestant work ethic. Let me ask, what's wrong with the conviction that God considers daily work a good thing? What's wrong with getting to work on time, and doing an honest day's work for a full day's pay? What's wrong with hard work? and thrift? and work for the glory of God? The Christian calling is, of course, larger than daily work, but it includes daily work. Daily vocation is only part, but it is a legitimate and important part of the Christian calling.

Marks of a Christian vocation

This does not mean that every job is a divine calling. Far from it. 1) To be a divine calling a task must, for one thing, be necessary work. It must contribute something needed, not something luxurious or frivolous. There is a lot of trivia which cannot be made or sold or used to the glory of God. 2) To be a divine calling the work must be morally right. In early times Christians were forbidden to be gladiators or soldiers. John Woolman hired out as a clerk, was ordered to make out a bill of sale for a slave; young Woolman gathered his courage and told his boss that buying and selling people like property was "inconsistent with the Christian religion", hence he could not take part in it. Needless to say, and no surprise to him, he was fired. Archibald Cox was fired and Elliot Richardson resigned, for the same reason: some things simply cannot be done to the glory of God.

To be a divine calling a job must be necessary work, it must be morally right, and 3) it must call forth a person's best efforts. Income does not substitute for the satisfaction of putting forth one's best work. In some jobs these days there is not much other satisfaction. Preaching, for instance. If a person cannot know at the end of the day that he has worked to the highest level of his own competence he goes to sleep a wretched person. If a person is not doing his best nor using his full powers, if he is watching the clock and cutting the corners, he has not yet found his Christian vocation. There is that old and corny story of the housemaid who went to a revival meeting and got converted, then applied to the church elders for membership. They quizzed her for some evidence of her conversion, but being simple-minded, she had no words to convince them. "How can you prove that you really are born anew as a Christian?" "Well," she replied, "I used to sweep the dirt under the rug, but since I came to know Christ, I get the dustpan and take the dirt to the trashcan." The solemn elders nodded. "She's got the real thing". The great question is not what work you will do, but will you do it to the glory of God?

I consider it significant that God embodied himself in a village carpenter, not in a king or statesman or general or priest. That was a most fitting image for the God whom the Bible all along represents as a worker. "In six days the Lord God made heaven and earth...and on the seventh day rested from his work". If indeed God is the Master Workman of all creation, then work is an honorable and necessary thing for God's people. Those who work with competence at any necessary task thereby share the image

of the Creator. God calls us to our tasks, hence we are fellow workmen with God, and by that fact we are created in his likeness and fashioned in his image. We are called to be responsible before him, and our daily vocation expresses that calling.

* Here and elsewhere I am indebted to J. Robert Nelson for occasional thoughts and phrases from his article, "The Hope of Your Calling", Nexus 46, Spring, 1973.

** Roland H. Bainton: Here I Stand, pp. 233-234

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel Boston University on January 20, 1974. Additional copies available free.

THE WORLD MAY BE WORSE OFF THAN YOU THINK

Jeremiah 6:11-15, and Matthew 16:1-4

Robert H. Hamill

We join today in observing the cease-fire and Vietnam agreement. We are not celebrating: there is too much of the past to weep about, too much of the future to fear. We observe this day not with cheer but with a sigh of relief. We want to avoid Jeremiah's rebuke of those who cry, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.

What has happened

Most people are sober enough to recognize the general folly of this whole Vietnam adventure. We devastated a nation we intended to protect. The war took the lives or health or homes or freedom or happiness of millions of people. It damaged the spirit of the American people to the point of despair and countering violence. A whole generation of the young and many of their elders were turned against government and had their faith in their nation undercut.

Of course there were good things within it. There was an outpouring of compassion by civilians who worked in the villages of Vietnam, and some heroic labors to meet the medical needs of the war victims; and GI's adopted orphans and did other works of mercy. - Here at home there rose up some beautiful people of brave deeds and gracious words, such as those of Daniel Berrigan:

Our apologies, our apologies, good friends,
for the fracture of good order,
for the burning of paper instead of children,
for the angering of the orderlies
in the rose garden of the charnel house.
We could not, so help us God, do otherwise,
for we are sick at heart and cannot rest
for thinking of the Land of the Burning Children
and for thinking of that other Child
of whom the poet, Luke, speaks.
Our consciences are in His keeping
and in no other.

Now out of the cease-fire agreement come other benefits. Mary McGrory listed some. We woke up this morning without hearing that American planes set new bombing records yesterday. This week we can use the Commons for some other good thing than peace demonstrations. Congress can debate the issues without being accused of "jeopardizing delicate negotiations," and people can stage protests without being charged they are "prolonging the war."

Furthermore, these ten aching years have taught us something. At last we know that we are not a glorious people and saviors of mankind, but, like other militaristic powers before us, we Americans like to bully our way around in the world and tell other people what they ought to do. Now we know ourselves a bit better. We are a wiser but sadder people.

Peace, but no peace

But remember again Jeremiah's complaint that the prophets were false prophets. They cried Peace, peace, when there was no peace. Certainly there is no peace in our world. No "peace with honor" at least. I see no honor in what we have done. It is a peace of exhaustion, a peace of necessity, a peace of compromise. No peace in Vietnam: only a fragile truce, under a Council of Reconciliation and Concord that appears too tenuous to achieve order in that turbulent land. No peace in Saigon so long as the critics of the Thieu regime are rounded up and thrown in jail to rot. No peace in Hanoi so long as the hospital destroyed by our Christmas bombing stands in rubble, and the sick lie on cots in improvised shelters. No peace in the countryside where the land is cratered and guerillas hide in bunkers to sleep by day and stage terror by night. No peace in the American soul which is troubled by guilt because we panicked or were deceived into a war that Mr. Kissinger this week confessed has been a civil war. We have been the major power in the war that killed 55,000 fellow citizens and over one and a half million Vietnamese, north and south--a price too dear for achieving so little, a price extracted from the dead. No peace to Daniel Ellsberg who is accused of revealing what the American people had a right to know all along. No peace to the poor whose health, education and welfare have been deprived of the \$137 billion we spent on the war. No peace to the GI veterans who come home from the killing to find themselves neglected and unemployable.

The unfinished task remaining before us

Let no one cry Peace, peace, for there can be no peace until we take up the unfinished tasks remaining before us.

1. Reparations. The first act required of the strong is to help the weak. That means for the United States to beat swords into plowshares, convert bombs into bread, and offer vast reparations to Vietnam both north and south, to help repair the damage we have done and help that sad and damaged little country stand on its feet again. Even before Congress can do that we can begin the action by collecting personal funds for human relief. I propose that next Sunday we take up a substantial offering toward rebuilding of Bach Mai hospital which was gutted during the Christmas bombing.

2. Welcome home the GI veterans, including the POW's, and increase our concern for them. We have neglected them even though many are living among us already. Let us respect their work as soldiers, for they were often as reluctant to go as we were to have them go, yet they ran the risks and they suffered the pain to body and mind. Now as fellow citizens we can begin to heal the hurts and bind up the wounds of our own people.

3. Also we shall extend the same concern for young men who resisted the draft, who were jailed for their moral opposition to the war or fled the country to obey their consciences, just as countless of our grandfathers fled their countries and came here to escape the military demands in old Europe. Now our young men need amnesty. Amnesty is not an act of forgiveness. They committed no crime that needs forgiveness. They acted out of conscience in the several ways available to them, and now we need their contribution to our common life. Amnesty wipes out the legal charge and restores men to full citizenship without penalty. Therefore I call again, as twice before I have called in this place, I call again upon Congress, as soon as our POW's return home in 60 days, to grant full amnesty and to restore all civil rights to those young men who refused to take part in the Vietnam war for conscience sake.

4. Works of justice for all our people must be our fourth unfinished task. Justice would require that we scale down our vast military establishment to a modest defense system, and convert the economy into the constructive works of health care, housing, schooling and welfare for all our people. Thus we could take up and expand the humane works of a civilized people.

Ambiguity of the future

Even if we diligently perform these four unfinished tasks, there is still no guarantee that Pres. Nixon's vision can be achieved. He declared we have a peace with honor, and he pled that we make it a peace that heals and a peace that lasts. Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that it may be so, but there is no certainty that it can be done. Political fortunes are unpredictable. In 1937 Chamberlain came back from Munich promising "peace in our time." Last October Kissinger came home from Paris saying "peace is at hand." But peace requires much, much more than treaty agreements. Peace requires a sober turning away from policies that make for war and a firm devotion to the things that make for peace. The great tragedy of the Vietnam war is that we have been somewhat confirmed in our long long reliance upon violence. Once more we believe that violence works. Did it not stop the communist horde from the north? Did it not defend the "democratic" regime in Saigon? Did the

Christmas bombing not bring Hanoi to terms? Many many American people believe that it did!

As the UN charter declares, "wars begin in the minds of men." American wars begin in the minds and hearts of American people, and in their laws and institutions. The obstacles to peace are more formidable than the critics assume who blame this last war on Johnson or Nixon. It is not the villainy of villains that makes for war, but the acquiescence of the righteous. It is not a demonic president but a morally calloused people who allow a war to happen. When the morals of the people decay, the public life decays. So long as people vote only their own self-interest, so long as they cop out from their public duty, and hurt others' reputations to save their own, and fight at home over who must do the dishes, and cheat on exams, and do shoddy work on the job, and lie on their income tax--just so long will war seem more sensible to such people than the costs of peace.

Watchman, what of the night?

All which makes it painful to hear Jesus replying to those who asked for a sign of the times. You know the weather, he said. Red sky at night, sailors' delight; red sky at morning, sailors take warning. But you cannot read the signs of the time!

If we were to calculate the signs of our time we might come up with a gloomy forecast of the social weather ahead. The weather map includes storm signals: the general collapse of morals, with standards of honesty and self-discipline in decay; the increase of crime, especially among the young; the dull, drab dehumanization of city life; the disregard of human rights of the poor, and the consequent eruption of violence to assert those rights; material success considered the evidence of the good life; and careless destruction of the natural environment; the use of the law to favor the rich; the calculating corruption in Government. The long, unending list makes for a dismal future.

Our American society resembles a highly talented person who embodies both the gifts of genius and the defects of brutality. So when I ask as Isaiah asked,

Watchman, what of the night?
Watchman, what of the night?

I seem to hear Isaiah's reply, "The morning comes, also the night." (Isa. 21:11) Good and bad, light and dark. Our future will be what Dickens said of the year 1789, "the best of times and the worst of times." As I reflect on times past and the probable course of the future I find comfort in Charles A.

Beard's summary of what he learned from his vast study of history:

1. Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad with power.
2. The bee fertilizes the flower it robs.
3. When it is dark enough you can see the stars.
4. Though the mills of the gods grind slowly, they grind exceeding fine.

What can one person do?

As for what any one person can do, especially a person committed to Christ, I find great meaning in the figure of speech from Gabriel Marcel.

'I might compare my situation with that of an actor who has been given his own cues and lines, but who has not had the play as a whole read to him and has not even been told briefly what it is about. He has merely been told: at such and such a cue you will make your entrance, you will speak the following lines, do this piece of business, then make your exit. The actor has to suppose that his lines and his business which seem to him pointless, have their point in the total pattern of the play. Thus if life as a whole has a point, a plot or theme, then in some sense my own life has a plot or a theme too.'

I am called to play my part even though I cannot see the end of it nor the overriding purpose beyond it. All I can be sure of is something like this: while there is a political prisoner in Saigon my freedom is not sure; while there is one child in Hanoi suffering from American bombing, my conscience is not clear; while there is one person in this university who is hurt or deprived, my work is not finished; while there is any person in this land deprived of his rights, my rights are in trouble. Admittedly,

One man's love can't set a people free;
Two men's love can't set a people free;
But if two and two and fifty make a million
We'll see the day come round,
We'll see the day come round,

as Peter Seeger sings it. We will see the day come round when this land no longer defines its boundaries as the Gross National Product at the top and Social Security at the bottom, with the Pentagon on the right and the Constitution on the left, but our human society will be bounded on the north by the aurora borealis, on the south by the changing seasons, on the east by the primeval chaos, and on the west by the Day of Judgment.

What of the future?

That is a dream, and a faith, but not a certainty. There is of course no proof that the City of God will become a visible reality in our time, or in any time. There is no guarantee that this nation, or any nation, or any civilization, can fulfill enough of God's purpose to endure on the face of the earth. Our human folly is stupid enough to blunder and blast us into nowhere. The slow moral decay may undercut all our potential for greatness.

Yet, the City of God is trying to be born, and birth in history takes a long time, a very long time. You and I must live all our life in heart-breaking frustrations, taking comfort in small advances--things we work hard to accomplish, such as a housing project for the poor, the election of one honest and reasonable councilman, the reform of a prison, or the protection of one person who runs the risk of speaking truth to those in power. These are small but worthwhile efforts. "Day comes, and also the night," and we are often defeated. In the short run the prospects are terribly gloomy: stormy weather is the social forecast.

However, at the very time when society increases in fury and trouble, many people are becoming more sensitive to evil, more determined to cure every wrong, more dedicated to the common good. Those people are utterly persuaded that nothing can separate them from God's overwhelming love and power. We are in the hands of God who directs and governs the human drama, and we have our little parts to play out faithfully, leaving to him to work them into the great theme of human destiny. He is able to do abundantly more than we can imagine. For thus says the Lord:

As the rain and snow come down from heaven
and do not return until they have watered the earth,
making it blossom and bear fruit,
and give seed for sowing and bread to eat,
so shall the word which comes from my mouth prevail;
It shall not return to me fruitless
but will accomplish my purpose
and succeed in the task I gave it.
You shall indeed go out with joy
and be led forth in peace. (Isaiah 55:10-12)

* * * * *

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on January 28, 1973.
Additional copies available free.

THE RIGHTS TO LIVE AND TO DIE IN DIGNITY

Jeremiah 1:4-10 and I Corinthians 3:16-23

Robert H. Hamill

Two rights appear to be so "right" they would need no defending: the right to be born and the right to die as dignified human beings. But changes in the law, changes in morals, changes in social customs, and spectacular changes in technology all threaten these rights.

I

The recent Supreme Court decision on abortion brings the right to be born onto center stage. (The decision came on the day of Lyndon Johnson's death, January 22, and the week of the Vietnam cease-fire, else it would have aroused more public stir.) The decision declares that states may not prohibit abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy, nor in second trimester if the mother's health is endangered, as determined by the medical judgment of a doctor. However wise or mistaken, this decision puts the issue where it belongs: on the free choice of the mother and doctor. (I wish the father also were consulted. His body is also concerned, this is his child too.) Now that abortions are legal almost every woman has to face this issue and many women will be put under terrible pressure by other people to seek abortions.

One caveat, to begin with. This decision puts the doctor in an impossible situation. It may be easy to decide that abortion is justified in cases of rape and incest, or when the woman has contracted measles or taken certain drugs. But suppose the woman tells her doctor she feels miserable; she is in pain, nauseated, with cramps, and the like. How much of that is real, and how much of it is a disguise, a faked appeal, a real but self-induced psychosomatic pain which results from her sudden realization of what pregnancy means? It means her career will be disrupted, she will lose job and income, or perhaps she regrets that one night of passion, or she has growing dislike for the man involved, and she must care for this child for years to come. How can the doctor sort out such factors? How can the doctor say no to the woman who screams about her discomfort? Will some doctors take the easy Yes and become known as abortionists? Will the woman shop around to find a doctor who will say yes?

When is human life human?

The crux of the problem is, "Is the fetus a human being?" If yes, no doctor will abort; he cannot condone murder. If not a human being, what is it? That

depends on your definition of human life. Science cannot define human life; science can only describe the process of growth from conception to full independent existence. It is known that within a few hours of intercourse conception occurs; this sets the genetic future of that individual. Within six days the zygote moves through the fallopian tube and enters the uterus where it begins to grow. Within eight weeks the fetus develops all organic structure. The brain develops and emits waves that can be recorded by EEG; the heart and other organs take recognizable shape; and the fetus turns its head, kicks and drinks. The fetus is not an inert sculpture that comes forth months later; it is a living body from near the very beginning, with organs formed and systems working.

But is it a human being? It is undeniably human, nothing else; the genetic fix has determined its body type and basic talents. If it is not a human being it is at least human life. Each person must draw the line somewhere, and this is a religious issue. In the absence of any divine definition, I feel safe in drawing the line at the point where we assume responsibility for human life, even for potential human life, and protect it because it is human. "Abortion is not just another surgical procedure. Nor is it murder. Abortion is abortion. It is a peculiar moral problem...it is the destruction of potential..." potential which has already begun to develop. (Ralph B. Potter) I am convinced that what is potential ought to be welcomed to actuality, so we can affirm that creation is good.

According to Jeremiah, the Lord God declared to him,

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I consecrated you. (Jer.1-4)

Hebrews and Christians know that body and soul are united; the body has sanctity because it is "the temple of the living God." (I Cor. 3:17) No person is absolute master of his own body; he has no dominion over it, he holds it in trust for God's purposes. This is the reason for strong moral objection to self-mutilation and suicide; your body is not your own, it is God's and you are God's. You hold yourself, body, mind, and spirit, in trust for God's purposes.

Genetic controls advisable?

When therefore we speak of therapeutic abortion we use language loosely. It is therapeutic for the mother indeed, and at times that must be the overriding consideration. But it means to destroy a potential person's chance of having the life that other people decide for him is not worth living. But what does that living life have to say?

Beyond simple abortion there is genetic surgery designed to prevent a child from being born defective. Someone decides such things. Such genetics means freedom for the decider, mother or doctor, and death for the child who is decided out of existence. Who has the right to decide for another being its right to life? I wonder if we want a world where genetics is the master science, where human life is so planned that everyone must measure up to certain standards before he has a right to be born? B. F. Skinner wants society without freedom or dignity, but do we want a society in which medical science can know, modify and control all abnormal genetic processes? Do we want a society in which government officials or elite groups of scientists can read people's minds, direct their thoughts, control their behavior by chemical techniques? Do we want anyone deciding what kind of people may live and what kinds must die? Must the defective child be killed before he has a chance to live with his handicap? Must the unwanted, unintended child perish without being given a chance to win his way in the hearts of his parents?

I ask these questions because we are engaged here in a most risky project that involves pride of knowledge and power of technique. If we must have a guiding principle let it be this: protect all human life. Let us be consistent: protect the life of the criminal, so no capital punishment; protect the life of young men, so no ordering them into battle; protect the life of innocents, so no bombing of cities for any reason; protect the life of the unborn, so that even the defective are saved unless clearly they are not human and have no chance to become so.

Extreme caution is required to protect the sanctity of life, all human life, including the aged, the weak, the deformed, the unskilled and perverse and cantankerous, and the helpless, especially the helpless, including the unborn. Now that the unborn are no longer protected by law, who will protect them except the conscientious mother and doctor who decide whether the unborn shall be born or perish? The Lord God of all creation bestows sanctity:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I consecrated you.

Such feeling of awe and unyielding respect for life would help us to sense the mystery of life and to live faithfully before the Creator who created all life and called it good.

II

In our society it is bad manners to grow old.
You should stay young, smooth, pretty, vigorous.
To age, and to show your age, shows bad taste,
poor judgment.

Rejection of old age

This common attitude inclines us to shove the elderly out of sight. First we deprive them of work, so they feel useless. If the productive years are the good years, and the last, aging years are unproductive, then indeed the unproductive are useless, valueless, unworthy. Then we send them to "sunset homes"--for their own good of course!--and there 70% of people with terminal illness are housed, subtracted from their families. We feel the aged are biologically repugnant, so we shove them out of sight, out of mind, just as we put into the attic the lovely old things no longer useful but too precious to throw away. There we "sanitize old age, and sterilize death," and shatter the full experience of life by pretending that death does not belong to us. Death is alien, a foreign experience. Thus we rob the old of their chance to complete their life; this is the final robbery, the last indignity we inflict on the elderly.

Sigmund Freud explains this strange rejection of those we love. The son respects his father, admires him, even identifies with him. He also wants to take his place, and that wish gives rise to hatred and fear. In myth the hero always rises up against his father and kills him. In real life the killing is symbolic. The father-image is stripped of its glamour and the father is killed by being depreciated. Old age is discredited. (See Simone de Beauvoir: The Coming of Age, 218)

Some reaction against this is arising. Economic benefits are given to the aged: pensions, tax favors, even reduced fare on the MTA. Programs for the aged include Meals on wheels, Golden Age clubs, car pools, and the like. There is some merit to these, but for the most part they tend to patronize the elderly and keep them dependent and powerless. The Gray Panthers have a different idea. The elderly are organizing, as the blacks and the women organized, to say, "Age is good. Grey hair is beautiful." The Gray Panthers intend to rehabilitate the elderly, who are now mostly forced drop-outs, so they can re-enter the main stream of public life and take part in re-making the world. They call on everyone over 65, Get angry, liberate yourselves!

No evasion of death

Sooner or later the elderly person must face up to death. He can postpone it but not avoid it. When he reflects soberly, or when he is compelled to face

it by sentence of terminal disease, he is likely to go through five stages, as Dr. Kubler-Ross describes it.

1. He denies it. "It can't be true. Not me!"
2. He gets angry. "Why me? Why not that rascal so-and-so?" He resents those who will survive, and blames the doctors.
3. He bargains. "If I can live till Christmas, OK. Or until I am 70, I won't object."
4. He gets depressed when he sees no avoiding it. He may regret his past life, cry over his unfinished work, reject his family. He cannot be comforted.
5. Finally he may come to peace of mind and a quiet dignity. To reach that final stage he needs to know the truth, and must have some accurate assessment of his condition, however grim. Then he can face death with courage.

In times past death was taken as normal. A person usually died at home, surrounded by his caring family. When he breathed his last, some friend would put a cold mirror to his lips to test whether there was any breath. Symbolically this was done to Pope John. Attending cardinals brought in a small golden hammer and pounded on his forehead, and called out softly, "Roncalli, are you alive?"

The pope is one of few persons in the world who knows where he will die: there in that bed where he sleeps. Everything comes to him there, including death. But in our case, we are likely to die in a hospital where final care and responsibility are transferred from family to professionals, the medical team and their equipment. There every effort is made to save the patient, including "heroic" measures, that is, extreme, all-out efforts. Machines are attached to heart and to lungs, drugs given by needle and food by tubes, and the process goes on even while the brain dies, to prolong the dying life. It really prolongs the dying. A great contest rages: the power of science vs. the claim of death, and the patient is not always the winner. A nurse at the Boston University Hospital said recently:

"We had weekly goals for Mr. Brown. One week it was to get him off the respirator, the next week to eat, then to watch TV. He resisted and it reached the point where we realized that if he accomplished the goal he became angry at us. He said this was not the way he wanted to live--that he wanted to go home and die." (Patriot Ledger, Jan. 27, 1973)

Many doctors and nurses, unless they are educated out of this pagan notion, are afraid of death; they consider death a defeat of their skills. Therefore they cannot honor the patient's right to his own death.

Decision about dying

When heroic medical measures are given it may fall to the family to decide when enough is enough. You may be asked to decide when to let your mother die! The utter power of medical technology can keep a body clinically alive long beyond the point where the patient or his family would choose. Therefore the patient himself may decide ahead of time.

A pastor friend of mine (Gardiner M. Day) tells of the time he called on a parishioner in a nursing home. The woman was so crippled with arthritis she was dependent on other people to dress her, lift her into sitting position in bed, and feed her. One day she greeted him,

"I am glad to see you, pastor, but I had hoped I would never see you again. Since I last saw you I have had pneumonia. I hoped they would let me pass painlessly into the next world, but they gave me antibiotics and so you find me alive and as useless as ever. Can you tell me why I have to live?"

Is not the right to die with dignity a right we all desire, and deserve? May not an old person decide for himself how and when he may die? There is a document sometimes used called a Living Will. "To my family, my physician, my pastor, my lawyer: If the time comes when I can no longer take part in decisions for my own future, let this statement stand as testament of my wishes: If there is no reasonable expectation of my recovery from physical or mental disability, I, John Doe, request that I be allowed to die and not be kept alive by artificial means or heroic measures...I do not fear death as much as I fear the indignity of deterioration, dependence and hopeless pain. I ask that drugs be administered to me for terminal suffering even if they hasten the moment of death."

A person has the right to refuse treatment, or, if he is beyond the point of saying so himself, he has the right to have others say it for him, bound by his wishes. Death belongs in the whole life, and if a person is a whole person, attending wholly to his whole experience, he has a right to his own death.

III

The sanctity of life certainly includes two rights: First, the right of the unborn to be born, thereby to face the hazards of being unwanted or handicapped, but also to know the wonder and glory of living. He has the right to decide for himself whether his life is worth the living. Second, the right to decide how to die.

The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, (Job 1:21) and the Lord's people have the right to accept that life and to give that life back again, but never to take it from another or to deny it to another. Each person has his own rights.

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on January 28, 1973.
Additional copies available free.

THE RIGHTS TO LIVE AND TO DIE IN DIGNITY

Jeremiah 1:4-10 and I Corinthians 3:16-23

Robert H. Hamill

...

Two rights appear to be so "right" they would need no defending: the right to be born and the right to die as dignified human beings. But changes in the law, changes in morals, changes in social customs, and spectacular changes in technology all threaten these rights.

I

The recent Supreme Court decision on abortion brings the right to be born onto center stage. (The decision came on the day of Lyndon Johnson's death, January 22, and the week of the Vietnam cease-fire, else it would have aroused more public stir.) The decision declares that states may not prohibit abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy, nor in second trimester if the mother's health is endangered, as determined by the medical judgment of a doctor. However wise or mistaken, this decision puts the issue where it belongs: on the free choice of the mother and doctor. (I wish the father also were consulted. His body is also concerned, this is his child too.) Now that abortions are legal almost every woman has to face this issue and many women will be put under terrible pressure by other people to seek abortions.

One caveat, to begin with. This decision puts the doctor in an impossible situation. It may be easy to decide that abortion is justified in cases of rape and incest, or when the woman has contracted measles or taken certain drugs. But suppose the woman tells her doctor she feels miserable; she is in pain, nauseated, with cramps, and the like. How much of that is real, and how much of it is a disguise, a faked appeal, a real but self-induced psychosomatic pain which results from her sudden realization of what pregnancy means? It means her career will be disrupted, she will lose job and income, or perhaps she regrets that one night of passion, or she has growing dislike for the man involved, and she must care for this child for years to come. How can the doctor sort out such factors? How can the doctor say no to the woman who screams about her discomfort? Will some doctors take the easy Yes and become known as abortionists? Will the woman shop around to find a doctor who will say yes?

When is human life human?

The crux of the problem is, "Is the fetus a human being?" If yes, no doctor will abort; he cannot condone murder. If not a human being, what is it? That

depends on your definition of human life. Science cannot define human life; science can only describe the process of growth from conception to full independent existence. It is known that within a few hours of intercourse conception occurs; this sets the genetic future of that individual. Within six days the zygote moves through the fallopian tube and enters the uterus where it begins to grow. Within eight weeks the fetus develops all organic structure. The brain develops and emits waves that can be recorded by EEG; the heart and other organs take recognizable shape; and the fetus turns its head, kicks and drinks. The fetus is not an inert sculpture that comes forth months later; it is a living body from near the very beginning, with organs formed and systems working.

But is it a human being? It is undeniably human, nothing else; the genetic fix has determined its body type and basic talents. If it is not a human being it is at least human life. Each person must draw the line somewhere, and this is a religious issue. In the absence of any divine definition, I feel safe in drawing the line at the point where we assume responsibility for human life, even for potential human life, and protect it because it is human. "Abortion is not just another surgical procedure. Nor is it murder. Abortion is abortion. It is a peculiar moral problem...it is the destruction of potential..." potential which has already begun to develop. (Ralph B. Potter) I am convinced that what is potential ought to be welcomed to actuality, so we can affirm that creation is good.

According to Jeremiah, the Lord God declared to him,

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I consecrated you. (Jer.1-4)

Hebrews and Christians know that body and soul are united; the body has sanctity because it is "the temple of the living God." (I Cor. 3:17) No person is absolute master of his own body; he has no dominion over it, he holds it in trust for God's purposes. This is the reason for strong moral objection to self-mutilation and suicide; your body is not your own, it is God's and you are God's. You hold yourself, body, mind, and spirit, in trust for God's purposes.

Genetic controls advisable?

When therefore we speak of therapeutic abortion we use language loosely. It is therapeutic for the mother indeed, and at times that must be the overriding consideration. But it means to destroy a potential person's chance of having the life that other people decide for him is not worth living. But what does that living life have to say?

Beyond simple abortion there is genetic surgery designed to prevent a child from being born defective. Someone decides such things. Such genetics means freedom for the decider, mother or doctor, and death for the child who is decided out of existence. Who has the right to decide for another being its right to life? I wonder if we want a world where genetics is the master science, where human life is so planned that everyone must measure up to certain standards before he has a right to be born? B. F. Skinner wants society without freedom or dignity, but do we want a society in which medical science can know, modify and control all abnormal genetic processes? Do we want a society in which government officials or elite groups of scientists can read people's minds, direct their thoughts, control their behavior by chemical techniques? Do we want anyone deciding what kind of people may live and what kinds must die? Must the defective child be killed before he has a chance to live with his handicap? Must the unwanted, unintended child perish without being given a chance to win his way in the hearts of his parents?

I ask these questions because we are engaged here in a most risky project that involves pride of knowledge and power of technique. If we must have a guiding principle let it be this: protect all human life. Let us be consistent: protect the life of the criminal, so no capital punishment; protect the life of young men, so no ordering them into battle; protect the life of innocents, so no bombing of cities for any reason; protect the life of the unborn, so that even the defective are saved unless clearly they are not human and have no chance to become so.

Extreme caution is required to protect the sanctity of life, all human life, including the aged, the weak, the deformed, the unskilled and perverse and cantankerous, and the helpless, especially the helpless, including the unborn. Now that the unborn are no longer protected by law, who will protect them except the conscientious mother and doctor who decide whether the unborn shall be born or perish? The Lord God of all creation bestows sanctity:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I consecrated you.

Such feeling of awe and unyielding respect for life would help us to sense the mystery of life and to live faithfully before the Creator who created all life and called it good.

II

In our society it is bad manners to grow old. You should stay young, smooth, pretty, vigorous. To age, and to show your age, shows bad taste, poor judgment.

Rejection of old age

This common attitude inclines us to shove the elderly out of sight. First we deprive them of work, so they feel useless. If the productive years are the good years, and the last, aging years are unproductive, then indeed the unproductive are useless, valueless, unworthy. Then we send them to "sunset homes"--for their own good of course!--and there 70% of people with terminal illness are housed, subtracted from their families. We feel the aged are biologically repugnant, so we shove them out of sight, out of mind, just as we put into the attic the lovely old things no longer useful but too precious to throw away. There we "sanitize old age, and sterilize death," and shatter the full experience of life by pretending that death does not belong to us. Death is alien, a foreign experience. Thus we rob the old of their chance to complete their life; this is the final robbery, the last indignity we inflict on the elderly.

Sigmund Freud explains this strange rejection of those we love. The son respects his father, admires him, even identifies with him. He also wants to take his place, and that wish gives rise to hatred and fear. In myth the hero always rises up against his father and kills him. In real life the killing is symbolic. The father-image is stripped of its glamour and the father is killed by being depreciated. Old age is discredited. (See Simone de Beauvoir: The Coming of Age, 218)

Some reaction against this is arising. Economic benefits are given to the aged: pensions, tax favors, even reduced fare on the MTA. Programs for the aged include Meals on wheels, Golden Age clubs, car pools, and the like. There is some merit to these, but for the most part they tend to patronize the elderly and keep them dependent and powerless. The Gray Panthers have a different idea. The elderly are organizing, as the blacks and the women organized, to say, "Age is good. Grey hair is beautiful." The Gray Panthers intend to rehabilitate the elderly, who are now mostly forced drop-outs, so they can re-enter the main stream of public life and take part in re-making the world. They call on everyone over 65, Get angry, liberate yourselves!

No evasion of death

Sooner or later the elderly person must face up to death. He can postpone it but not avoid it. When he reflects soberly, or when he is compelled to face

it by sentence of terminal disease, he is likely to go through five stages, as Dr. Kubler-Ross describes it.

1. He denies it. "It can't be true. Not me!"
2. He gets angry. "Why me? Why not that rascal so-and-so?" He resents those who will survive, and blames the doctors.
3. He bargains. "If I can live till Christmas, OK. Or until I am 70, I won't object."
4. He gets depressed when he sees no avoiding it. He may regret his past life, cry over his unfinished work, reject his family. He cannot be comforted.
5. Finally he may come to peace of mind and a quiet dignity. To reach that final stage he needs to know the truth, and must have some accurate assessment of his condition, however grim. Then he can face death with courage.

In times past death was taken as normal. A person usually died at home, surrounded by his caring family. When he breathed his last, some friend would put a cold mirror to his lips to test whether there was any breath. Symbolically this was done to Pope John. Attending cardinals brought in a small golden hammer and pounded on his forehead, and called out softly, "Roncalli, are you alive?"

The pope is one of few persons in the world who knows where he will die: there in that bed where he sleeps. Everything comes to him there, including death. But in our case, we are likely to die in a hospital where final care and responsibility are transferred from family to professionals, the medical team and their equipment. There every effort is made to save the patient, including "heroic" measures, that is, extreme, all-out efforts. Machines are attached to heart and to lungs, drugs given by needle and food by tubes, and the process goes on even while the brain dies, to prolong the dying life. It really prolongs the dying. A great contest rages: the power of science vs. the claim of death, and the patient is not always the winner. A nurse at the Boston University Hospital said recently:

"We had weekly goals for Mr. Brown. One week it was to get him off the respirator, the next week to eat, then to watch TV. He resisted and it reached the point where we realized that if he accomplished the goal he became angry at us. He said this was not the way he wanted to live--that he wanted to go home and die." (Patriot Ledger, Jan. 27, 1973)

Many doctors and nurses, unless they are educated out of this pagan notion, are afraid of death; they consider death a defeat of their skills. Therefore they cannot honor the patient's right to his own death.

Decision about dying

When heroic medical measures are given it may fall to the family to decide when enough is enough. You may be asked to decide when to let your mother die! The utter power of medical technology can keep a body clinically alive long beyond the point where the patient or his family would choose. Therefore the patient himself may decide ahead of time.

A pastor friend of mine (Gardiner M. Day) tells of the time he called on a parishioner in a nursing home. The woman was so crippled with arthritis she was dependent on other people to dress her, lift her into sitting position in bed, and feed her. One day she greeted him,

"I am glad to see you, pastor, but I had hoped I would never see you again. Since I last saw you I have had pneumonia. I hoped they would let me pass painlessly into the next world, but they gave me antibiotics and so you find me alive and as useless as ever. Can you tell me why I have to live?"

Is not the right to die with dignity a right we all desire, and deserve? May not an old person decide for himself how and when he may die? There is a document sometimes used called a Living Will. "To my family, my physician, my pastor, my lawyer:

If the time comes when I can no longer take part in decisions for my own future, let this statement stand as testament of my wishes: If there is no reasonable expectation of my recovery from physical or mental disability, I, John Doe, request that I be allowed to die and not be kept alive by artificial means or heroic measures...I do not fear death as much as I fear the indignity of deterioration, dependence and hopeless pain. I ask that drugs be administered to me for terminal suffering even if they hasten the moment of death."

A person has the right to refuse treatment, or, if he is beyond the point of saying so himself, he has the right to have others say it for him, bound by his wishes. Death belongs in the whole life, and if a person is a whole person, attending wholly to his whole experience, he has a right to his own death.

III

The sanctity of life certainly includes two rights: First, the right of the unborn to be born, thereby to face the hazards of being unwanted or handicapped, but also to know the wonder and glory of living. He has the right to decide for himself whether his life is worth the living. Second, the right to decide how to die.

The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, (Job 1:21) and the Lord's people have the right to accept that life and to give that life back again, but never to take it from another or to deny it to another. Each person has his own rights.

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on January 28, 1973.
Additional copies available free.

Some Meanings of Death

Robert H. Hamill

Consider the question, How much are you worth? Some \$300 to \$400 million is asked for Patricia Hearst, the highest price ever put on a human head. What are you worth? Would your parents and friends raise a fund to prevent your death? How much does your death mean to you? How do you feel about the destruction of \$300 million worth of "you"?

Have you reflected seriously about your own death?

Suppose you contract leukemia; are you prepared for the sad, lonely, creeping of death?

And if you die, will you be missed? Would someone take your place?

And if you are replaceable, what happened to that \$300 million you are worth? And if your father were able and willing to pay \$300 million, how much do you think your heavenly Father is ready to pay to prevent your death?

Another question: Did you see the TV account of the man in Iowa who has leukemia, and only a few months to live? He has pulled himself together and set out to do all those decent things he long intended, and he reports that "for the first time I have heard my children laugh and seen my wife smile!"

Jesus complained, "You have ears and hear not, eyes and you see not," but here is a man with terminal leukemia who sees with his eyes and hears with his ears!

Have you ever faced your own death intently enough to have that experience?

Another kind of question: Does it make any difference to you what happens to you after your death? There is a spread of possibilities.

1) Macbeth stands at one extreme:

Life is a tale told by an idiot,
Full of sound and fury, signifying
Nothing.

Therefore there can be no hereafter.

2) At the opposite end people believe that the individual person survives, somehow; the person lives on not merely in his work and his descendants, but he lives on as a distinct person, still alive, or alive again.

3) Midway between, there is the popular conviction that while we cannot be at all confident about afterlife, a person can yet find purpose and meaning in this life now. This is the liberal, rational, sensible faith that originated in the Enlightenment, faltered under Darwin and Freud, and almost perished at Dachau and Hiroshima.

My question is, does it make any difference to you now, which view you believe? Does it make any

difference to you now, which view you believe? Does it make any difference to that "\$300 million you", whether someday you are eaten by worms in the ground or fly with angels in heaven? (I speak in figures, of course.)

The Sting of Death

St. Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth and hurled to them the painful question, "O death, where is thy sting?" And before he can answer we think we know the answer. We have been stung! You have been stung by someone's death; your mother perhaps. Your friend has been killed in an accident, or in war, and you are stung by the injustice, the cruelty of it.

Or you are stung by the finality of death; it cannot be revoked, or reversed; it defines end, the end. Death closes the books. Time's up, the exam is over, hand in your paper, no time for further correction, no make-up, the grade is in, locked tight in the computer.

The sting of regret! So much to do, so little done, now so late! John Keats said it for all of us: When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Then on the shore of the wide world I stand
alone, and think,

Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

The sting of death comes in that Final Judgement, the doctrine protecting the profound truth that it makes an eternal difference how you live this life.

Hell? I hope it is empty. I hope God is merciful to all, regardless of everything. Be merciful!

Yet I fear that the hereafter may be the Hell that I deserve.

Of course there may be no hereafter, and that is further sting: that it all ends in nothing, in vast, unimaginable void, that I am disposable and the world gets along very well without me.

The current issue of the BU Journal carries a verse,

Because to grow older
Is to become more aware of death,
I set aside Thursday
to think of what my absence from the world
would mean.
I found I had time
to do several other things that day.
(Grave Thought, Wm. Sayres)

Indeed, the world will little note nor long remember what I do here, and someday people will no longer speak to me, then later and they will no longer speak about me, and when they forget, then I am forgotten. Another person will wear my

clothes and stand in my place. I know I will not exist and yet the world go on.

I resent it. Dylan Thomas is right,
Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Our Bankruptcy Before Death

Death is a terrifying prospect also because it bankrupts us. Death is so awesome, so overwhelming, its immensity towers over every human resource. Medical powers postpone it, insurance covers its cost, but there it stands, a dreadful monster, with almost sacred power to confound all our protest. This human being, this creature genius, this resourceful being who protects himself from the drench of the freezing rain and the army of tiny germs, who invents speech and walks the moon, this creature who holds dominion, victorious over all his other fates -- against death, against death only, does he cry out in protest and cry in vain. No wonder James Joyce speaks of death as a sacred power, the "Hangman God" before which all human efforts are doomed. Death inspires thinkers to meditate, then brings those meditations to a silent end. Death crowns heroes and martyrs, then drags down to oblivion those whom it has lifted up. Death unravels every human community, taking those fervent little interweavings of human need -- husband and wife, lovers, father and son, colleagues, comrades in arms -- "and eventually forcing these intersecting lines to honor its presence with the rigid parallels of the graveyard." (Wm. F. May)

Then death brings one final sting: Death chooses its own way of coming. You do not choose.

If you could plan your own death, what would you want? To die quickly with little pain? To go peacefully in your sleep, at home? Perhaps in a hammock on a spring day, overlooking the ocean! But alas, most people do not die that way. Death decides to kill violently on the highway, or tortuously with long delay of cancer and pain. Death's warning puts you away in a hospital with tubes and tents, hiding you from your family so you cannot be comforted. Death decides against you, how it will come. The sting, the sting!

Coming to Accept My Own Mortality

Nevertheless I must come to terms with my own mortality, with all its sting. As a schoolboy I learned the syllogism: All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal. Socrates, indeed, and you, and you, but Robert Hamill? For me to die, with all my distinctive and singular experience -- that is altogether a differ-

ent matter. It cannot be that I ought to die.
That would be too terrible.

But my logic and my wishes get overwhelmed by
the relentless pressure. It will happen, I feel it
happening. Now to prepare for it.

Suppose you were told you had but one week to
live; you have good health, and money enough; what
one thing will you be sure to do? John Wesley was
asked how he would spend the time if he were to die
next midnight.

"Why, just as I had expected to spend the time.
I would preach tonight at Gloucester, tomorrow
at Tewkesbury, go to my friend Martin's house
for entertainment, converse and pray with the
family as usual, retire to my room at ten
o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father,
lie down to rest, and wake up in glory."

And you? Perhaps you would travel to Rome to see
the Sistine Chapel. Or get close to nature, go
skiing, or sit by the stream and fish. Or throw a
party and celebrate with your friends. Or go to
the ghetto, share a meal with the poor, and give
gifts. Or ask forgiveness of several people for lies
and cheating you have done, to clean up the record.
Or go home, get right with your parents, and say I
love you, I love you both! I would do several such
things, and listen to Berlioz' Te Deum.

We begin by recognizing that good things come to
an end, and the time is short. I am impressed by
the Yale senior who said,

"It often appeared to me that one of the prob-
lems with Yale during our four years was that
people did not spend enough time contemplating
their own death. Practically no one seriously
considered his own mortality...We learned from
Philosophy 10A that Spinoza insisted, 'A free
man thinks of nothing less than death, and
his wisdom is not a meditation upon death but
upon life'. Yale seemed most together as a
community during the Black Panther spring,
when it seemed as if the Yale community were
definitely mortal. If death and love make us
fragile, then we are strongest when aware of
our fragility." (Jeffrey Gordon, "On the
Future", Yale Alumni Magazine July 1971).

Aware of our fragility, our mortality, we are
strongest -- and best! I have on my desk some
notations about people to see, including a young
friend who has leukemia. Yet I keep postponing
that call. If I knew I had only one week to live,
I would make it immediately. I saw the sun rise
this morning and paid no attention. It will rise
again tomorrow, I can see it then, and next week,
next summer, and the next summer. But five

summers? Perhaps. Ten summers? Possibly. But twenty summers? Not likely for me. If I remembered that my days are numbered I would pay more attention, live more intensely, be more sensitive. When I remember that I am fragile, and mortal, then I am strongest, and better than otherwise.

The Intimation of Mortality

No one drinks deeply of life, it is said, "except he who is willing and ready to leave it." (Seneca) No one lives deeply until he has come close to dying. There is something about the uncertainty of life, something about its brevity, that makes it richer than anything the gods can know. According to a story about the Greek gods, Jupiter came to earth in human form to make love, and after his experience he went back and spoke to Mercury about the gods: "We miss something, Mercury -- the poignance of the transient -- the intimation of mortality -- that sweet sadness of grasping at something you cannot hold...". The author goes on to say, "I realize now that mortals miss it, too, when they do not seriously think about death". (Lael Wertenbaker, Death of a Man, quoted in Herman Feifel, ed. The Meaning of Death, p. 124.)

But when they do think seriously about death, they make what Erikson calls "responsible renunciation". They reorder life around a center beyond the self: some cause, some love, some idea larger and better than self. They unload the personal agenda that has consumed their life, the complaints and trivia that drag like baggage. This must be what Castaneda means when he says the spirit warrior "has no personal history", and what St. Paul means when he says he knows "how to be abased and how to abound...I know how to be buried with Christ that I may be lifted up with him."

...and of the Life to Come

And when another person does that, and then dies, what shall we think? George Bernard Shaw said about William Morris when he died, "You can lose a man like that by your own death, but not by his." John O'Hara said, "George Gershwin died July 11, but I don't have to believe it if I don't want to".

I know what that means.

Hannah died in 1968, and so did Martin Luther King. John F. Kennedy in 1963, my father in 1939, my mother 1923, and Jesus of Nazareth died in the year 32 AD -- but I don't have to believe it if I don't want to. And I don't. I just cannot believe that the universe discards such precious things so casually -- creatures the universe has spent aeons of energy and experiment to perfect. If such persons are junked then only a cold dark wind blows

across this wasteland and the rotten scheme makes no sense at all.

We Christians are peculiar people. We talk about death with infinite sadness and resentment, then talk about life after death with a strange kind of joy. We speak of these together, at the same time. Otherwise we speak with the profound melancholy of people who separate the Church from the graveyard. They assume that there are two Lords. First there is the Lord of the Sabbath who presides over the affairs of the cheerful Philistines while they are thriving and in good health. Then there is a second Lord, a Dark Power one seldom speaks about, the Lord of the highway wrecks, hospitals and cemeteries, who handles everything in the end. But the Christian faith does not speak of two Lords. The Lord of the Church is not ruler of a surface kingdom. His dominion is nothing if it does not go at least six feet deep! (Wm. F. May)

Our life is always a mixture of nonsense and purpose, of Cross and Resurrection, and the good news is the sure fact that God is God of both. The Lord God we deal with deals with us in the nonsense as in the purpose. The Cross belongs in this life, and Resurrection defines the next life. The insane generosity of the New Testament God, the extravagant kindness of the God who pays workers the same wages for one hour as for one day of work -- that is the news that comes to us as whole people, not just to our questioning minds. When Goethe was about to die things became dark and he cried out, "Light, the world needs more light." Years later, Unamuno heard about that and said, "No, Goethe was wrong. He should have said, Warmth, the world needs more warmth. We shall not die from the dark but from the cold." Our minds never have enough light to satisfy our baffling doubts, but our hearts can be comforted and assured by the warmth of the everlasting arms underneath. The hands that made us are able and anxious to keep us. Who cared for the past will provide for the future. If there is a physical body there is also a spiritual body, and as we have borne the image of the earthly so we shall bear the image of the heavenly.

Thanks be to Him who has given one and promises the other. Amen.

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel Boston University on February 17, 1974. Additional copies available free.

A COMING RELIGIOUS REVIVAL?

Robert H. Hamill

Many people have predicted that as science expands, religion will contract. They are convinced that intellectuals will renounce religious view of things, yet today we are experiencing a sizable religious surge, and it is happening among the young generation, those intellectuals immersed in the scientific worldview of Marx, Darwin, Freud, not to mention McLuhan. In fact, a bewildering assortment of religions bursts across the landscape. Jaded intellectuals who are weary of an overly organized and rational society seem to grasp at new cults, especially those rooted in the mystery religions of the Orient. Most of these lack the liberal Christian activism for social reform. Rather they focus on self-knowledge as the way to God. Any reforming impact on society will be indirect, as individual persons get attuned to their own ultimate nature and then influence the world indirectly. (Chad Walsh, New York Times Book Review, Nov.28'71)

Variety of religious experiments

From India comes Vedanta, a variety of Hinduism, that stresses the oneness of all things, including God, man and nature; it speaks of reincarnation, and karma, the law of moral cause-and-effect; and regards most experience as illusion. Another Indian practice is Yoga, based on the conviction that spiritual and physical exercises can bring enlightenment because body and soul are intimately linked.

Another faith is Bahai, a 19th century offshoot of Islam. Bahaists believe in the unity of all religions, and they stand for world peace and universal education.

There are Buddhist derivatives, especially Zen, which emphasizes meditation while sitting cross-legged as the way of enlightenment. Zen involves clarification about one's own nature, and a kind of non-thinking, non-attachment, non-involvement.

The most conspicuous of the new movements is Jesus People. Take hurried glimpse at this popular movement. Near Freeville, N.Y., a large red barn has a sign, "The Love Inn." There long haired youth, middle class dropouts, live in a commune as a part of a nationwide movement of youths who are "turning on to Jesus" and dressing up old time religion in hippie garb. They devote Tuesday evenings to Bible studies, they operate a telephone counseling service called HELP, and give rock concerts in the coffee house where they rap with people about Jesus. Frequently they are invited to Kiwanis and local schools to tell how they turned off drugs. "America is

spiritually starving to death," says a 24-year old elder of the commune and former Catholic seminarian. "People are searching for answers in sex, drugs, or the peace movement, but the only answer is Jesus... They may not agree that Jesus is the answer, but they know that we get results when they don't." It is hard to argue with success!

The Jesus Movement began in 1967, and attracted young people who had tried LSD, Zen, Tarot cards, and astrology. "There was something piquant about hippies publicly confessing their faith in Jesus and baptizing new members in the ocean surf or public drinking fountains. It seems as though a generation had been away from Christianity long enough so that large numbers of them were able to rediscover it as something fresh and compelling." (Walsh)

Regard for the mystical

What do you make of all this? Here in the midst of an affluent, educated, spirited culture, we see a turn toward ancient and simple styles of religion running against the mainstream.

The first thing to notice, and appreciate, is the recovery of mystery. These people have a new, or renewed regard for mystical experience. Most young people have lost any faith they had in science or reason as sufficient meaning of life, and they are skeptical about the power of political action to reform the world. They are attracted by the mysterious, the mystical, even the magical. They refuse to believe the secular city is all there is. (Walsh)

A real change of consciousness is taking place, there is a movement away from cold rationality toward something warmer, more intuitive, more subjective. The spirit of ecstasy replaces pedestrian rule-keeping. Emotion is accepted as a natural thing. An irresistible dose of Consciousness III infuses the culture.

Regard for the comic

Along with the mystical I find also a regard for the comic. For instance the musical "Godspell." It comes as a vivid climax of a trend which has resurrected gospel music ("Amazing Grace,") street evangelism, Jesus Freaks, and SUPERSTAR, and now Godspell. In this musical Jesus and his friends are arrayed in bright gypsy/clown clothes, with painted faces. Why this flamboyance? Why is our Lord Jesus Christ portrayed as a clown? Stephen Schwartz, author of lyrics and composer of music, explains:

"When the world is in such a mess you can't take it too seriously. We make Jesus Christ into a music hall act, clowning about and doing a soft shoe dance with Judas. You simply

have to like the man. Jesus amuses and delights you; he is the kind of character anyone would want to follow."

You may find theological rationale for clowns cavorting on stage, singing "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," in Harvey Cox' Feast of Fools:

"Now in a new, or really an old but recaptured guise, Christ has made an unexpected entrance onto the stage of modern secular life. Enter Christ the Harlequin: the personification of festivity and fantasy in an age that had almost lost both." (p.139)

This Savior in a Superman shirt, with striped pants and painted nose--seems to touch our jaded spirits with new spirit of celebration. It makes him seem human, touchable, vulnerable.

"Only by assuming a playful attitude toward our religious tradition can we possibly make any sense of it. Only by learning to laugh at the hopelessness around us can we touch the hem of hope. Christ the clown signifies our playful appreciation of the past and our comic refusal to accept the spectre of inevitability in the future." (p.142)

In the closing words of his chapter on Christ the Harlequin, Cox writes,

"When we honestly ask ourselves whether we can have such a life-affirming world...for the empirical evidence is either mixed or unfavorable. But we can hope...that man is destined for a City. It is not just any city, however,...it is not only a City where injustice is abolished and there is no more crying. It is a city in which a delightful wedding feast is in progress, where the laughter rings out, the dance has just begun, and the best wine is still to be served."

Another instance of delightful religion happened in real life, on the campus of the University of Michigan.

"Like blown leaves on a fall afternoon, they gathered suddenly on the walks before the...main library. Young men and women, blacks and whites, they numbered 25 or so. Quickly they formed a ring and began to clap and sing praises to the Lord.

"Their song ended, they drew themselves rightly together, raised their hands, and chanted a prayer that sounded more militant than pious. They stepped back and sang again.

"They were members of the fundamentalist Children of God community, come to campus to crusade. Their ritual of song and chants, which some Critics argue induces hypnosis,

went on for perhaps 20 minutes. Then silently and as suddenly as they had come, they were gone." (Reported by Christian Science Monitor, Jan. 27 '72, in a study of religion and youth culture across country.)

Danger of simplistic religion

However delightful and wholesome all such movements may be, something about them seems not quite right. There is nothing wrong: in fact they are good, healthy, corrective, fascinating--just incomplete, hence not satisfying to the whole person. These religious fads fit easily into the "touch and feel" culture of group experience; they often substitute group feeling in place of wisdom. What becomes important is not what I do or create, but what I feel and experience. Not what I produce but what produces experiences in me: that counts. Life is no longer moral but experiential, and alas little intellectual depth or moral passion. Such religions lack the full dimension of noble religion, hence become simplistic or sentimental.

What then is required for an adequate religion that satisfies the whole person?

Height

Height, for one thing. Of course, any special image makes a poor figure; but height means real transcendence, transcendence with awe and austerity. Rudolph Otto taught us to respect the numinous, the awe-inspiring. In the presence of that God we are struck and overwhelmed by our creaturehood. Before that tremendous mystery we come with hushed, trembling humility. The Holy One calls forth a tremor of fear and awe because such Mystery is wholly other than our human life: it is separate, sovereign, above and beyond our approaching, and our only appropriate response is adoration: not praise to what we can understand, but adoration to what is beyond our grasp. Call it a deep, delicate, obstinate sense of otherness, or eternity. (von Hugel) Call it height.

What I miss in the current religions revivals is just such height. It feels horizontal. God is joyful companion, easy to meet: just meditate your way into identity with that Spirit. "God seems hard to define not because he is so remote but because he is so near. (Martin Marty) Much too flat! By ignoring the transcendent, current religion sees only the indwelling presence of God and misses the absence, the away-and-againstness of God. H. Richard Niebuhr once said it: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a Cross." That is not good enough. We need vertical God of great height.

Depth

Depth is a second spacial image, but I use it in the Tillich sense of concern for the substantial, ultimate questions of life. Without such depth religion becomes superficial, a surface veneer to life.

Strange as it may seem, much new religion seems made for the Brave New World. Let me explain. In that utopian novel by Aldous Huxley, the Controller speaks to Savage about soma, a magic drug.

"If by some unlucky chance anything unpleasant should happen, why there's always soma to give you a holiday from the facts... You swallow two or three tablets and there you are. You can carry half your morality around in a bottle. Christianity without tears--that's what soma is."

But Christianity without tears is not Christianity, and life without tears is not life. Savage replies.

"What you need is something with tears for a change. Nothing costs enough here... I don't want comfort. I want God. I want poetry. I want danger, I want freedom. I want goodness. I want sin."

That is exactly what I miss in the new religions. Facts: they do not deal with my sin, my freedom, my suffering, my death, my failures and defeats, my meanness; they do not deal with the basic questions of my life.

I miss the height that confronts me with the God of majesty, and I miss the depth that deals with the deep down agonies of my own life. It seems not likely that we get a genuine revival out of such flat religion.

Breadth

We come now to a third spacial image, breadth. Profound religion is never solitary; it always expresses itself in corporate experience. People must turn outward toward their fellowmen, yet that is what I miss in most popular religions. For instance, Hare Krishna. I am impressed by its devotees, saffron robed, with heads shaved, who defy popular customs and venture forth on the streets with missionary zeal. Chanting and dancing, they hand out sweet rolls and literature to us curious ones who stand around:

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna,
Krishna Krishna, Hare, Hare.

Chanting, they explain, purifies the spirit and achieves God-consciousness. Chanting cleans the mind of materialistic pleasures, they say. And though they stand together in a line or circle, they are essentially alone. Each person turns

inward. They appear outdoors among people, but they are not turned outward in reality. They seem to have no passion for fellowmen, no compassion for the poor and imprisoned, the sick and dying. All the social changes that cry for doing are written off as secondary to the inward sense of God,--but that neglects the second great commandment which Jesus declared is equal to the first: love your neighbor. If such popular religions prevail, the causes of justice and brotherhood will fall to the secular activists and to those who function within the mainline Christian and Jewish religions. The prophetic work of human loving is absolutely essential, along with the mystical. Religion is what Hocking once defined, "a passion for righteousness conceived as a cosmic demand."

SUMMARY

That great husband and wife team of historians, Will and Ariel Durant, wrote a small book to summarize what they learned through writing ten huge volumes of the history of civilizations.

"One lesson of history is that religion has many lives, and a habit of resurrection.

How often in the past have God and religion died and been reborn!" (Lessons of History, 49)

If it happen that Christianity be reborn again, like new wine into new wineskins, it will be a religion of full dimensions. It will have height that sees God high and lifted up, before whom I bow and confess I am unclean, living among people as sinful as myself. Also depth, depth that deals honestly with my sin, suffering and death, and says to me, "Come all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest...Nothing in all creation, neither peril, pain, famine, nakedness, or sword, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ, who make you more than conqueror over anything this world can do." And it will have breadth of love and compassion, uniting all faithful people in one body of Christ and turning them outward in loving concern for all people because they are God's people.

Christianity does not make any easy certainties: it does not guarantee what popular religions are guaranteeing. I warn you to beware, and I applaud those final words in a review of new paperbacks about these new religions:

"The old wisdom of the alchemists, the new wisdom of the world citizens, the simple wisdom of the Jesus Freaks, the phony wisdom of the Satanists are far more marketable than the lonely promise of Judaism and Christianity. If anyone wishes to eliminate uncertainty, tension, confusion and disorder from his life, there is no point in getting mixed up either with Yahweh or with Jesus of Nazareth."
(Andrew Greeley, in New York Times Book Review, Part II, Feb. 13, '72, p.28)

But if anyone is not afraid of uncertainty and tension and disorder in his life, and if he wants a religion profound with the full dimensions of height and depth and breadth, then there is the Lord God Almighty, whose glory we see in the face of Jesus Christ, who has the habit of resurrection, and though he dies frequently in human history, and seems to be dead in our time, he will surely be reborn again and again and again.

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on February 20, 1972.
Additional copies available free.

ABORTION ON REQUEST: A CHRISTIAN PROBLEM

Robert H. Hamill

Within recent days Pres. Nixon and Sen Muskie, the U.S. Supreme Court, several leading medical journals and the Boston City Hospital, church bodies including the Catholic diocese of Boston, Women's Lib, legislative hearings--all, in their appropriate ways, have spoken out about abortion. In Paris some 340 prominent French women have identified themselves as having had abortions themselves.

This public outburst brings to our attention the dramatic cases. A married woman contracts a severe case of German measles in early pregnancy, and thus faces the likelihood that her unborn child will be more or less seriously deformed. The mother in a ghetto family, with six children already, through some negligence or ignorance becomes pregnant again; should the law force her to go through with it? What about the sacredness of life, her life, her children's life? A young, unmarried girl, impressionable, after a night at the movies and some sentimental radio songs, gets caught, as they say, Her options are few: She can marry the young man, but such marriages are never ideal and have low survival rate. She can carry the child and give it up for adoption, but that is a cruel perversion of motherhood. She can raise the child herself but that means dropping out of school, having no job, and living on welfare. If she happens to be a college girl this pregnancy means serious disruption to her studies, her career, her finances and her emotional stability. In such cases, and many more, there may be considerable truth in the charges made by Rev. Howard Moody, founder of the Clergy Consultation Services, which for years now has referred pregnant women to reliable medical help.

"The single woman in our society has...been the victim of our hypocritical, double-standard sexual mores. When she becomes pregnant, she is further victimized by a... law that favors the married woman. Thus the law becomes the instrument of the woman's punishment, creating a most blatant inequality..."(1)
Mr. Moody goes on to ask, "By what moral or divine authority do we condemn an accidental embryo to be an unwanted and unloved child?"

It is a humane compassion that prompts most of the protest against existing laws governing abortion, and the laws are being relaxed all across the land.

New York now permits abortions on request, up to the 24th week of pregnancy. The Massachusetts law, with little prospect of change in the near future, does allow abortions in cases of rape and incest, or in the prospect of serious deformity in the child, or when the woman's health or mental welfare is endangered. Today I do not intend to discuss these questions of law; the issues of public policy in a society with cultural and religious diversities and vast economic inequality, are terribly complex. Likewise I confess at the start that, like St. Paul, "I have no word from the Lord" on this question, but whom what I do believe about the Christian gospel I invite you to consider with me the moral questions involved for our private behavior.

I. Some notes on the biology of birth

Christian people should begin with the facts. What is the scientific situation, the biology of birth? We ask this question before we decide whether a fetus is a human being or some peculiar tissue growth in the woman's body. The elementary facts include these:

After the discharge of male sperm, some of them work their way up the Fallopian tube and one of them meets the egg and fertilizes it there, that fixes the genetic nature of the future child; the genes, half from the woman, half from the man, are locked into a pattern and permanently fixed at that moment of conception. For about a week the egg slowly descends down the tube toward the uterus, dividing into cells meanwhile, and implants itself in the uterus, where it is then known as the blastocyst. By four weeks, it has grown to 10,000 times the size of the egg, and its blood has begun to circulate. By six weeks all its organs have formed except for the limbs; it has become an integrated human organism. At eight weeks it is called a fetus; by then fingers and toes have taken form, basic skeleton is shaped, and the fetus shows the familiar external features and all the internal organs of an adult person. At this same time, eight weeks, the fetal brain gives impulses that coordinate the functions of other organs, and its electrical activity, recorded by electroencephalogram, displays the distinctive individual pattern of a human being. Already we face the ethical question: If the absence of brain activity is taken as evidence of death, why does brain activity in the fetus not declare that human life is present? All this at eight weeks, the point at which the woman becomes rather certain she is pregnant.

At ten weeks the fetus is capable of spontaneous movement, having responded to stimulation and touch

much earlier; and after the twelfth week the mother feels the movements. At that point the fetal heart function can be measured by electrocardiogram, and after this point the abortion method of dilation and curettage (D&C) is no longer safe; more serious methods are required.

By the twentieth week the pregnancy has reached halfway, and the voluntary expulsion of the fetus is called premature, and the birth and death must be recorded. Even at 20 weeks some fetuses survive and grow into adulthood. At about this point the fetus is said to be viable, but viability is really a statement not about the fetus but about the state of medical progress, its capacity to save a premature child. In the future it may become possible to save a fetus much earlier (by test tube or other artificial placentas), yet even today there is ten percent chance of survival after twenty weeks, although New York allows abortion up to 24 weeks, and Maryland to 26 weeks. Many people, having seen those spectacular LIFE magazine photographs of the human fetus in its natural womb, can no longer think of the fetus as a disposable thing; it is too human for that.

Reflections on the biology

When we reflect on this biological development it seems there is no clear-cut point at which this "thing" becomes a human being--except to push it back to the very beginning. It is one continuous unbroken evolving from fertilized egg to full human life. Prof. Ramsey writes:

"Genetics teaches us that we were from the beginning what we essentially still are in every cell and...attribute. Thus genetics seems to provide an approximation, from the underside, to the religious belief that there is a soul animating and forming man's bodily being from the very beginning." (2)
The fetus, at least from blastocyst (fertilized egg implanted in the uterus, at about ten days) deserves respect as human life. It is arbitrary to choose any point thereafter as the beginning of life. That is why the doctor has sworn to the Hippocratic Oath that "I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception." The doctor knows there is more than one patient in all cases of abortion: mother and child. The doctor knows the genetic character of that being is set already; he can see its stubborn, astonishing "independence and fix on life, throwing out the lifeline" (Ramsey) to grab ahold in the uterus as its first fit place to live. He knows how early this being has heartbeat, brainwaves, and its own diseases; he knows it does its own living and its own dying. (3)

Clearly it is both illegal and immoral to abort at nine months; clearly at that point we are dealing with human life. If nine months, what about eight months, or seven, or six as New York allows, or one month, or one week? Where in the long evolving can you say exactly that thereafter there is a human being, but before that only tissue in a woman's body? Biology shows no such point. Yet, in the last year over 100,000 unborn have been destroyed legally in New York.

"What had been evolving human beings, most often with clearly recognizable human limbs and countenances, were passed through pathology laboratories, flushed down sewers, incinerated in hospital furnaces, or in some cases cast in cellophane bags on city dumps." (Value of Life Committee, March 1971)

Women indeed have rights; the pregnant women we spoke about a moment ago, indeed they have rights. But so do these unborn human beings have rights. The biology of the situation indicates that life begins with conception, when the genetic nature of this being is fixed. I wonder if you see any escape from the logic of this biology?

II. The promise implied in the sex act

Let us now consider a different set of issues, those that raise the moral problem still more sharply. Beyond the biological situation there are ethical issues to be faced.

Begin with the elementary fact that pregnancy results from coitus, sexual intercourse. Therefore, except for rape, pregnancy is essentially a preventable condition. It is not a disease. Pregnancy may occur by direct intention. More often, and especially in those cases when abortion is later considered, pregnancy happens from ignorance, or from malfunction of some contraceptive (no method is 100% certain even at best!), or from neglect, or from passion that simply throws caution to the wind. In any case it happens from the sexual act which is a voluntary act. And the abortions we are considering here today in this Christian company, are intended as remedies for this kind of situation: they are not contraceptives, but birth control; they are designed to terminate normal pregnancies that result from voluntary coitus.

In this matter I am indebted to Ronald M. Green, graduate student at Harvard, who made it clear to me some years ago that "...whenever a woman willingly engages in coitus she, in doing so, makes an implicit promise that in the event of conception she will bear and give life to the fruit of her act." She may be using good contraception in an effort to avoid pregnancy, and she may not be at all self-conscious about this implied promise.

"Nevertheless, such a promise-making situation

exists, realized or not. The mere fact that coitus, when followed by conception, initiates a series of events that normally culminate in legitimate expectations on the part of another human being (the future child) places...the woman under the particular obligation to fulfill these expectations."

That is, she aroused certain expectations, and now is obliged to fulfill them. Her sexual act implies a promise-making; there is a promise implicit in the sexual act. (4)

This promise is made equally by the man involved. In common morality, and certainly in the law, the male who begets a child, even in a chance sexual encounter, is especially obligated to that child. This is not an explicit promise vocalized by the father; it often is not even intended; but it is an implicit promise made by the sexual act, and society holds the man accountable.

Furthermore, the obligation incurred by the sex act is due not to the fetus but to the potential child. Thus it makes no essential difference when this "thing" becomes human; the point is that the sexual act itself, when it issues in conception, sets into motion a development that normally issues in a distinct human being, thus creating expectations that mother and father are obliged to fulfill; they are bound to keep their promise, a promise made not to the fetus but to the full human being. By their act together, this man and this woman have promised to take the consequences, to fulfill the expectations, of this act. There is a promise implied in the sex act, a promise to another person. The moral question is this: how can we be responsible unless we keep that promise?

III. On being unwanted

Turn now to two further moral questions, briefly. First, the question of being unwanted. The chief argument for abortion on request is that the mother doesn't want this child; it is an unwanted pregnancy.

Of course it is highly desirable that every child born into the world be wanted: that he be born into a family that welcomes him gladly and cares for him devotedly. Highly desirable, to be sure. But is being wanted a "constitutional right?" Does being wanted constitute the essence of his claim on life? Is being wanted so necessary that he cannot live without it? Is being wanted so necessary that he ought not be permitted to live without it? If it is morally permissible to kill a human fetus because it is not wanted, why is it not permissible to kill the aged, senile, vegetating, decrepid old hunk of humanity, because "it" is not wanted? What does being wanted have to do with a person's right to live?

It is estimated by Dr. Charles F. Westoff of Princeton University's Office of Population Research, that "unwanted births" account for 35 to 45% of population growth in this country in recent years. Suppose we be more conservative, and cut this to 33%. To make even this figure dramatic we have numbered your bulletins 1,2,3. All those holding 1's and 2's were "wanted" by your parents; welcome to this world! Everyone was glad when you arrived! Those of you holding 3's, I am sorry. You were mistakes. Your parents didn't want you. They regretted you were conceived, they gave you life with sorrow. They preferred that you not exist. You weren't wanted. Being unwanted, should you have been abolished? The moral question is simply this: Should every unborn child be aborted if it is unwanted?

IV. On being happy

My final question concerns the attitude, the motive, of the prospective mother, and to a lesser degree of the prospective father, when they ask for abortion. What the woman says is undeniably true; it is terribly inconvenient to carry this pregnancy to full term and bring this child to birth. It means another nine months of interference with everything she has designed for herself, her schooling, her freedom, her control of her own future. It means years of confinement in caring for the child. It means restricted freedom to go, do, be what she had planned. It means another mouth to feed, another person to be responsible for; it means 21 years of burden. All because of one moment of carelessness, or one moment of beautiful, joyful passion. Why must she be punished with years of restraint upon her happiness? So she asks the doctor to help her abort, for her sake, please!

The doctor however is trained in a different tradition, and committed to a different set of values. He has dedicated his life to saving other life; he fights against anything that destroys life; and in case of doubt, he errs on the side of the helpless and he preserves life. Now this woman is asking him to reverse his role. She is asking him to terminate life--an unconscious life, a helpless life, but still a life. She is asking the doctor to assume that the fetus has no right to live that is equal to her right to be happy. And the moral question is simply this: By what right does she expect the doctor to put her happiness above another human being's right to live?

Summary

Let me now summarize, pointing out first what I have omitted from this discussion. I have not talked about law and public policy; that is another set of issues which contain very troubling questions, and deserve our attention at another time. I have not been discussing abortions already legal in most places, including Massachusetts, abortions involving rape and incest, the prospect of deformity in the unborn child, and the health of the mother. I have not discussed contraception, for proper use of those methods would prevent most of the pregnancies that now ask for abortion. I have given attention only to those cases in which the woman requests abortion for her own personal reasons. I have spoken not to the general public but to members of this congregation who have moral and religious sensitivity to this problem. Nor have I made any declaratory judgment, but I have raised four questions:

1. If biology reveals no point in that long evolving from fertilized egg to adulthood at which it can clearly be said scientifically, "After here, a human being; before here, only tissue," then how can any of us make that arbitrary decision and discard that substance as mere tissue?
2. If the sexual act carries (along with other meanings) an implicit promise to the human being who may be set into motion by this act, then how can we be responsible unless we keep that promise and let that life develop?
3. Does an unwanted human being have no claim on his own survival simply because he is unwanted?
4. Is one person's claim to happiness more valuable than another potential person's right to life?

Again I say I have no word from the Lord on this matter, but out of my understanding of Christian things I ask these questions.

(1) "Abortion: Woman's Right and Legal Problem," Christianity and Crisis, March 8, 1971.

(2) Quoted in The Terrible Choice: The Abortion Dilemma, ed. Robert E. Cooke, et al. p. 85.

(3) See Paul Ramsey, special article on the ethics of certain medical issues, in The New England Journal of Medicine, April 1, 1971, pp. 700-706.

(4) See Ronald M. Green, "Abortion and Promise-Keeping," Christianity and Crisis, May 15, 1967.

- 8 -

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on April 25, 1971.
Additional copies available free.

100



**"REASON AND CONSCIENCE
IN BOSTON UNIVERSITY"**

Baccalaureate Sermon

May 20, 1973

by

Dr. Robert H. Hamill

**Marsh Chapel
Boston University**



Many people feel that this university is sick, so sick they dare not guess whether it can recover, or even survive. The elevated financial fever gives only the outward measure of an inward and spiritual disease. Some people doubt whether the heart can endure the testing yet to come. Consider the symptoms of the sickness.

The festering sore of Marine recruiting exposes a deep inner torment over the open university. What constitutes an open university? What is involved more than a handful of federal grants? The patient may not realize how serious this infection is.

Another question is, Who decides things for this university? There is a struggle for power and a widespread protest against the concentration of power in the executive office. Reinhold Niebuhr taught us years ago that "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." Should we then distribute power more widely? The president has agreed to a 40/60 voting ratio between administration and faculty on many substantial issues. Lord Acton however warned us about power, and he might have said that not only power but the hunger for power tends to corrupt, and the grasping of power can corrupt absolutely. The Christian faith knows that those out of power are often no more pure in heart than those in power. Our patient has some suicidal tendencies.

People--quite a few, in fact, and important people--are leaving this university, some by their own choosing, and that raises the question whether we can maintain tradition and morale through such a drastic turnover of people. Can there be any continuity of institutional life? How many organs can you transplant in this patient and still have the same person?

As for students, for whom the rest is meant to be, you recognize--nay, you experience the truth spoken by Octavio Paz:

After the general collapse of Faith and Reason, of God and Utopia, none of the intellectual systems is capable of alleviating our anguish or calming our fears. We are alone at last, like all men, and like them we live in a world of violence and deception, a world dominated by Don No One...Nakedness and defenselessness are waiting us. (The Labyrinth of Solitude, p. 194)

Consequently many of you develop a life style resembling what Paz calls the pachuco type, the restless youth who swing erratically back and forth; they are instinctive rebels, obstinate, driven by a fanatical will-not-to-be-what-people-want-you-to-be, but to be your own self however unmannered and undisciplined. But friends, that may not contribute to your health. Health is not built on hostility. Anger and apathy are two forms of self-destruction. Our patient apparently hates himself.

With these and other symptoms of serious sickness, this university is passing through a shaking of the soul, a crisis of self-doubt. We are disheartened, we blame one another, we swear at the President, he returns the compliment. Students grouse about the whole system. Now, as doctor diagnosing our condition do you think this university can recuperate, or even survive?

I

Now let me turn from this medical analogy to a financial one, and recall Jeremiah. Times were desperate then too. The city was under siege. The enemy had stood at the gates since January and it was now hot summer; the wells were drying up, and children crying in the streets. Months ago Jeremiah had warned the king against false prophets who sing Peace, peace, when there is no peace. Furthermore, the people had gone a-whoring after false gods, therefore God would use the Babylonians to lay siege to the city and carry the king off captive. Now, sure enough it was happening. The worst possible projection happened. And for saying so in advance, and in public, Jeremiah had been thrown into jail. There he languished until God told him to go buy a piece of land. Jeremiah called a press conference, signed the documents with a big flourish, and had the deed sealed in a safe deposit jar to keep for a long time, because the siege would continue and Jeremiah would linger in jail, but in the long run the Lord God would rescue, and liberate. Jeremiah hurled these words at the king:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. (32:15)

The point is vivid. The enemy was at the gate, the people sick and hungry, and the prophet in jail. At that moment Jeremiah, in jail, bought a field. He believed that his people under God had a future. He invested his savings in a field that was occupied by enemy troops! Most people would have bought a crying towel or a white flag. Jeremiah bought a field. In the worst imaginable time, he invested.

Now I put to you a question. If you were Jeremiah, would you invest in Boston University? Is there any reason to buy into this university today? Are there any Jeremiahs ready to buy and to do whatever it takes to make this place worth other people buying into it?

II

There are plenty of suggestions from many doctors. One of the most fascinating comes from Prof. William Arrowsmith who came to Boston University soon after he wrote an article on "The Idea of a New University." He speaks about the frustration and rage we all feel, the violence, the erosion of responsibility, the affluence, the selfishness in American life. He declares that the university seems to have nothing to say to these things because it is so deeply in hock to the government and industry that it cannot act conscientiously expect at the risk of its corporate investments and government grants. "I am suggesting that the University itself, in part through the knowledge it creates, in part through its own principled irresponsibility, is mindlessly helping to create a distinctive modern chaos." He documents that charge and then, as Doctor Arrowsmith he writes a prescription for the patient:

"The university possesses intellectual skill but has disowned its moral responsibility by refusing to apply its knowledge. And, since there is no prospect of endowing either church or family with the necessary intellectual power, I see no alternative except to moralize the university, to make of it--let me say it openly--a secular church...It is because I have faith, probably irrational, in the power of intellect--and in the university as a bastion of intellect--to renew itself that I set such emphasis upon the role of the university in the moral renewal of culture. In modern times almost the whole job of culture has been dumped upon the universities." (Center Magazine, III, 2, March 1970, pp. 48, 57, 60)

Arrowsmith here paints an inspiring vision of university health! It appeals especially to those who feel that this university needs to intensify its public services. It might go far toward healing our own sickness by turning our attention outside ourselves.

III

1. We need reflect however upon the danger of too

much relevance, and be warned against teaching and doing mainly those things which apply only to the immediate present. Relevance can be today's fad and tomorrow's cliché. A university should listen to what the centuries have to say, not just the days and the hours. Perhaps the most relevant thing a university can do about Watergate is to teach Machiavelli,--and Paradise Lost! and The Divine Comedy! The task of the university is to serve the public's unchanging need for understanding and insight that outlast the latest grand jury. The university has the larger and more lasting questions.

2. There is also the danger of politicizing the university. Beware of pushing the university into taking stands on every issue from Vietnam to abortion. If a university can be conscripted by a political movement on the left, it can also be conscripted by a political movement on the right. If it can be politicized for reform it can be politicized for repression, and the reactionaries always have more votes, more laws, more police, more wire-taps and more slush funds than anyone else. Beware of capturing the university for any cause, even your own cause, because the chief business of a university is to think, to learn, to question, to criticize, to teach. A university is not a church; Prof. Arrowsmith is wrong about this. When a university is held responsible for making a new society, that confuses the functions. It is the chief business of a church to love; it is the chief business of a university to think.

3. I would be especially cautious about Arrowsmith's bestowing upon the university the role of messiah, as though by self-purification and self-giving the university could redeem the public order. That is an illusion. Aldous Huxley speaks the truth:

There seems to be a touching belief among certain Ph.D.'s in sociology that Ph.D.'s in sociology will never be corrupted. Like Sir Galahad's, their strength is as the strength of ten because their heart is pure--and their heart is pure because they are scientists and have taken six thousand hours of social studies. Alas, higher education is not necessarily a guarantee of high virtue, or higher political wisdom. (Brave New World Revisited, Harper, 1968, pp. 34-35)

Indeed, was it not the best and the brightest who took us into Vietnam? And is not every one of the

men involved in the Watergate scandal a graduate of American higher education? That fact caused the national AAUP "to grieve that we have failed in not helping them to overcome their character defects...while they were in our tutelage. We urge that University professors confess their sins." That ! from the staid and proper AAUP! Indeed, beware of the presumption that because we are smart we are therefore good, or wise. Having sat in faculty meetings I can only chuckle over William Buckley's jibe that he would rather be governed by the first thousand names in the Boston telephone book than by the Harvard faculty.

Recall the judgment of Justice Jackson who presided over the Nuremberg war crimes trials which found certain university people guilty of being all too relevant and too political. They had put their knowledge and skills into the medical and political atrocities of the Nazi war machine. They were decent, cultured people; they listened to Mozart on their hi-fi's, they read Goethe and Schiller in paperback. But Justice Jackson had to conclude, "We have to fear only the educated man. Only the educated man knows enough to hurt us." Only the educated person knows enough to fashion nuclear weapons. Only the educated person knows enough to devise legal ways of exploiting the blacks, or to maintain poverty under the disguise of freedom, or to cover up crimes while pretending to be St. George on a white horse. Only the educated person. The equal and opposite truth is that only the educated person knows enough to do us any real good. Only the educated person knows how to convert the affluence of the few into enough for everyone, how to restrain powerful nations for the safety of mankind, how to make cities livable, how to preserve nature for posterity. Only the educated know how.

This requires an educated conscience, or a conscientious education. Prof. Arrowsmith went on to say, 'Above all we need knowledge with a conscience--a conscience about the chaos our knowledge will otherwise create. In order to be effectively political, this conscience will have to be institutionally evinced.' Or, if you prefer Nathan Pusey, "We need to know, but we need also to believe, and we want especially to believe knowingly, and to know with conviction." We ought not depend on the president to articulate such conscience. Indeed, the president in his office, the professor in the classroom, the student at his desk and in the Student Union, I here in this pulpit--all of us voice the university conscience, and we do it by what we are as by what we say.

IV

Do you know what puzzles me most about this campus? It seems that some students and faculty who are trained in liberal studies find it easy to become illiberal. Frequently it is not the brawny athletes or professional rowdies who become ugly and intolerant, but those in many of our schools and colleges who have been most exposed to the humane traditions. We study the long, long view of history, yet people insist on instant solutions. We teach aesthetics, yet people pollute the campus with their personal trash. Why is it, despite all our humanities, people are so inhuman? How can we have three religious centers along Bay State Road, and this Chapel at the center of the campus, and still have so much selfish behavior, callousness toward nature, profaning of things holy?

The fault, dear brothers and sisters, may not be in our stars nor in "147" nor in the secular temper of these times nor in any other thing we use for excuse, but in ourselves that we are less than we are called to be. If our philosophers confine their teaching to linguistics and neglect the weightier matters of wisdom and worth; if the artists teach for salary and not out of personal passion for beauty; if theologians speak of God only in the third person, a He and never a Thou; if our doctors who are committed to health smoke themselves into lung cancer; if our psychologists who are committed to understanding the human psyche cannot understand themselves well enough to avoid feuding with their neighbors; if we chaplains who are committed to the living God trust in group therapy more than we trust the Holy Spirit--if gold rusts, what will iron do? "Truth is a verb," said Buckminster Fuller, "truth is a verb," something to be acted. Thomas à Kempis warned long ago, "The more thou knowest, and the better thou understandest, the more quickly shalt thou be judged, unless thy life be also the more holy."

V

In that book on solitude, Octavio Paz quotes Holderlin:

...if, beyond the straight way,
The captive Elements and the ancient
Laws of Earth break loose
Like maddened horses...then a desire to return
To chaos rises incessantly.

How could you better describe the condition of this university, and the temptations before us? Holderlin goes on to say,

There is much
To defend, and the faithful are much needed.

That is my text. Jeremiah could have spoken it. "There is much to defend, and the faithful are much needed."

Here is a university to defend, a university that stands along-side church and state as one of the orders of creation, not subordinate to any, but with its own precise function, and living by its own self-understanding. There are virtues here, the intellectual virtues: honesty; fearless inquiry into the most dangerous ideas; humility sitting down before the facts like a little child; openness to colleagues in mutual critique and confession; a trans-national fraternity of people who do not answer finally to any national cause; and a confidence that in the very nature of things deceit and violence and trickery succumb in the long run to the honesty and thinking that we call reason. These are virtues to be defended.

The faithful know also that the same power that holds creation together works to make this university cohere. The "uni" in "university" is the same "uni" as in "universe" and all of us relate to that Universal and Transcendent, either positively by our loyalty or negatively by abandoning the big questions and quitting the good fight.

Indeed there is much to defend, and the faithful are much needed. In a time far worse than ours Jeremiah bought a field. He was hopeful; not optimistic but hopeful, and willing to risk it. We are told that Merrill Lynch is bullish on America, and they want you to risk your money on it. I am bullish on this university because I know the people here. I served this year as chairman of the faculty committee to choose the University Lecturer, and we had verbal or written dossiers on some thirty colleagues, and I was greatly impressed by the quality of faculty who have national reputations for scholarship and teaching. I have talked with enough students, on the sidewalk, in the cafeteria, in my home, to know how they hurt and how they hope in their gutsy life here. I have sat in the offices of administrators so I know how they agonize for the good of this place. I am convinced there are people here, traditions here, quality here, and, I believe, stability here that will outlast the turmoil of the moment. The patient has inner power to recuperate, and unless he gives in to a death wish he can recover. Meanwhile there is much to defend, and the faithful are much needed. Therefore I buy into this place because reason and conscience are here, and there is much, much, to defend. Amen.

JESUS THE LATEST FAD?

Robert H. Hamill

No doubt about it, Jesus is the "in" thing this year. After years of rejection as a decorative front for the church institution, as a person too meek and mild to personify the revolution, as a man hopelessly naive and nonviolent in a violent time—Jesus is now the hottest thing on the religious scene. "The kids love Jesus, this we know, For the media tell us so." (The Christian Century) In the middle 60's God was dead and we had secular Christians, even atheist Christians and the "gospel of Christian atheism." Then we had a year of Christian revolution. In 1969 we learned the religious alphabet from Astrology to Zen, and last year we danced to the tamborines of Hare Krishna and bought the expensive courses of Scientology. But this year is the Jesus year, thanks to the Jesus people, the Jesus freaks, the Jesus movement.

Now a fad is not the same as being relevant. Women's skirts go up and down, conforming to the mood of the moment but making no effort to conform to reality, that is, to the anatomy of the thing. Conforming to the moment is faddish, it obeys the whims of the fashion designers, whether they design clothing or university curriculum. Relevance, on the other hand, is more lasting than a fad. Relevance fits reality. Relevance listens to what the centuries have to say, not just the days and hours. Relevance may have to resist the momentary fad.

Offense, and no offense

In this light consider two events in the gospel of Matthew. First, John was in prison and he heard about the work of Jesus, so he sent disciples to ask, "Are you the messiah or shall we look for another?" Jesus replied: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the poor have good news preached to them. Blessed are those who take no offense in me." (Matt. 11:2-6) Another day the people were astonished at his teaching. They wondered where this man got his wisdom and mighty works. Was he not the carpenter's son? Didn't they know his family, all of them very ordinary people? Where then did this man get all this power? "And they took offense at him." (Matt. 13: 53-57a) Indeed they had reason to find him offensive, as we shall see in a moment.

It is easy to escape the offense in this man because he is essentially an attractive, appealing person. The church may be bland, but he is real stuff, exciting and alive. After recent years of quasi-revolutionary movements, it feels good now to settle back with this person who takes things a little slower. The revolution failed, you got busted, you cannot find a decent job, so now you sniff your way through Love Story and in your mind you thumb through the old picture albums of western culture and find that Jesus makes a pleasing picture of peace and joy, with mercy toward all and God's love covering all our sins. Would you take offense at that? It fits the mood of this moment.

No wonder there is the Jesus movement, the Jesus people, the Jesus freaks. Who are these people? You cannot identify them by ID card because they adopt Biblical names: Joseph, David, Jonathan, Mary, Ruth, Esther, Naomi. Some are Vietnam veterans, some C.O.'s; some are former drug users or pushers, or former campus radicals; many come from the middle to upper middle class homes of affluence. Out of their diversity they have come to a common disillusionment with modern society, and a radical commitment to Jesus Christ. They often hold goods in common, sharing their food, clothing and shelter. In matters of sex they usually are stricter than the Puritans. All human colors are welcome: brown and black and white are brothers. Critical of the established church, they are committed to Jesus Christ. They want to change people and change the world, and they are convinced that can be done only through Jesus Christ. (See Ira Gallaway, "The Jesus People," engage, Aug. 15, 1971)

What shall we say to all this? Are these Jesus people just a faddish throwback to the old, rigid fundamentalism, or is this God moving through young people to renew an old, rigid church? Are these people dangerous and foolheaded, or are they prophets speaking the word of the Lord?

I keep an open mind about this matter. Certainly there are faddish elements in this movement, just as there were in earlier revivals in this country. For instance in the Great Awakening two centuries ago, George Whitefield stirred up the campuses; students screamed, fainted, had convulsions, in wild hysteria, so it was hard to tell whether the revival was the work of God or the devil. Pres. Chauncy of Harvard condemned the excitement, and at Yale several students were denied their diplomas

because of their "enthusiasm." In our own time there have been fads in the following of Jesus. Bruce Barton made him appear as a Rotarian. Sallman painted him as a sweet, tender, almost feminine creature. Others saw him as a Harlem social worker, or a Bonhoeffer style martyr, or a dagger-bearing Zealot inciting revolution. These were all fads of the moment. Now in the Jesus movement he is the occasion for "immediate experience," the inspirer of "superficial incantation but also of true and deep devotion. He is a...voice of authority and a beckoning hint of love in a world where the young seek simplicity and innocence." (1)

Perhaps the best attitude is that of Gamaliel. At one point the disciples were hauled before the council for their street preaching, and the high priests wanted to kill them. But Gamaliel, an honored teacher of the law, reminded the council that other upstart movements had died out, and he suggested that this too will pass. "For if this plan is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God." (Acts 5:33-39) So I say about the Jesus freaks. Just wait and see what happens to this Jesus movement.

Why Jesus caused offense

Except that in the case of Jesus himself you cannot wait. He forces you to make a decision of some sort, and there is a good deal in this man Jesus that causes people to be offended. He was an exciting, colorful, unpredictable person. Tender to the unfortunates, patient with honest inquirers, humble before heaven, he was also a firebrand, a disturber. He insulted the respectable clergy and called them hypocrites. He called Herod "that fox." He went to parties and people said he ate and drank too much and kept bad company. He was indeed a kind of beatnik who never settled down and wandered about with his little gang of followers. He assaulted the bankers and threw them out of the temple. He rode roughshod over sacrosanct regulations, especially rules about the Sabbath. He cured disease by any means handy, with a shocking disregard for other people's pigs and property. He showed no deference to the rich and powerful; he flouted the friendship of those who could help him, making it hard for people to be nice to him. Confronted with trick questions he replied with questions that sent people away red-faced and stammering. And he spoke the hardest things: "Blessed are the poor...If you are not for me you are against me...I come to bring

a sword, that is, to divide...If you do not hate your father and mother you are not worthy of me..." This man was impossible! No wonder people took offense at him.

One of the religious centers on campus has a sign in the window, "Guru Inside--instant problem solving." They must be spoofing us! You can be sure that guru is not Jesus: Jesus doesn't solve problems so much as he creates problems, sharpens and aggravates problems--and that is what makes him so blamed relevant. He keeps insisting that life does not consist of abundant possessions, that his people must put his way above the way of family or nation, that much more is required of those to whom much has been given. Life is a gamble and Jesus makes no guarantees; he does not promise that your life will be safe or prosperous or even happy. He does not promise that "God will become real to you," that your prayers will surely be answered however foolish they may be. He does promise that you will be delivered up before councils and governors and you will get into all kinds of trouble. No wonder people took offense. Everyone--the mob of course, but his friends as well, and the leaders of Hebrew religion, the best religion of that time, and the leaders of Roman government, the best government of that time,--everyone took offense at this man.

What makes Jesus so appealing?

Why then his appeal? Why do people find Jesus so unfailingly attractive that they develop new movements for him? Why do the young become Jesus people, Jesus freaks, campus crusaders, for instance?

One reason is that heroes are hard to come by. Most heroes are fragile images of the moment, faddish and fading. Jerry Rubin, Jackie Onassis, Ted Keddedy, Cassius Clay, Joan Baez, Billy Graham, Ralph Nader--each carries a touch of the momentary, the faddish, too temporary to model after or draw strength from. No one of them seems completely relevant to our whole need. Instead of turning to them, the young generation is turned on by Jesus Christ Superstar. (He, by the way, would consider that title blasphemous! He never considered himself a superstar. He downgraded himself, turning people away from himself toward God, insisting that "none is good save God." Superstar? Ridiculous!) Nevertheless here is this immensely popular and serious rock opera, bringing that Man back to our

attention, the man of Galilee becomes the Man for All Seasons, for all persons! Also Godspell, the new Broadway musical, celebrates Jesus with some moving, joyful songs. There is also Leonard Bernstein's new creation, premiered last Wednesday in the new Kennedy Center of the Performing Arts, a Mass which centers on a figure who looks very much like Jesus and sings about the Word of the Lord, how the man can be imprisoned but the Word of the Lord cannot be imprisoned, and how we all wait for the season of the Word of the Lord. Here then, through our popular arts, we find Someone who is relevant, permanently relevant, Someone who is more sensitive to our total human need than any momentary hero can be. Creators and composers of all kinds keep going back to Jesus Christ to avoid the fads of the day, for there is a real human being, a man worth imitating, and a prototype of the man of the future.

There is still more to him than this moral appeal. He carries a religious message, good news. His whole life and experience declare to you that your life is good. Your past is past, and it is approved for what it is. You are accepted for what you are, with all your foibles and stumbling stupidities. God knows. God understands, better than you do. God accepts you that way not because you are good and lovable, but he accepts you with all your limitations, and he overcomes, digests, transforms the person you now are, and makes you good. He offers you new life and promises to make that new life a good life.

A price to be paid

It is not cheap. Bonhoeffer was right about cheap grace. Dag Hammarskjöld told it the way it is: there is a price to be paid before a broken relationship can be restored. The forgiver must take the consequences of the forgiven man's wrongdoing--and that is precisely what God does in the continuing life of Jesus Christ; he assumes the hurt and hatred in your life, and bears the consequences. Jesus is the price God pays for your new life. There may be accidental wisdom in that advertisement for advance ticket sales to "Jesus Christ--a Rock Opera," which was staged by the Unitarian-Universalist Assembly. "Make Checks Payable to: JESUS CHRIST." That's where you owe it all right. He did what is costly. He assumed the consequences of human stupidity and pride and prejudice, and he did it representing God. He bore the guilt of the guilty, something as six-year-old school kids who stand on the street corner at seven

a.m. on a cold winter morning to be bussed across town thus bear the sins of their parents back to the third and fourth generation of their ancestors.

What is it then that causes people not to be offended in Jesus? I cannot come up with any nice formula explaining the man, but I remember what Albert Schweitzer said after years of study:

"We find no designation which expresses what He is for us. He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old by the lakeside He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks He has to fulfill in our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is." (The Quest of the Historical Jesus)

There he stands! Beyond the fads of this moment there is something permanent in this man, and through him we get rescued from what we are and get made into new persons. I have to confess, as Don Marquis once said it for Judas, that this man in a sense has "bewitched me, for when his eyes met mine I knew that here was one I must follow...for the world was somehow different, and I was different from myself." Different, and if not better, at least not near the rascal that I would otherwise be. And what is required is a vigorous response, a Yes or a No. I believe Schweitzer is correct in saying that "No vital force comes into the figure (of Jesus) unless a man breathes into it all the hate or all the love of which he is capable. The stronger the love, or the stronger the hate, the more life-like is the figure which is produced. For hate as well as love can write a life of Jesus." So, love him, or hate him. He is worthy of your love, and worthy of your hate, for as the good book says, some take offense at him and for good reason, and others find no offense in him, but joy and meaning for their own lives, and the only hope they see for mankind.

(1)

The Christian Century, editorial, June 23, 1971.

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel Boston University on September 12, 1971. Additional copies available free.

IS GOD A PROFESSOR?

John 1:1-5, 10-18

Robert H. Hamill

All religious language is symbolic. We have no vocabulary restricted for holy things, only. Every word we use about God is at best an analogy, even customary words as 'father,' 'judge,' 'creator,' 'ruler,' So why not the word 'professor'? God is the professor, all the world a classroom, every person a student. That figure might be more meaningful than Lord and Kingdom, or Shepherd and sheep, for none of us lives in a kingdom, none of us raises sheep. We are more likely to understand this figure of God as professor. A professor is a mysterious character, often inaccessible, whose will is inscrutable. The professor knows more than we know, he/she asks embarrassing questions, and conducts examinations, and makes judgments over us. It is tempting to think of the professor as God, and in this tough academic world it seems often more important to please this earthly god than the heavenly one. But set that aside, and consider the other possibility: that God is like a professor.

Professor of all life, all people

Professor of what? Astronomy perhaps; does he not live among the stars? Meteorology at least; he regulates the weather. Engineering no doubt; he designs and creates all things! He could teach on the Law School faculty, and declare his commandments. In Theology certainly; he knows church history and the creeds. I would assign him perhaps to anthropology, because his chief business is the making and remaking of people. He belongs in the social sciences somewhere, especially political science because of his overwhelming concern for the earthly kingdom of justice.

Not that God is a specialist, a narrow scholar. God knows all there is to know, but he knows too that the future is open-ended, and the future is not "there" in the sense that the present is "there" to be known. Some things are actual, such as the United Nations; other things are potential, as world peace; therefore God cannot know world peace as though it were already here as the United Nations is here. God knows the actual present as actual, and the potential future as potential. God's knowledge is growing, his total experience of the world is being enriched by the world's growth, something as a good professor grows in knowledge all his lifetime.

Better say then that God is professor not of

subjects in the catalogue of human knowledge, but professor of the whole curriculum, professor of all life and all people, for in a profound sense God does not teach subject matter. When God reveals he does not reveal creeds and formulas or "wisdom" in textbook form; he does not teach a catechism. God reveals himself, not information about himself. Our knowledge of God does not consist of facts about God; it consists of serious, sustained reflection on all our experience. God does not require that we have some special "religious sense," because he teaches so that even the simple can understand. He has hidden things from the wise and revealed them to babes. (Matt. 11:25)

Hunger and thirst, the main student virtue

At Ohio State University a professor met his class the first day, made an assignment and dismissed the class. Second day he asked, "Have you any questions on today's assignment?" There were none, so he made a new assignment and dismissed the class. Third day, "Any questions?" None. New assignment, class dismissed. That professor would not lecture until someone was curious enough to ask a question. He reasoned that it's no use teaching until students are eager to learn. Likewise in God's classroom. Only sinners are welcome, only those who know their own need and limitations, and want to remedy them. Only those dissatisfied with themselves can ever learn. The single requirement in God's classroom, the only tuition to be paid, is the earnest desire to learn, the hunger and thirst for the good life--what Tillich described as "asking passionately the question of the meaning of our existence and being willing to receive answers, even if the answers hurt."

Distinctions

Study under Professor God is not identical to study at B.U. In the university you are permitted to take electives, and your friends advise you, "Take Professor Archibald--any course, but get him, he's out-a-sight"--whatever that means. You may choose Professor Archibald, but no person chooses God. You are in his course whether you like him or not. You choose whether to learn, but not whether to "take" him.

Nor does God lecture. He is never that precise. God knows people will not listen to a lecture on thrift and self-reliance; instead he arouses in a boy the desire for a bicycle, then the boy hustles out to make and save his own money. Using the demonstration method, like a professor doing an experiment in the lab, God states the law, "Whoever takes the sword will perish by the sword," and its

corollary, "Righteousness alone exalts a nation." Then he arrays the evidence and bids you watch the demonstration: the rise and fall of those who take the sword--Caesar's Rome, the Christian Crusades, Ghengis Khan, Napoleon, Hitler's Germany and the American electronic battlefield in Vietnam. Then he bids you to observe the things that endure--the moral and religious maturity of the Hebrews, the beauty and learning of the Greeks, the law, literature and liberty of the English. Then he concludes, "Those who have eyes to see, let them see."

Teaching by events, and by persuasion

Now we can see how difficult it is, this professing. A friend of mine teaches public speech, and he has to resort to spectacular methods. He had a student who stared at the floor and would not look up, not until my professor friend sat on the floor where the student was staring, thus compelling him to look at his audience. Another student was so glued to his manuscript that the prof grabbed his papers from the lecturn and said, "Now talk to me." Such drastic methods resemble "the mighty acts of God," which strip you of your securities: the death of a parent; the loss of a job that had made you too comfortable; a blow to your health to jolt your arrogance; flunking a course when you goofed off too long. On such occasions he sets a bush on fire to grab your attention. Most times, however, he relies on your whole life experience as his teaching material. He lets the truth seep into your mind slowly; you absorb the truth, you do not write it down frantically as class notes. For this reason Jesus used parables, to bring home to us the meaning of daily experience. So God teaches.

I read recently of studies made about the performance of pupils who are expected to perform well. Teachers were told that certain students, really chosen at random, had high IQs and high potential, and then, over the months following, those students customarily performed much better than average, simply because the teacher expected them to. Ah, if we human beings could only realize the high expectations which God has of each of us! There is a word, you know, that "from those to whom much is given, much more is required." (Luke 12:48) On TV one day I watched Jascha Heifetz tutor two young violinists. One student played, and Heifetz made no response. Then the second student played; he sounded to me to possess much greater talent, and Heifetz criticized his work unmercifully, requiring him to repeat and repeat a passage until he got it to the master's liking. He believed that from him to whom much talent is given, better work is required. No doubt God is like the master violinist.

As teacher God does not set up a combat of his wisdom and our folly. Rather his role "lies in the patient operation of his overpowering rationality...He is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness." (Whitehead) God is not coercive, but persuasive. He behaves like a good professor, not as policeman, judge or governor.

Examinations and grades

Yet even the best professor gives exams, and grades--they prod us to do better work. However, grading often seems unjust, and so does God's. I know a professor who had in his physics class two star football players. He wanted to keep the boys eligible, yet he also had academic integrity. He devised this plan: "Jim, you think up any question about the subject matter of his course, and Hank, you answer it. You both get the same grade depending on your combined performance." Alas, poor Jim couldn't think up anything Hank could answer, so there went two touchdowns. In that experiment Prof. Lapp worked on the idea that students be graded according to their cooperative achievement, not separately, and I am convinced that God does the same.

God does not reward us according to our separate sins and virtues, but deals with us as a whole society. As professor he gives a class grade, not individual grades. The tower of Siloam falls on the innocent as on the guilty, and the sun shines on the good and the evil. Cancer strikes the saints as often as the rascals, yet people benefit from new medicines though they did not contribute to their discovery. Thus God binds us into one human company. We benefit and we suffer because of one another. The kingdom--or the classroom--of God is a social experience, with group rewards and group punishment. No person lives, or sins, to himself in God's classroom. No apple polishing will persuade him to treat you better than your classmates, not release you from the consequences of their bad performance.

This does not mean that God forgets the individual--far from it. In fact God's classroom is the only place where the solitary person can be sure he won't flunk out. God never flunks any person, he never gives you up as hopeless! You may fail a course, as Judas failed, but God never throws you out of school. (The judicial code is not binding on him!) "His mercy never fails and his steadfast love endures forever."

God personifies his teaching

Beyond all his other devices for teaching, God uses one distinctive method. He embodies his message in persons...How does he teach honor and reverence for life? He raises up Albert Schweitzer. How does God teach that "the meek shall inherit the earth?" He raises up Martin Luther King. And how does God teach what he means for human life to become? He raises up a man named Jesus. About a hundred years ago here in Boston, a man was asked to describe a Christian person; he pointed out Phillips Brooks and said, "There." If you are asked to describe what God means by 'humanity,' what God means human people to be, you could do no better than to point to Jesus of Nazareth who is called Christ, and say, "There."

Jesus, you notice, came as a Teacher. Had he been a carpenter he would have shown forth the God who is the Designer and Maker of the universe. Had he been a policeman or judge he would have shown God as righteous Law-giver and Ruler. He came as Teacher, professor. With simple words and parables, and open acts of love and courage, he taught about God the Teacher, the God who deals with the student more than with subject matter, and shows more of himself than of any doctrine. That is God's way of teaching.

You notice, further, that the gospel of John conceives of God's creative act as act of Word. "The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was." And through the Word "all things came to be; no single thing was created without him." Now word is a professorial tool, the professor's chief tool. He deals with words: word is act, act is word. And the divine Word is also act, the act that makes and keeps all things. God must be a good deal like a professor. I hope that is good news for you, both you professors and you students.

* * * * *

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on September 16, 1973.
Additional copies available free.

GOD IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN....

Robert H. Hamill

St. Augustine spoke for me when he said,
"To Thee, O Lord, I should have lifted up
my mind, for Thee to give it relief; but
I had neither the will nor the power to do
so, and the difficulty was the greater be-
cause when I thought of Thee nothing real
or substantial presented itself to my mind."

God seems, if not dead, at least silent, and our
dealings with him have come to a stumbling halt.
We seldom pray, except in extreme emergency. There
probably is a God of some sort, but he is so
incomprehensible that we don't bother about figur-
ing him out. There is plenty else for us to do
down here on earth. We seem left to ourselves to
manage our life. We feel alone in the universe,
alone with one another. No wonder MacLeish has
Sarah say to her husband, J.B.,

"Blow on the coals of the heart. The candles
in the church are out. The lights have gone
out in the sky. Blow on the coals of the
heart."

That's all there is left, now that God no longer
speaks to people. Thus when we think of him,
nothing real or substantial presents itself to our
minds.

We breathe the secular, scientific attitude
which denies reality to anything it cannot measure
or verify. We know for sure that God is not some
enormous Being who intervenes in human affairs and
interferes with natural processes. Our dear old
Sunday School teacher was wrong: God is not some
divine genie who unrolls the script of history and
gives sneak previews of the future to those smart
enough to understand prophecies in Scripture. Much
of that is what Outler calls "baggage of overbelief."
What then can we get into our heads that is "real
or substantial"?

Sermon to intellectuals

One thing is sure, we must not expect a neatly
packaged creed, nor a set of convictions with a
Q.E.D. at the end, nor an image portrait all
consistent. No, there are surrealist fragments in
the figure of God. He is a baffling enigma, and
we are perhaps like the intellectuals in Athens who
pretended to know more than they knew, yet wor-
shipped god as unknown. So Paul preached to them.

"The God who created the world and everything
in it...is Lord of heaven and earth...He
created every race of men of one stock, to

inhabit the whole earth's surface...They were to seek God, and, it might be, touch and find him; though indeed he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move, in him we exist...Now he commands mankind, all men everywhere, to repent, because he has fixed the day on which he will have the world judged, and justly judged, by a man of his choosing; of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:24-31, NEB)

In that brief sermon we hear a sketch of the Christian understanding that God, the ultimate Mystery, is alive, working, and very present. God is purposefully present in human life, Paul was saying, as the creator and provider of all human possibility, and God works in the orderly and moral governance of all creation. He is the Inspirer of human insights and wisdom; for the Greeks too had anxieties, and longings for the true and beautiful and good, and the need to love and to be loved. He is the Lawgiver who demands that men live reverently before him and justly with one another, according to standards he has made clear. He is the infinite One who has come in one finite Man and made clear what he intends human life to be like. God is present in all these human experiences. God is the life within human life, the meaning and coherence and possibility of it all, partly hidden and partly revealed, and what makes a man a man, what makes a human being, is precisely the capacity to discern the Presence within things present.

Where is God living?

Is it possible to be more specific about how and where God works? Let me try.

God stands present to human affairs not as a meddling supervisor, nor as absentee landlord, but as One who provides the potential for human fulfillment. He sustains all efforts that people make toward true humanity.

1. When I declare that God is alive and working, I am saying something about my own existence. I am saying that life is good, and that it is good to exist, to be. My life, your life, the whole context of living, are worthwhile. I trust it, I count on it to provide for us all. St. Paul was right, "In him we live and move, in him we exist." The human enterprise has its sad and shabby moments to be sure, but through it all it is better to be than not to be, and life has potential for good. The word "God" designates whatever it is about this whole experience that calls forth my trust and sustains it. This primordial confidence which God renews--that is one

place where I find God alive and at work. (Woodyard, pamphlet, The Reality of God)

2. Another place where God lives and works is in his oversight and judgment of large scale human affairs. Countless human endeavors for self-governance collapse. High floated dreams for human betterment go defunct. The military adventure in Vietnam produces My Lai, and a million dead, and burned huts and poisoned crops and millions of refugees. Correctional prisons do not correct, they only imprison, then when some men revolt the authorities shoot down the innocent with the guilty. Our human schemes get shattered by the Great Hammer that says, "You cannot do things that way." He brings to naught the stubborn and the stupid and the wicked, even when they are disguised as angels of goodwill. God is not mocked. He brings the people to judgment.

3. God lives also, as I am convinced, in all the human efforts to humanize the earth. In Gandhi, in Martin Luther King, in the Kennedys, in countless nameless, unknown tragic heroes, those men and women who strive for justice and dignity among men, those who are slain because they labor to humanize the earth--in all such people God lives and works to redeem his people. Call it human love, or compassion, or nonviolence--whatever--it indicates something far deeper, something called sacrifice, and the human situation at its crucial points seems capable of being saved only by such sacrifice. We are dealing here with the basic nature of reality, the way things are--something Christians know as Cross. And wherever there is Cross, there God lives and works.

I have said that I find God alive and at work, first, wherever life feels basically good and worthwhile; second, wherever human wickedness is made to fail; third, wherever human sacrifice sets forward the humanizing of the earth. Theologians call these creation, judgment and redemption. To me they seem to be simply the elemental works of the living God.

How does one know?

But how does a person know for sure? Or know at all?

1. Some people come to their faith in God by reason, that is by hard thought and reflection and figuring it out in their minds. Pascal set to work that way, asking hard questions.

"When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after,

the little space which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of space of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened, and am astonished at being here, rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, why now rather than then. Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this place and time been allotted to me?" (Pensees, 205)

Just Wednesday, in this pulpit, President Silber said there are no more important questions than these, the kind Pascal was asking, questions about the destiny of human life, and the providence of creation. They deserve serious and systematic consideration, Dr. Silber declared, and a university cannot be a university unless it makes a place for sustained attention to such questions. Certainly the educated person will ask such questions, and thereby seek out God with his mind, hopefully to find him, find something "real and substantial" as Augustine longed for.

2. Other people find God by means of the moral struggle. The revolutionary ferment of our time is stirred largely by a moral revolt against cruelties. For years now American people have seen the Vietnam war to be a cruel hoax on the Vietnamese people, a military disaster, and a moral scandal, and they have become morally outraged because they believe the war contrary to God's will. Other issues now claim our moral attention, such as prison reform, for now after Attica we can all see vividly exposed the cruelties that are built into the system, and they deserve our fierce moral response. For other people, especially the young, the aching moral issue may be abortion, because any serious person sees issues there which are terribly complex: they involve the body and psyche and deep human emotions; they arouse questions of law and conscience and religion. The moral dimensions of this question deserves our sustained attention. Whether it be war or prison or abortion--whatever--whenever a person struggles with the moral shape of a serious issue, he comes against the question, how does this fit into the nature of reality? What is the ultimate that I am up against when I face this question? How can I decide, how can I know, what is ultimately good? And where do I find the moral strength to pursue the good? And in that moral struggle he finds that Reality is good, Reality supports the free and compassionate against the compulsive and cruel. There is a moral Reality out there, and in the struggle to find it and obey it a person comes to know the One who makes that Reality and keeps it.

3. For most people among us there is still one more way to come to know God: that is, meeting with other people who hold this faith, and meeting thereby with Jesus Christ. We find God alive and working in the man named Jesus, whom men called Christ. Not every-

one finds him, to be sure, not even everyone among those who saw Jesus face to face. Anatole France is likely accurate when he tells of Pontius Pilate who, in his old age, met a friend of years before who asked him if he remembered a young man named Jesus, native of Nazareth, who was crucified for some crime or other. Pilate knit his brow a moment. "Jesus? Jesus of Nazareth?" "No, I don't seem to remember." Jesus makes no impression on some people. God does not force himself. Evidence for God is not compulsory. He does not overwhelm like floodwaters, nor storm the walls as troopers did in Attica.

Many people however do come to know God through meeting this strange man hanging on his cross. In his own time people referred to him as "Anointed," "Beloved Son," "Messiah," "Son of God." By such titles the gospels meant to say that there is more to this man than meets the eye. Meeting him you meet up with the Sovereign God of all creation. You meet his Father who sent him, deputized him to act on His behalf. Meeting Jesus you meet the God who comes first as God the void, then God the enemy, and now in Jesus comes as God the friend, the giver and changer of life.

God is hidden and revealed

So in countless experiences I find God both hidden and made known. In and behind the natural world, the seedtime and harvest, the sun and rain on the just and the unjust, there God declares himself the Maker of heaven and earth. In and behind the struggle for life in a hospital room God accredits himself as the beginning and end and keeper of life. In and behind the United Nations and Congressional committees, the welfare struggle and school bussing, the Black Muslims and the NAACP, God establishes himself as the Lord of our human affairs. In and behind the love of a man and a woman God leads two people into the meaning of life. In and behind the Event called Jesus Christ God invades all of life, claiming it as his own. In and behind all such experiences God is alive and at work to rescue his people from hurt and deliver them into good.

We cannot say, "Lo, here...Lo, there..." because we cannot know precisely where our human events end and divinity begins. We deal with a hidden and often unidentifiable divine dynamic. He does not write his signature on the billboards, but instead he keeps us dissatisfied with what is obvious, and he deals with us mostly in what we call mysterious. But if we keep ourselves open, intellectually alert and morally strict, we find him in the mystery of our own life, for in him we do live and move, in him we do exist, and here in our own experience he is alive and present and hard at work.

Let us listen finally to Tielhard de Chardin:

"God does not offer himself to us as a thing all complete and ready to be embraced. For us he is eternal discovery and eternal growth. The more we think we understand him, the more he reveals himself as otherwise. The more we think we hold him, the further he withdraws, drawing us into the depths of himself. God is not a fixed point in the universe, but a moving center which we have to follow, as the Magi their star."

* * * * *

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel, Boston University on September 19, 1971. Additional copies available free.

AMNESTY, CLEMENCY AND PARDON

Robert H. Hamill

Amnesty means a forgetting. It wipes the slate clean, as though the deed had never happened. The Supreme Court defined amnesty as "abolition and forgetfulness of the offense." Amnesty cannot be earned: it is an act of goodwill undertaken by the authority.

Clemency means relaxing of penalty. Clemency is lenient, it "goes easy" on the offender. President Ford has set up a Clemency Review Board to consider the appeals of young men already convicted for desertion. It can adjust the punishment to fit the individual case. Mr. Ford said he wanted to throw the weight of his presidency on the side of leniency. That means clemency. Clemency can be earned, as good behavior in prison earns early parole.

Pardon means remission of penalty; it cancels out the punishment. Pardon forgives the offender. Pardon implies guilt, and acceptance of pardon implies the admission of guilt. For instance, Mr. Nixon. The purpose of pardon is to have pity on the offender, to alleviate his suffering. The purpose of amnesty is to reconcile the offender and the offended, and to bind up the wounds of society. The Supreme Court in 1915 declared that "(Amnesty) overlooks the offense; (pardon) remits punishment." Amnesty is granted when it is "deemed more expedient for the public welfare than prosecution and punishment.

Confusion of mood, and of principle

Our country is experiencing a terrible confusion about these matters, precipitated by two Presidential actions: the pardon of Mr. Nixon and the program of clemency for draft offenders, Watergate and Vietnam! Some people want to forgive and forget about Vietnam, yet hold Mr. Nixon to the strict rules of law and order. Other people want to forgive and forget about Watergate, yet hold draft offenders to the strict rules of law and order. Still others take a soft line on both categories, and others take a hard line on both. There is vast confusion in our feelings.

Principles are another matter, and we must be aware of confusing the principles. There is a clean distinction between these cases, and we must not let our confused feelings override the clear moral issues. Therefore let us look again at these three words, in reverse order.

The pardon of Mr. Nixon

Mr. Nixon was pardoned for deeds which were clearly charged in the House Judiciary Committee report, and for others including those which Mr. Nixon himself confessed in that August 5 statement which triggered his downfall. In compassion for Mr. Nixon's health and the impact on his family, in feeling that he had suffered enough, the President issued a "full, complete and absolute pardon" for any crimes done against the United States during his presidency. That is a clear case of pardon: it is addressed to the offender. It does not forget nor condone nor erase the charges against him; it simply wipes out the punishment and sets the offender free. That is pardon.

Clemency for draft offenders

The President then granted clemency to draft resisters. His proposal calls essentially for two years of alternative service so a resister can earn his re-entry into American society. Deserters who have been convicted and are serving in prison can appeal to the Clemency Review Board to have their terms reduced; but they have to take an oath re-pledging their allegiance to the country. Exiles and those emerging from underground have to sign a different pledge, and undertake two full years of service.

This earned re-entry program is certainly better than Nixon's "Never!" but it is not magnanimous. Nor is it amnesty. To earn this re-entry a deserter must take an oath of allegiance and thus accept his country's judgment on his moral protest. This amounts to a confession that his moral protest was a mistake. Obviously those who conscientiously opposed the Vietnam war and went to the extreme of desertion, some of whom are in exile and others underground, are not likely to reverse their convictions and now accept new penalties for obeying their conscience.

Indeed there are some benefits to this program. It is better than nothing. Some men who are imprisoned for conscience sake will find it more tolerable to serve some months in a hospital. Some men will pay the price of humiliation and work in order to walk our streets again and live with their families here at home. But most of them will refuse this clemency because it falls far short of amnesty. President Ford is confusing clemency with amnesty. Earned re-entry is not amnesty, which means forgetting, wiping off the slate. This program is not amnesty.

Amnesty yet in the future

President Ford said, "I reject amnesty," and he did. Amnesty means the "abolition and forgetfulness of the offense," so the clemency program is not amnesty; it is not a forgetting.

When we speak of amnesty for draft resisters, whom do we mean? Exiles in Canada and elsewhere, who fled rather than enter the military; perhaps 10,000 of them. Plus a small group of men now in federal prison for their refusal to be drafted; there are 300 to 400 of these. In addition, unknown thousands who have disappeared underground. They live as fugitives in their own land, either having deserted from the military or hidden from the draft board. Tom, for example, a high school dropout. His counselor tells about him: "Time after time in our talks, tears substituted for words when he tried to express his abhorrence of military life. His family threatened to disown him, his brother threatened to dismember him, yet he went AWOL. Like all deserters I know, Tom left the Army only as a last resort. He lasted underground only a month before giving himself up. He was broke, his wife was pregnant. It took two months of red tape and testing to convince the Army psychiatrist he was incapable of coping with the army's violent world. At the last moment his discharge was rejected. Where Tom is now I have no idea. He took off again, this time with his wife and baby." (Lowell Monke, in Fellowship, June 1974)

In addition there are 450,000 Vietnam veterans with less-than-honorable discharges. Scarred by drug abuse, torn by the emotional turmoil of battle, suffering from discrimination for being nonviolent at heart yet having to shoot and kill and burn against their will--at last they broke down and were discharged as "psychologically unfit." It all adds up to 500,000 young men--exiled, prisoned, underground or discharged less than honorably--men who were not able to prove that they could not kill and would not train to kill, men for whom the law did not allow their kind of protest--so they were driven to some illegal form of resistance. Such people are victims of Vietnam just as surely as other honorable men, veterans, those GI's physically disabled in battle and now populating the VA hospitals, are victims of Vietnam.

Amnesty does not ask pity for such men. Amnesty is not like pardon; pardon cancels out punishment, while amnesty forgets the offense. Pardon releases Mr. Nixon from the penalty of his crimes; it clearly implies that he committed crimes. Amnesty, true amnesty, would wipe out of memory the deeds which occurred and would make no judgment about how these young men behaved.

After all, what was the offense? It was the offense of morality, premature morality. They saw and said and acted it out vividly, before the rest of us, that the Vietnam war was a national disgrace; that the killing of 50,000 American youth on the other side of the globe; the murder of one million civilians on each side of battle; the devastation of that little land by burning and bombing and defoliation; routing of millions from their little villages, to be set on roads as refugees in their own land--all this was insane, immoral for civilized people--and these resisters said they would not bless it nor do it.

Where are the elders, "the best and the brightest" who conceived and escalated that madness? Where are those who massacred the innocent children, as Lt. Calley at My Lai? Where are the presidents and generals and Congressmen who voted for that continuing insanity? Where are the rest of us who made our profits, paid our taxes, and kept quiet? We all go scotfree, while thousands upon thousands of these young men languish in jail, hide out underground, are exiled in foreign lands, or walk the streets as social rejects--victims of that public madness. Ex-President Nixon gets a pardon for crimes against the country, while Tom, and Tom, Dick and Harry, our sons and brothers and husbands--suffer the moral indignity of this clemency proposal. They are asked to renounce their convictions and to renew allegiance to a land they loved enough to oppose it when it was wrong. They are being further penalized for having opposed the war before it became popular to do so. This country has no moral right to ask of them such moral humiliation.

A decent thing

The only way to wash out the residue of Vietnam is to grant full amnesty to all who resisted the military life for conscience sake. I agree with Fr. Hesburgh, "I can more easily forget what the youngsters did than what their elders did. And that is all amnesty really means, forgetting." Amnesty would wipe out of mind whatever actions those young men took to resist the military life for sake of conscience.

The time has come now for real amnesty to replace this "earned re-entry" clemency proposal. Vietnam and Watergate have almost destroyed us as a great people. To restore our own self respect we Americans need to do something decent. Amnesty is a decent thing to do.

For clarity of mind we must distinguish three things: pardon has been granted to Mr. Nixon for his offenses against the established laws of the land; clemency is now offered to draft resisters on the grounds they earn their reentry into our society; but amnesty, the wiping out of the past, still needs to be proclaimed. Amnesty is a decent thing, and we need to do a decent thing. "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds."

* * * * *

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel, Boston University, by Dr. Robert H. Hamill, University Chaplain, on September 22, 1974. Additional copies available free.

NEW MORALITY -- REALLY NEW, REALLY MORAL

Genesis 39:1-12 and Acts 5:1-11

Robert H. Hamill

The world turns and the world changes,
But one thing does not change.
In all of my years, one thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing
does not change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.
--T. S. Eliot, Choruses from "The Rock"

In our time this struggle becomes intense. That is what most of the generation gap is all about, with its protests, long hair and bazaar on campus sidewalks. That is what the civil rights and black struggles are all about, and Watergate and the farm workers' struggle. That is what the judicial code and ROTC protests are all about--this perpetual struggle of good and evil, and the problem, what is good, what is evil?

One thing at least seems clear. Most Americans, especially the young, regard the violation of traditional moral codes as lesser wrong than the attempt to disguise such violations by pretense or excuse. According to a public poll the vast majority of American people feel

That a politician who takes bribes is worse than an adulterer; the manufacturer of unsafe automobiles is worse than a mugger; a policeman who accepts money from a prostitute is worse than the prostitute; a white grocer who sells bad meat to a black customer is worse than the black who riots; a psychiatrist who improperly commits an old person to a mental hospital is worse than a draft dodger who fakes a physical defect; a landlord who will not repair a fire trap is worse than a campus radical who occupies a building; a rich man who uses loopholes to avoid income tax is worse than a welfare chiseler.

(TIME, June 6, 1969; Louis Harris poll)

We are re-defining what we think is right and wrong.

The nature of the new morality

We all know that a new morality is emerging, and we know something of what that new morality is not. It is not permissiveness. It does not say that a person may properly have sex with whomever, and whenever he desires; that he may steal any property if he needs it, or destroy any public property if it pleases him; or indulge any drug for pleasure without regard for his health; or spend money for anything he can afford; or buy term papers and turn

them in as his own; or carry a gun if it makes him feel safer. No, the emerging morality does not mean such permissiveness.

Neither does the new morality consist of obedience to rules. Rules and laws are either too vague to be helpful, or too precise to deal with the complexity of moral problems. Also, people are ingenious enough to get around any law you can devise, such as the rule of no drinking in your dorm rooms. Students learned to drink while sitting on the window sill with their feet inside and everything outside, thus obeying the law.

Likewise a new morality cannot consist of devising some utopian dream of what ought to be, then pursuing it with the hot passion of a lover, "...dreaming of systems so perfect that no man will need to be good." Nay, the good life is not some ideal state that can be blueprinted and engineered.

If the new morality is not to be these things--neither permissiveness nor rules nor utopia--what can it be? I am convinced the new morality will consist of an inner accountability, some authentic acting out from a free, responsible self.

New morality exceeds the old

For one thing the new morality will be more severe than the old morality, more severe even than the ancient law. Jesus said,

"Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law..." (Matt. 5:17, 18)

Then he proceeded to take six basic Jewish laws as illustrations: laws relating to murder, adultery, divorce, truth-speaking, retaliation and neighborliness. Look at the first one as a sample. The law was, Thou shalt not kill, and the penalty was death. But Jesus said something like this: You may not actually kill another person, but you often hate him, and the anger in your heart is as serious in the sight of God as the violence of your hand, because actions grow out of your attitudes. You may not be guilty of the outer act, but yet indulge in the inner attitude that makes for the act later on. (Ferris)

In all six examples Jesus did essentially the same thing. He started with the law, did not reject it, nor ridicule it. He assumed it was the Law of God, and accepted the law as the minimum requirement of society under God. Then beyond the requirements of the law he spoke to a person's heart and mind, and laid demands there. The early

church was not a nice gathering of nice people where everyone did as he pleased, in his new freedom in Christ. Rather, those people were expected to conform to the mind of Christ. They, like Jesus himself, were patient with the wayward, but they did not tolerate behavior that was destructive. This may have something to say to those who live in dorms, or in communes, even in families: wide permissiveness never builds community; that takes standards, and Jesus proclaimed standards that were inward and therefore more severe than outer obedience.

Notice that Jesus did not tell people they could go out and murder someone who stood in their way, provided they did it kindly. It was not permissible to commit adultery if they did it with love, nor to lie if they did it with a clear conscience. He did say there are things less obvious and less easily detected, that are more serious than these outward actions which merely reveal what is in your heart and mind. He made it plain that even though they might technically be "within the law" they might still fall far short of inner morality. Jesus said that the existing moral codes were not good enough, so he liberated people from the law's restrictions while also making the more severe demands of love and accountability. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the best people, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Morality thought of as responsibility

The best word for this understanding of morality may be 'responsibility.' Instead of saying the moral ideal is to love, or to obey the laws, or to strive for a goal, say that the aim of moral life is to be a responsible person. Common sense tells us what this word means. To say Tom is a responsible person means that Tom takes charge and performs his work in a reliable way, as Joseph administered the Egyptian economy during seven fat years to save up grain for seven lean years. To say a person is responsible means his word is as good as his bond; if he says he will do a job, it's as good as done. Or, a responsible person is one who assumes his fair share of the community chest fund and engages in some project of civic improvement. A responsible person assumes the burden of his society. In the Air Force Academy for example every cadet promises not to lie, cheat or steal, nor tolerate those who do. He is responsible for keeping the academy honest. The responsible person is the person who keeps his car brakes tight so he won't accidentally injure a pedestrian. Common sense carries all these meanings in the word 'responsible.'

Responsibility in the Bible

But there is more to this word than what comes from common sense. Naturally we turn to the Bible to find it, but lo, the word is not there. The

basic idea of responsibility is a Biblical idea, so it is strange the word is missing.

1. Response.

The idea of responsibility begins with words 'respond,' 'responsive.' We might spell it "responsability," the ability to respond. Responsibility begins with awareness, sensitivity, the way Jesus was sensitive. When the sick, the crippled and the blind came to him, he gave them his full attention. When the woman was taken in adultery, he was sensitive.

2. Interpretation.

Jesus understood these sufferings as events by which God was speaking and dealing with his people. The events of nature, for example, he read as parts of a large pattern of God's behavior. He observed that the sun shines on "criminals, delinquents, hypocrits, honest men, good Samaritans and VIP's without discrimination, that rains come down in equal proportions on the fields of the diligent and of the lazy." (H. R. Niebuhr) Some people interpret all this to be the working of a natural order that is without justice, unconcerned about human right and wrong. Jesus saw it differently: he saw in it the work of a cosmic generosity. And if the weather is good to criminals and outcasts, he reasoned, it means that these people are not cast out but are held in God's good care. The righteousness of God, he reasoned, rises high above human standards.

This is the same way the Hebrew people had always interpreted their experience. Time and time and time again the Old Testament says something to this effect: The God of our fathers delivered us out of the hands of the Egyptians and brought us to a new land; the disasters we have faced are God's way of teaching us; the fortunes we have inherited are proof of his love for us better than we have deserved. Therefore in response to Him, we will do so-and-so. And after Jesus it was Paul who put it vividly. Writing to the Romans he was extolling the wonders of God's work.

"How unsearchable his judgments, how untraceable his ways!... Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is... Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him..." (Rom. 11:33-12:1) The great Therefore! Because God has done great things for us, therefore we undertake great things. We respond to God, as we understand what he is doing.

3. Accountability.

The Christian morality means to figure out what God is doing, and to respond in a fitting way. We are accountable. Perhaps illustrations are best. Take two musicians: one who stayed in music, and one who changed.

In Hagedorn's biography of Albert Schweitzer he tells how young Schweitzer was basking in his young life; he was a notable musician and organist, with an international reputation; he had the whole musical world in his hands, as they say:

"He wanted to believe that his gifts were just good luck and nobody's business but his own. But a Voice in him would not let him rest...The Voice was saying that he who has been blest with joy and beauty has incurred a debt which he cannot evade. He who has been spared sorrow is under obligation to alleviate the suffering of those less fortunate.

"He did not want to hear the Voice, and there were times when he did not hear it, and felt free--free to lead his own life, make plans, dream about the future. But it always returned, and spoke ever more insistently. There is too much suffering in the world. A man must pay God and mankind for high fortune."

In response to the high fortune of his life a person indeed becomes responsible for living responsibly. At age 30 Schweitzer headed for medical school, then to Africa for a long lifetime of healing and teaching.

Schweitzer left music, but Fritz Kriesler stayed with it--illustrating that there are no rules on such things. Listen to Kreisler the violinist:

"I was born with music in my system. It was a gift of Providence, so I deserve no thanks for the music. Music is too sacred to be sold. I never look upon the money I earn as my own. It is public money, a fund entrusted to me for proper disbursement. I am constantly trying to reduce my needs to the minimum. I feel morally guilty in ordering a costly meal, for it deprives someone else of a slice of bread--some child, perhaps, of a bottle of milk. In all these years of my so-called success in music, we have not built a home for our family. Between it and us stand all the homeless of the world."

Another case of the great Therefore. The music in my soul is a gift of Providence. Therefore I am entrusted with money for proper disbursement. Therefore I am scrupulous in the spending of that money. I respond to Providence who gave me music in my soul. I become responsible for the use of it.

Such is fundamental Christian morality. It is a morality of response to God that makes me responsible for all that I do.

Benefits of this view of morality

1. Clearly this morality is not what popularly goes by the name "new morality," which is neither new nor frequently, moral. This morality really is new; it

is not the anything-goes way of life, nor rule-keeping. It really is moral, being more rigorous because it puts behavior in the large setting of being responsive to nothing less than God. We learned this from Joseph and from Peter. Joseph was sold into slavery and attached to Potiphar's estate; Potiphar went away on business and left Joseph in charge. Now Joseph was tall, dark and handsome, and Mrs. Potiphar propositioned him. He refused, but on what grounds? Out of fear he might get caught? On the contrary. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Then came that time when the early disciples sold property and gave the proceeds to the apostles for charity to the poor. Ananias cheated, and held back some for himself, deceiving the apostles. Peter rebuked him, "Ananias, you have not lied against men, you have lied against God." These two young men Joseph and Peter both knew that there is a moral response and responsibility that are more demanding even than their own conscience. Here then is a morality that is really moral!

2. This morality recognizes that life is ever changing. We take comfort from the words Jesus spoke to his friends who took him seriously, "The Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth." You do not need exact definitions of the truth; you can rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so long as you recognize you need guidance. Paul confessed as we all must confess,

"It is not to be thought that I have already achieved all this. I have not yet reached perfection, but I press on...toward the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above, in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:12, 14)

3. I find this morality particularly fitting for our time. In a time of general moral decline, I yearn not to decline. Despair about public morals tempts us to reject our own responsibility; if the "system" is at fault, why am I accountable? But cynicism is a deadly sin, the unforgivable sin. When our moral expectations unwind, how can we press on? But this morality is meant for the hard times, for times of crucifixion. It says simply, God is doing great things, therefore I am responsible.

* * * * *

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on September 23, 1973.
Additional copies available free.

NEW MORALITY -- REALLY NEW, REALLY MORAL

Genesis 39:1-12 and Acts 5:1-11

Robert H. Hamill

The world turns and the world changes,
But one thing does not change.
In all of my years, one thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing
does not change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.
--T. S. Eliot, Choruses from "The Rock"

In our time this struggle becomes intense. That is what most of the generation gap is all about, with its protests, long hair and bazaar on campus sidewalks. That is what the civil rights and black struggles are all about, and Watergate and the farm workers' struggle. That is what the judicial code and ROTC protests are all about--this perpetual struggle of good and evil, and the problem, what is good, what is evil?

One thing at least seems clear. Most Americans, especially the young, regard the violation of traditional moral codes as lesser wrong than the attempt to disguise such violations by pretense or excuse. According to a public poll the vast majority of American people feel

That a politician who takes bribes is worse than an adulterer; the manufacturer of unsafe automobiles is worse than a mugger; a policeman who accepts money from a prostitute is worse than the prostitute; a white grocer who sells bad meat to a black customer is worse than the black who riots; a psychiatrist who improperly commits an old person to a mental hospital is worse than a draft dodger who fakes a physical defect; a landlord who will not repair a fire trap is worse than a campus radical who occupies a building; a rich man who uses loopholes to avoid income tax is worse than a welfare chiseler.

(TIME, June 6, 1969; Louis Harris poll)

We are re-defining what we think is right and wrong.

The nature of the new morality

We all know that a new morality is emerging, and we know something of what that new morality is not. It is not permissiveness. It does not say that a person may properly have sex with whomever, and whenever he desires; that he may steal any property if he needs it, or destroy any public property if it pleases him; or indulge any drug for pleasure without regard for his health; or spend money for anything he can afford; or buy term papers and turn

them in as his own; or carry a gun if it makes him feel safer. No, the emerging morality does not mean such permissiveness.

Neither does the new morality consist of obedience to rules. Rules and laws are either too vague to be helpful, or too precise to deal with the complexity of moral problems. Also, people are ingenious enough to get around any law you can devise, such as the rule of no drinking in your dorm rooms. Students learned to drink while sitting on the window sill with their feet inside and everything outside, thus obeying the law.

Likewise a new morality cannot consist of devising some utopian dream of what ought to be, then pursuing it with the hot passion of a lover, "...dreaming of systems so perfect that no man will need to be good." Nay, the good life is not some ideal state that can be blueprinted and engineered.

If the new morality is not to be these things--neither permissiveness nor rules nor utopia--what can it be? I am convinced the new morality will consist of an inner accountability, some authentic acting out from a free, responsible self.

New morality exceeds the old

For one thing the new morality will be more severe than the old morality, more severe even than the ancient law. Jesus said,

"Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law..." (Matt. 5:17, 18)

Then he proceeded to take six basic Jewish laws as illustrations: laws relating to murder, adultery, divorce, truth-speaking, retaliation and neighborliness. Look at the first one as a sample. The law was, Thou shalt not kill, and the penalty was death. But Jesus said something like this: You may not actually kill another person, but you often hate him, and the anger in your heart is as serious in the sight of God as the violence of your hand, because actions grow out of your attitudes. You may not be guilty of the outer act, but yet indulge in the inner attitude that makes for the act later on. (Ferris)

In all six examples Jesus did essentially the same thing. He started with the law, did not reject it, nor ridicule it. He assumed it was the Law of God, and accepted the law as the minimum requirement of society under God. Then beyond the requirements of the law he spoke to a person's heart and mind, and laid demands there. The early

church was not a nice gathering of nice people where everyone did as he pleased, in his new freedom in Christ. Rather, those people were expected to conform to the mind of Christ. They, like Jesus himself, were patient with the wayward, but they did not tolerate behavior that was destructive. This may have something to say to those who live in dorms, or in communes, even in families: wide permissiveness never builds community; that takes standards, and Jesus proclaimed standards that were inward and therefore more severe than outer obedience.

Notice that Jesus did not tell people they could go out and murder someone who stood in their way, provided they did it kindly. It was not permissible to commit adultery if they did it with love, nor to lie if they did it with a clear conscience. He did say there are things less obvious and less easily detected, that are more serious than these outward actions which merely reveal what is in your heart and mind. He made it plain that even though they might technically be "within the law" they might still fall far short of inner morality. Jesus said that the existing moral codes were not good enough, so he liberated people from the law's restrictions while also making the more severe demands of love and accountability. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the best people, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Morality thought of as responsibility

The best word for this understanding of morality may be 'responsibility.' Instead of saying the moral ideal is to love, or to obey the laws, or to strive for a goal, say that the aim of moral life is to be a responsible person. Common sense tells us what this word means. To say Tom is a responsible person means that Tom takes charge and performs his work in a reliable way, as Joseph administered the Egyptian economy during seven fat years to save up grain for seven lean years. To say a person is responsible means his word is as good as his bond; if he says he will do a job, it's as good as done. Or, a responsible person is one who assumes his fair share of the community chest fund and engages in some project of civic improvement. A responsible person assumes the burden of his society. In the Air Force Academy for example every cadet promises not to lie, cheat or steal, nor tolerate those who do. He is responsible for keeping the academy honest. The responsible person is the person who keeps his car brakes tight so he won't accidentally injure a pedestrian. Common sense carries all these meanings in the word 'responsible.'

Responsibility in the Bible

But there is more to this word than what comes from common sense. Naturally we turn to the Bible to find it, but lo, the word is not there. The

basic idea of responsibility is a Biblical idea, so it is strange the word is missing.

1. Response.

The idea of responsibility begins with words 'respond,' 'responsive.' We might spell it "responsability," the ability to respond. Responsibility begins with awareness, sensitivity, the way Jesus was sensitive. When the sick, the crippled and the blind came to him, he gave them his full attention. When the woman was taken in adultery, he was sensitive.

2. Interpretation.

Jesus understood these sufferings as events by which God was speaking and dealing with his people. The events of nature, for example, he read as parts of a large pattern of God's behavior. He observed that the sun shines on "criminals, delinquents, hypocrites, honest men, good Samaritans and VIP's without discrimination, that rains come down in equal proportions on the fields of the diligent and of the lazy." (H. R. Niebuhr) Some people interpret all this to be the working of a natural order that is without justice, unconcerned about human right and wrong. Jesus saw it differently: he saw in it the work of a cosmic generosity. And if the weather is good to criminals and outcasts, he reasoned, it means that these people are not cast out but are held in God's good care. The righteousness of God, he reasoned, rises high above human standards.

This is the same way the Hebrew people had always interpreted their experience. Time and time and time again the Old Testament says something to this effect: The God of our fathers delivered us out of the hands of the Egyptians and brought us to a new land; the disasters we have faced are God's way of teaching us; the fortunes we have inherited are proof of his love for us better than we have deserved. Therefore in response to Him, we will do so-and-so. And after Jesus it was Paul who put it vividly. Writing to the Romans he was extolling the wonders of God's work.

"How unsearchable his judgments, how untraceable his ways!... Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is...Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him..." (Rom. 11:33-12:1) The great Therefore! Because God has done great things for us, therefore we undertake great things. We respond to God, as we understand what he is doing.

3. Accountability.

The Christian morality means to figure out what God is doing, and to respond in a fitting way. We are accountable. Perhaps illustrations are best. Take two musicians: one who stayed in music, and one who changed.

In Hagedorn's biography of Albert Schweitzer he tells how young Schweitzer was basking in his young life; he was a notable musician and organist, with an international reputation; he had the whole musical world in his hands, as they say.

"He wanted to believe that his gifts were just good luck and nobody's business but his own. But a Voice in him would not let him rest...The Voice was saying that he who has been blest with joy and beauty has incurred a debt which he cannot evade. He who has been spared sorrow is under obligation to alleviate the suffering of those less fortunate.

"He did not want to hear the Voice, and there were times when he did not hear it, and felt free--free to lead his own life, make plans, dream about the future. But it always returned, and spoke ever more insistently. There is too much suffering in the world. A man must pay God and mankind for high fortune."

In response to the high fortune of his life a person indeed becomes responsible for living responsibly. At age 30 Schweitzer headed for medical school, then to Africa for a long lifetime of healing and teaching.

Schweitzer left music, but Fritz Kriesler stayed with it--illustrating that there are no rules on such things. Listen to Kreisler the violinist:

"I was born with music in my system. It was a gift of Providence, so I deserve no thanks for the music. Music is too sacred to be sold. I never look upon the money I earn as my own. It is public money, a fund entrusted to me for proper disbursement. I am constantly trying to reduce my needs to the minimum. I feel morally guilty in ordering a costly meal, for it deprives someone else of a slice of bread--some child, perhaps, of a bottle of milk. In all these years of my so-called success in music, we have not built a home for our family. Between it and us stand all the homeless of the world."

Another case of the great Therefore. The music in my soul is a gift of Providence. Therefore I am entrusted with money for proper disbursement. Therefore I am scrupulous in the spending of that money. I respond to Providence who gave me music in my soul. I become responsible for the use of it.

Such is fundamental Christian morality. It is a morality of response to God that makes me responsible for all that I do.

Benefits of this view of morality

1. Clearly this morality is not what popularly goes by the name "new morality," which is neither new nor frequently, moral. This morality really is new; it

is not the anything-goes way of life, nor rule-keeping. It really is moral, being more rigorous because it puts behavior in the large setting of being responsive to nothing less than God. We learned this from Joseph and from Peter. Joseph was sold into slavery and attached to Potiphar's estate; Potiphar went away on business and left Joseph in charge. Now Joseph was tall, dark and handsome, and Mrs. Potiphar propositioned him. He refused, but on what grounds? Out of fear he might get caught? On the contrary. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Then came that time when the early disciples sold property and gave the proceeds to the apostles for charity to the poor. Ananias cheated, and held back some for himself, deceiving the apostles. Peter rebuked him, "Ananias, you have not lied against men, you have lied against God." These two young men Joseph and Peter both knew that there is a moral response and responsibility that are more demanding even than their own conscience. Here then is a morality that is really moral!

2. This morality recognizes that life is ever changing. We take comfort from the words Jesus spoke to his friends who took him seriously, "The Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth." You do not need exact definitions of the truth; you can rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so long as you recognize you need guidance. Paul confessed as we all must confess,

"It is not to be thought that I have already achieved all this. I have not yet reached perfection, but I press on...toward the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above, in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:12, 14)

3. I find this morality particularly fitting for our time. In a time of general moral decline, I yearn not to decline. Despair about public morals tempts us to reject our own responsibility; if the "system" is at fault, why am I accountable? But cynicism is a deadly sin, the unforgivable sin. When our moral expectations unwind, how can we press on? But this morality is meant for the hard times, for times of crucifixion. It says simply, God is doing great things, therefore I am responsible.

* * * * *

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on September 23, 1973.
Additional copies available free.

CONSCIOUSNESS IV--TO GO ONE BETTER

Robert H. Hamill

The law professor at Yale, Charles Reich, in his book, The Greening of America, popularized the idea of consciousness. This "consciousness" does not mean the opposite of unconscious; nor a set of opinions or beliefs. It means a person's total perception of the world, his worldview--how he sees things and feels things--his way of life, his life style. Prof. Reich says three types of consciousness predominate in this country, and I have asked three students to express these types. Call them Tom, Dick and Harry, and let them speak for themselves. First Tom, for Consciousness I.

Tom, for Consciousness I

"I grew up on a farm in the midwest, and I plan to go into business for myself. Or medicine; the AMA makes a lot of sense to me. I need to make a decent income for my family. Competition is a law of nature, so I intend to work hard and prove I can make it.

"I am a student in CBA of course; there I can learn what it takes to get ahead.

"I schedule my life fiercely: six hours a day on studies, about forty hours a week. I don't have any control over the course of study or the content of our courses, but I know how to beat the game.

"I don't have many close friends but a gang of us eat meals together and I do a lot of double dating. I dress the way it feels good to me; nothing flashy, but I don't mean to offend anyone either.

"As a kid I read Horatio Alger stories and the boyhood of Abraham Lincoln, and there's something in the American dream that I admire. If a guy is honest, had good standards, works hard and plans for the future, he can succeed.

"This country is getting too socialistic, too much government interference. We need to elect men to office who have high personal ethics and happy home life, who will stop crime and lower taxes. Lots of us Americans believe that church and school and family are the foundations of a good society, and we intend to keep it that way, but I must admit things are not as hopeful as they used to be."

Tom will graduate with good grades, live in the suburbs, and be more of a workman than father and lover. Behind the bravado and self-confidence of

this man there is a growing sense of frustration. The society he dreams of has already become corrupt. Enormous inequities and cruelties and violence have arisen, partly out of the self-assertiveness of people like Tom. Independent and self-reliant, he already feels pushed around. Tom imagines himself free and happy, but underneath he is angry and bitter at the way things are moving in this gangster world. He is a little sad, and feels victim of a technologized society.

Now we listen to Dick speaking out of Consciousness II.

Dick, for Consciousness II

"My folks grew up in the depression days, Dad's little store and his savings were wiped out. Being unemployed they drafted him and he came home from Iwo Jima with a crippled arm. He felt like a pawn in the hands of huge, wild forces. Now that's wrong, it ruins people. We need strong government to control the economy, and world government to control aggressors.

"So I vowed I would help change society. I study sociology and political science, and plan to go into government service where the action is. There we can develop welfare programs and health and legal services according to human needs.

"I have dedicated myself to goals bigger than my own success. Tom's individualistic dog-eat-dog philosophy is vicious and disastrous. My heroes? John Lindsay, Ralph Nader, the Kennedy's, the people who ask what they can do for their country. I expect a hard and demanding life, but discipline is good for me and necessary for society.

"Human nature can be wicked unless the human beast is tamed. It is only law that makes men free. If you can't beat the system, join it, I say, and use it and make it work for good.

"As for my own style of life, I like clothing and music that are in good style; and good manners. I believe in education and voluntary reform movements. I am convinced that if everyone knew other people, and understood what they are up against, we could all live together in justice and peace."

So Dick carries his attache case and represents the intellectuals, the liberals, the McCarthy people, the professionals, union leaders--the elite and power people. They run the world. All these people are highly dedicated to the good of their fellowmen. They believe in institutions because institutions protect people and serve the common welfare. Government provides police and the courts;

the university dispenses education; the industrial corporation produces the goods that people need. But all institutions go wrong, so the Consciousness II people set out to reform them. They will regulate business, protect the environment, reconstruct the university. Themselves, they fit into these agencies of good, and play the roles assigned them, and live in suburban boxes. Their only complaint is that organization begins to organize their lives too, and tells them subtly how to dress, what rules to follow, and who is boss. And day by day the whole Establishment begins to feel more like a growing monster.

Now let us turn to Harry, who belongs to Consciousness III.

Harry, for Consciousness III

"Well, I'm Virgo, for one thing, and this Aquarius thing makes more sense than Tom and Dick think. I was on drugs once; they never tried that either. Now I'm on Zen; man, that's a trip.

"Last year I read all of Thoreau and James Joyce and Salinger all in one week, but it was Malcolm X that got to me. Black or white or purple, what difference does color make? It's the little people, the poor, the tramped on and forgotten--they get it worst.

"As for me, I've got hang-ups I suppose, but inside I'm OK. I accept myself. I'm glad I'm me. Lots of people are phonies; they play roles; they fit into shaped places, afraid to break out. Reformers? They don't even reform themselves; they are fake.

"I begin with my own life. I do not violate my own personality. I don't judge other people. I try to be honest and open. So I feel liberated. I am free from rules and conformity and all the stupid pressures of a stupid society. I feel happy! I can hug a stranger and dance in the street when I feel like it. I feel close to lots of people, we belong together because we experience things the same way.

"Dress isn't important. One outfit is enough. After all, I'm one and the same person whatever I do, eat or go to class or go to church.

"I major at SFAA, but I don't know what comes next, and couldn't care less. Ambition-on-the-escalator is nonsense. I am satisfied with what I am and what I am doing right now. That's enough."

Harry represents the hippie, freak, offbeat culture. His friends of Consciousness I and II promised him affluence, happiness, ideals, technology and

freedom, but their society has given him neon ugliness, dreary work and the Vietnam war. It destroys people as it destroys the environment; it benefits the privileged few, and is neither democratic nor just. The great American promise is betrayed. Now Harry has no ambition to change all that by any direct political or public effort. His counter culture, as Roszak describes it, is

"a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks (like) a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbaric intrusion." (The Making of a Counter Culture, p. 42)

The Consciousness III people play a difference game, their own game. Their clothes--as conformist as any vested suit Dick wears--symbolize their low key, relaxed attitudes, and re-enforce their sense of being outsiders, outside the prevailing culture. Their T groups and sensitivity sessions, their incense and drugs, their nature trips and handmade things--everything is part of "experience", because they feel sure that experience is a better thing than thinking and planning and organizing, because everyone can see where those things got us.

There is no Consciousness IV

As you listened to Tom, Dick and Harry you likely resonated to something each man said, while other features in each man seemed to you repulsive or crude or downright immoral. No person is a pure type. Neither Consciousness I or II or III accords perfectly with the Christian understanding of life, nor do I intend now to sketch out the perfect Consciousness IV. There is no Consciousness IV to be labelled Christian for all people. No one life style can fulfill the demands of the gospel, because the gospel exceeds our capacity to imagine it, let alone achieve it.

I can only suggest perhaps some features of that life style, and I take my text from both Jesus and Bonhoeffer. The story tells of the day when men went fishing, caught nothing, and were disheartened. To them Jesus spoke a single word:

"Launch out into the deep."

Deitrich Bonhoeffer, that martyr who resisted the Nazis, spoke a word to the same point:

"Bravely take hold of the real, not dallying now with what might be. Not in the flight of ideas but only in action is freedom. Make up your mind and come out into the tempest of living."

Both Jesus and Bonhoeffer speak to us academic people. These four years of serious study are meant for the testing of ideas, the finding and formula-ting of truth: they are a time for thinking, hard thinking. Do not begrudge it. The only danger is that they set a permanent life style. Learning now to think and analyze and talk about ideas, we make a habit of that, and we feel that life consists only of thinking, analyzing and talking about ideas. Bonhoeffer bids us make up our minds on the great issues, and come out into the tempest of living. One greater than Bonhoeffer told fisherman the same thing: leave the shallow waters and launch out into the deep.

Ingredients of a new life style

1. One measure of the new life style required is suggested by Carlyle's comment as to who was to blame for the French Revolution.

"Everyone, large or small, who has fallen short of his public duty."

Indeed, a society can be wrecked without spectacular crimes or wars of prison revolts, but by the constant, petty breaches of faith, the minor complicities committed by people who are generally very nice people. Decent, upright, rational people of goodwill may yet be blind to human hurt, con-niving for their own comfort, irresponsible on their jobs, and so chisel away the granite base of any society. T. S. Eliot warned against those who

"...dream of systems so perfect

that no man will need to be good."

Don't believe it. Personal integrity and personal responsibility are required in the new Consciousness IV. I am simply not impressed when students organize a conference on "Saving the Environment," then clutter the place with their personal debris and foul up the air with their smoke.

2. Another ingredient required in the new life style is a closer identity of rich with poor, educated with the untutored, the elite with the powerless. "To be a Christian," Bonhoeffer wrote in his prison diary, "does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some particular form of asceticism (as a sinner or penitent or saint), but to participate in the suffering of God in the life of the world." We'll we ever achieve justice in America? We will indeed achieve justice when those who are not injured become as indignant as those who are. That means sensitivity to those who hurt, at the points where they hurt. To all intellectuals and academics comes the word from a character in Thornton Wilder's play, Our Town:

I don't care what they say with their mouths--everybody knows that something is eternal. And it ain't houses, and it ain't names, and it ain't earth and it ain't even the stars...everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal and that something has to do with human beings...There is something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.

Now that belongs in Consciousness IV, and our response must consist not in talk and meditation only, but in right action and right conduct.

Endurance, and the struggle itself

3. Still another ingredient is required which I don't find in the life styles of Tom, Dick and Harry. Call it endurance. That means, to get committed and stay committed, whatever happens and however long it takes, even to the end of time. Too much of human compassion is faddish. Here on campus last Wednesday, Eric Mann noted that student enthusiasm for civil rights faded fast after the big marches. For the next couple of years they demonstrated against the Vietnam war. Then came Women's Lib. Now it may be prison reform, and he is afraid this too may balloon and bust. But "to stand in the face of the storm, with courage and without panic, is perhaps a more needed ingredient of Christian love than the flash of sympathy." (Spike) I don't mean the stoic endurance, cold and gray, built of despair; rather, the endurance of William Lloyd Garrison whose statue you see on Commonwealth Avenue, and engraved on the side is the famous vow he made against slavery:

"I am in earnest. I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard."

That is endurance warmed by the mysterious confidence that God is working even in the worst of human situations. It means a final crazy hope that God will at last come to full reign over his creation. (Spike)

4. I come finally to the essential matter. Call it religious, transcendental, spiritual--whatever. Amid all the showmanship and swinging theology and spectacular exhibitions of our humanity which I see emerging in the three forms of Consciousness, here is something I miss. It was stated by a young woman, a grad student, in a letter she wrote to me a few years back.

"It seems to me," she said, "there is no exact measuring rod, no detailed set of standards, not even a defined and explicit goal which will pull this whole thing together. The only unifying factor is the struggle itself, the tension between what seems to be headway and what seems to be retreat. My security lies in my firm belief that though I've got to walk it for myself I do not really walk it by myself. God is concerned for his people and that is what keeps me from going under. It permits me freedom enough to live while struggling, and to live not peacefully but meaningfully."

also
I have a hunch that Peter and the fishermen felt the same thing. They were amazed at the command, launch out into the deep. It was dangerous out there! They were equally amazed when they caught fish. It was an enormous catch, far beyond their ability to deal with it. It was so far beyond their expectations that Peter exclaimed, "Depart from me. I am a sinful man"--that is, I am not worthy, this is not my doing, it is too much for me to manage. Depart from me! That is precisely what Jesus did not do. He stayed close so that Peter, though he might falter, would not ultimately fail.

So, make up your mind, come out into the tempest of living, out where the waters are deep and waves are dangerous, out where the fish are, out where people are, out where God is, providing for us and suffering with his people, until the time comes when they and we together work and wait and expect a decent society.

* * * * *

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel Boston University on September 26, 1971. Additional copies available free.

THE WATERGATE SINDROME

Nehemiah 8:1-3

Robert H. Hamill

Our country has lived through some historic moments this week, and endured the Agnew affair. The Vice President faced documented charges of bribery and extortion, then pled guilty to tax evasion to escape prosecution on the more serious charges. For the first time in American history a vice president left office as a felon. The irony is that Mr. Agnew was guilty of common, garden variety crime, plain old fashioned graft. He had no imagination, poor fellow. The 'plumbers' and tricksters at least had imagination! Kickbacks from government contracts is an ancient and honorable form of political corruption. Mr. Agnew and the prosecutors compromised on a conviction for tax evasion, which does indeed save the nation from years of trauma and extended shame.

Syndrom of inner sickness

We are tempted now to feel that Washington has been purged of all sin. Mr. Agnew paid the price, we can put "past obsessions" behind us and get on with the "business of the people." Mr. Nixon benefits from all this. He has unloaded this dirty baggage, chosen a successor (in a gala party atmosphere), and now in time of international crisis he picks up the role of national leader again. We are tempted therefore to give him a clean slate.

But I have a tiny question, a bitsy little matter I can whisper: what happened to Watergate? Remember those tapes? There is a matter far more serious than the Agnew agonies. This is not just stealing cookies from the cookie jar. The faults in Watergate are less measurable than taxes, less definable than graft, but more pervasive and more damaging. Lest we forget the evidence that has been revealed under oath before the Senate Select committee, it includes dirty tricks and White House horrors, 'plumbers' and secret surveillance, the break-in of a psychiatrist's office, the offer of high federal office to the judge then presiding in a crucial court case, the hiring of saboteurs to disrupt the political process, the planting of false stories in the

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel, Boston University, October 14, 1973. Additional copies free.

press and fabricating false records in State Department files, secret bombing in Cambodia and withholding that from the Congress and lying about it to the nation, together with wiretaps, spies, enemy lists and campaign gifts from questionable sources, not all of them reported.

This adds up to a syndrome, defined as "a group of symptoms typical of a disease or disturbance." Spelled syndrome* it would be a group of symptoms typical of a disease in the body politic, which broke out in what we call Watergate. The sins in this case are not gross and ugly but clean and polished, committed "in clean carpeted, warmed and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices." (C.S. Lewis) Such sins make a familiar pattern, a syndrome, of an inner sickness that infects and ultimately would kill the political body.

I. Idolatry

At the first Water Gate (see Nehemiah 8:1-3) the people gathered and Ezra read from the ancient law, and "all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law." If we were to gather at our Watergate and listen attentively to the law we could hear three distinct words. First, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make any graven image." (Exod. 20:3,4)

The issue at Watergate clearly was not a grab for money, such as Mr. Agnew did; nor a grab for prestige, because the White House staff are self-effacing, inconspicuous men. It was a grab for power, power for the White House and the President, and power for those "faceless interchangeable people" working for him. Those people were apparently unable to distinguish between national security and loyalty to the president. To them, national security equals loyalty to the president. That means that whatever he wants, whatever keeps him in power, whatever protects him and renders him invulnerable, is legitimate even if it involves burglary, forgery, cover-ups, payoffs, misallocation of funds or destruction of opponents.** Mr. Mitchell testified that virtually anything was justified in the effort to re-elect the president, considering the "unthinkable" alternative. Mr. Erlichman was asked whether in his judgment the president would be justified in going as far as murder if he felt the national security required it, and Mr. Erlichman declined to answer! The White House lived in a climate (syndrome) of such fear that every dissent was considered treachery, every critic an enemy.

* Suggested by the son of Rev. R. Benjamin Garrison, who preached a sermon with this title.

** Robert McAfee Brown, in The Christian Century, September 26, 1973.

In that atmosphere of pride and misplaced loyalty the ideas of right and wrong, legal and illegal, lose all meaning. The only virtue is efficiency and winning, but Christian faith knows that the uncritical loyalty to the President is idolatry, the worship of a false god, in this case the worship of one man, the Leader. Such loyalty calls for devotion to the White House above all else, and that is idolatry. "You shall not have any other gods before me. You shall not make any graven (or human) image." Watergate simply exposes that form of idolatry which prevails in the White House.

II. Hypocrisy

I find it striking that the Administration most devoted to law and order has become most unlawful and disorderly. Outwardly virtuous, it has made repeated calls for piety, respect for the law, the work ethic, personal integrity, and all such respectable virtues, but inwardly it has been corrupt. Yet if we listen attentively as we stand before our Watergate we would hear those devastating words from the very highest authority, "Woe to you who cleanse the outside of the cup, but inside are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Woe to you who are like tombs covered with whitewash, but inside are full of dead men's bones." (Matt. 23:25-28)

Watergate makes a blatant expose of those "who have made the most conspicuous display of their own piety and righteousness (and yet) have generated deeply profane and wicked works...Those who have most loudly lamented the abuse of governmental powers against individual freedoms are exposed as the grossest abusers of governmental powers to rob citizens of their privacy, their freedom of expression, and their franchise." And while we withdraw from pronouncing judgment we can hardly avoid Prof. Geyer's final comment, "None of us can pretend to know how the Almighty will judge this willful evil in our nation's leadership. It may be remembered however that Dante reserved the lowest circle in hell for hypocrites."***

III. Disdain for the people

The third word we would hear from the Watergate experience comes also from Jesus. "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known." (Luke 12:3)

President Nixon proclaims his own innocence of course, and thus far refuses to release the tapes that might prove or disprove his innocence. He says he will accept only a definitive decision by the Supreme Court, which will likely come forth sometime soon. Whether it comes or not, whether the tapes reveal him innocent or guilty of specific deeds and previous knowledge--all that is relatively minor. What is really important is his attitude toward the

***Prof. Alan Geyer, The Christian Century, Sept. 26 '73.

judicial process. That attitude appears to be arrogant. His highest staff people--Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Erlichman and Mr. Mitchell--testified, and Mr. Nixon himself declared, that he believes the separation of powers confers on the President the right to withhold from Congress and the courts any evidence, even that which might disclose misconduct by him or his staff. That attitude is what counts. That attitude is arrogant. That attitude is the same disdain for the people that allowed him to order the secret bombing of Cambodia for 14 months without the knowledge of Congress, then to lie about it to the nation on television--all in the name of national security.

All this, together with the enemies list, the plumbers operation, the White House horrors, the attempts to use governmental agencies to obstruct justice--adds up to a stunning assertion of unchecked Presidential power, power he claims can set aside the law that governs ordinary citizens. This adds to what Tom Wicker calls the "Nixonian assertion of imperial power." That is what Watergate is all about. It is about the President's disdain for the American people, an unwillingness to believe that people can be trusted and have a right to know. Someone has remarked, the President takes the Greyhound theory of government: leave the driving to us. He distrusts the people and considers himself above the law. Thereby he has created an environment of suspicion and distrust that makes Watergate a sad and awesome spectacle in our national life.

What can be learned from Watergate?

From our Watergate experience thus far we can conclude several things.

1. The increase of self-knowledge should result in a new humility. Most of us too believe that the end justifies most any means. Most of us tell little lies for a big cause. Most of us chisel and squeeze and twist the truth for the sake of "the cause" whatever our cause may be at the moment. For many of us too, success and power to make an impact are the highest goals. Many of us feel that dissent against our "truth" is either stupid or stubborn, and in any case it should be quieted. Jesus had a sharp word for all of us: "No one is good, not one."

2. Many of us are sickened by all the political skulduggery. We feel the whole process is so corrupt we don't care any more. In the name of national security government can get away with anything, and "that's politics." You have to play it that way. Early last summer Sen. Goldwater confessed to the debilitating sense of discouragement that grips us. In his earthy language he said, "I get up in the morning and say to myself, Oh, what the hell, what can you do?" We have good reason to feel that way, but in our better moments we know better, as Goldwater himself went on to say and continues to demonstrate.

3. I testify that Watergate has strengthened my conviction that God is still in charge. He is doing precisely what the prophets have always declared that God does: he is acting in human affairs to destroy evil men and evil institutions. Christian people can see Watergate as "a divine reminder that unjust policies and evil institutions do not ultimately prevail." (Ronald J., Sider) Jesus indeed was right, "Nothing is covered that will not be uncovered, nothing is hidden that will not be made known."

4. As a result of Watergate we sense a new need for communities of people dedicated to personal integrity. We know now that personal sin can corrupt any law, distort any government. We need persons of integrity in high places, and we need communities that support those who take the risks of honesty and openness. Churches ought to be that--small companies of people committed to the New Way of disciplined living. Such companies would call into question the arrogance and hypocrisy and idolatry which are exposed at Watergate, and support those in government who follow a new vision.

5. I hope finally that Watergate will bring us a new dedication to the political process itself. If war is too important to leave to the generals, then government is too important to leave to politicians. We have evidence that the political process is working. The Justice Department brought even a Vice President to trial. The Erwin committee has brought to light an immense amount of material that was hidden. Mr. Cox has brought the government case to the Supreme Court and we will have a decision soon. We might well listen to Justice Douglas whose words about ecology apply equally well to political life. "This is the most beautiful land in the world. Put your arms around it. Hold it tenderly. Protect it so it is not despoiled." After the trauma of Watergate we will indeed love America again because it can yet become a great and good land.

* * * * *

BUT WHO WANTS TO BE A SAINT?

Hebrews 11:32--12:2

Robert H. Hamill

Ask the proverbial man on the street what holiday comes this week, and he will tell you, Hallowe'en, you dunce! Hallowe'en developed over the centuries from the time when the Celtic new year was celebrated at this season, and evil spirits were believed to roam the earth to trouble poor humans and frighten the old folks with devilish tricks. The only way to avoid such trouble was to disguise yourself and pretend to be a member of that spirit world. So, you would dress in wierd costume, indulge in pranks and mischief, frighten people with faces of witches and goblins and candle-lighted pumpkins. The man on the street knows all this.

What he does not know is that this week includes All Saints Day, and it is a distant relative to Hallowe'en: Halloween, Hallows Eve, All Hallows, All Saints. All Saints day celebrated Christians who had been most faithful in their Christian witness. In the third century there was a festival for all martyrs. In the eighth century Pope Gregory dedicated a chapel in St. Peters "to all the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and all the just and perfect who are at rest." Later on, the date for All Saints was fixed on November 1, adjacent to October 31, All Hallows Eve.

Here in Marsh Chapel we are surrounded by images of saints: Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, of the Hebrews; Peter, Paul and John of Biblical times; Augustine, Francis, Martin Luther and John Wesley of later times. Around the lecturn are statues of Jerome, Wycliffe, and Lancelot Andrews. In the choir the heads of Bach and Handel. These images suggest that saints are the outstanding people, the persons unusually good, noble, devoted. A saint was a person "in Christ," a person of great love and overflowing compassion, and, clearly, distinguished ability. In Catholic Church history such persons were singled out and "beatified" and called blessed, because of the holiness of their life or their heroic death. Later such a person might be canonized and called saint, to be venerated because of the miracles done by his intercession.

The Biblical meaning of "saint"

Now if that is what it takes to be a saint, then you say, "I'm not a saint." True, Nor am I. We do not expect, we may not even aspire to be saints. You say you have been called lots of names, but no one is ever going to call you a saint?

But in the New Testament sense you already are saints! New Testament saints are not necessarily saintly in character. Paul wrote to "the saints at Ephesus" admonishing them "Do not get drunk," and to the saints at Corinth chastizing them for quarreling, boasting, robbery, lawsuits, gluttony, worshipping pagan idols. Nevertheless Paul called them saints--not because they were saintly but because they had committed themselves to Christ and the Christian company in the hope of becoming more Christlike in character. St. Paul today would write to "the saints who are at Boston University," meaning this congregation, including you and me.

Down through the centuries there have been some remarkable people in the Christian company, of whom we know only a few names: Polycarp who faced lions at age 80 rather than throw a pinch of incense on Caesar's altar; Joan who heard voices and burned at the stake, aged 21; Francis of Assisi who left his wealthy father's inheritance to live with the poor; Albert Schweitzer who turned his back on fame and fortune as a musician and went into the African jungle as a doctor; Martin Luther King who left this place and went to the bus boycotters in Montgomery and the garbage collectors in Memphis. Saints, all.

At the same time there have been Christian men and women far from perfect: corrupt priests, inquisitors in cardinals' robes, slaveholders, robber barons, bigots, military tyrants--all doing their wicked schemes in the name of Christ. The Church has been a company of the sinful. Its Founder came, he said, not to call the righteous, but sinners, and we have taken advantage of that! We have been the church of Jesus Christ, and the church of Judas Iscariot. We have been exactly those people Vachel Lindsay speaks of as the crowd who cheered when General William Booth of the Salvation Army entered heaven:

Drabs from the alleyways and drug fiends pale--
Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frail!--
Vermin-eaten saints with moldy breath,
Unwashed legions with the ways of Death.
That is what the church is: a communion of saints with moldy breath, that calls into its company men and women with "minds passion ridden, soul-powers frail," and then mediates to them the truth, the love, and the restoring power of God.

A company of care and concern

This communion of saints has several characteristics. To begin with it is a fellowship of people who care and work for the human good. Think of Gen. William Booth of the Salvation Army, who took to the

streets to reach the poor, the ragtag and bobtail of society. Think of Fr. Damien who volunteered his career as priest to work in the leper colony, in the days when lepers were ostracized and isolated and left to die; and he bound up their sores until that day, in his homily before holy communion, he began by saying, "We lepers...." Today the communion of saints includes those who go to the jails to sustain the spirits of those imprisoned there in filth and cruelty.

Hell is defined as the place where people feel no pain or beauty. What makes life so hellish these days is the desensitizing of our emotions: we are so calloused by the movie films and TV news and the violence around us that we lose our feeling. We become insensitive to human hurt, insensitive to brutality, insensitive to beauty. It is the work of the saints to re-sensitize our human feelings.

The communion of saints is characterized also by a kind of trust. Today our daily life is corroded by suspicion. "You can't trust the politicians," it is said. "You can't trust big business...you can't believe the press...Bureaucrats don't care about you... Everyone cheats you if he can...Don't trust anyone over thirty..." That cynical evaluation of human nature eats the joy out of living. But among the saints you can rely on mutual trust and support: they believe in one another. Their lives often fall into the hands of one another, to protect them against evil authorities, to sustain them against temptation and trouble, disease and death. I don't know about Prestone, but if you can't trust fellow saints, whom can you trust?

The communion of saints reaches across the generations. Here in the church, wisdom and culture are not transferred only from older to younger, but here the elders learn also from the young. They learn not just styles and dance and music, but they learn morals and social passion and sacrifice for a great cause, for it is the young who stir up our discontent about things that really matter. At the same time the communion of saints serves as antidote for the ruthless absolutes of the youth culture. Some of the young hold the absurd view that only the new is worthwhile, only the useful is relevant, only the instant pleasures are satisfying, only the young have the truth. Such a faddish reverence for youth is corrected in this living company of saints from every generation, who learn from and teach one another, who give and take.

The communion of saints is a company of persons seeking the quality of life which they find demonstrated in Jesus, the Christ. Through him they see life steadily and see it whole. Because of him they

take off their hats and bow their heads and listen to what the centuries have to say, not merely the days and the hours.

No geographic or cultural limits

The communion of saints is a fellowship without boundaries. St. Paul usually began or ended his letters with "greetings from the churches in Asia," or "all the saints (in Rome) greet you, especially those of Caesar's household." This meant a great deal to people who were recent converts from the pagan and hostile world. It was comforting to know that all across the civilized world there were pockets of resistance to Caesar, small bodies of faith and love who were alive to the new life and devoted to a new vision of mankind.

Now for us in turn it strengthens our weak knees to know that on most every campus in America there is a company of Christian students and faculty meeting faithfully for worship and study; in every land around the earth there are Christians meeting in their homes to hear and to broadcast the good news; in every nation there are committed saints who at great risk to their own safety, work for racial justice; in hospitals, schools, prisons and ghettos of the world Christian saints lay down their lives for their fellow human beings. Knowing this to be true, and knowing that I belong to this communion of saints that reaches beyond all human barriers, I find courage to do my little tasks with renewed devotion.

This universal communion of saints saves us from our parochial self-interest. In our time when minorities drive for self-identity and thus threaten to segment our society into bits and pieces, we desperately need a wide fellowship that surpasses our Black studies and Women's studies and Indian studies and American studies and democratic studies and free enterprise studies,--some study that is a humane study, a study of worldwide fellowship, and that is precisely the fellowship that is demonstrated in the communion of saints that overreaches every barrier of distance, language, politics and race. The reality of such a worldwide communion of saints enhanced by the World Council of Churches which is the spiritual forerunner of any effective United Nations, because spirit must come before the letter of the law, community must come before legal structure. If the human family is ever to attain visible coherence it may well arise from the communion of saints.

Includes those who have gone before

The communion of saints begins in local fellowship, reaches out to the ends of the earth, but does not stop there. It unites in lively company the living with the dead, in a world unseen but eternal and very present. The early Christians spoke of

their dead as "those who have gone before," and they remembered before God those of their company who had died and gone on ahead of them. They dared to believe that those departed ones held them in memory and helped them by their prayers and intercessions to God. (See E. F. Tittle, A Mighty Fortress, 35-36)

You and I may hesitate to pray to the saints, but we indeed pray for the saints. Why not pray for those of our own company who have gone before us, especially for those we prayed with while they were here in the flesh? Why not pray for those who spent their flesh and blood in the struggle for good things that make our life worthwhile? How can we keep from praying for those of our company who died because of what we did or failed to do to make their life more human? We are tied with them in the bundle of life and death, and we all belong together in the communion of saints.

So, the communion of saints overreaches not only our human differences and spacial distance, but also the claims of death. Differences, distance, death--they are swallowed up in the glorious company of the saints.

This communion of saints, this fellowship of committed Christians, is a gift from God--not something we work for or achieve by our own sweat and tears, but something given, over and above our commitment. We are sustained, rebuked, lifted up and cheered on our way by this living company. It overcomes our differences, it binds us over all distance, it keeps us in company with one another so that nothing in this world, not even death itself, can separate us from God and from one another.

In my title I ask the frivolous question, Who wants to be a saint? Well, I do, for one, and no doubt you do also. What else in all the world would you rather be than a saint in communion with all saints, to the glory of God?

* * * * *

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on October 29, 1972.
Additional copies available free.

PRAYER AS COMBAT AND ASKING

(A sermon in the form of prayer)

Luke 18:1-8 and Matt. 7:7-8

Robert H. Hamill

I speak with thee again, O Lord, as my faltering practice leads me to do, because I too, like others, am baffled and confused. I too am tormented by a sense of something missed, something wrong. All around me these days people dabble in spirituality and meditation. They go in for long periods of quiet, with chanting and strange scriptures, with background music, soft lights, incense, and other mood-makers. Even theologians notice that prayer has lost relationship to thee, so they re-define it in this-worldly terms, as a kind of therapy for their damaged souls.

"To pray is to be in touch with oneself in a new way." (Gregory Baum)

"Prayer and ethics are simply the inside and outside of the same thing." (Robinson)

They understand prayer to be reflection on their neighbors' needs, "not conversation with God but conversation with the world." (Rhymes)

"The purpose of prayer is to open our eyes and ears to the fullness of the real world." (Novak)

They understand prayer to be communion with themselves, and its value is measured by the intensity of their experience. The more intense, the more they feel in rapport with the Whole, the All. Strange doctrine!

I am troubled, Lord, when prayers become so "spiritual" they lose all concern for cancer or prisons. My soul aches when prayers are measured by moods and feelings. False prophets shouted Peace, peace! when there was no peace.

But thou hast taught us that prayer is more a struggle than a sleep. Jacob wrestled with thee. Jeremiah argued with thee. Moses complained against thee. For them prayer was less of inner feeling and more of a living encounter with thee the living God, a dialogue with thee in all thy love and judgment.

That man must be right who calls prayer a combat.* Before thee I combat with my own self in my brokenness and distraction, my superficial faith, and the pride and comforts that poison me.

I combat on behalf of others, sometimes against them, all to the single point of their salvation, available to them in Jesus Christ, their lord and mine. Before thee I combat with the world, for the remaking of the world, and I make my prayer a substitute for all violence, because never, never can I pray for a person and then lift up a violent fist or violent voice against him. My prayer calls violence to judgment because it is not radical enough, not rooted enough in thy will, to do any final good.**

Above all else my prayer is combat with none less than thee--a striving like Jacob's striving, and I will not let thee go until thou bless me. Apparently thou hast intended it so, for thou art vulnerable to our praying, and by our lifted heart and voice we penetrate thy silence. A poet has put these words into thy mouth:

Our father who art in heaven,
he knew what he was doing
That day, my Son who loved them so,
Who lived in their midst,
who was one of them,
Who went about as they did,
who talked with them,
who lived as they lived,...
who died as they died.

He knew very well what he was doing that day...
When he placed that barrier between them
and me,

Our Father Who art in heaven,
those three or four words,
That barrier which my anger and perhaps
my justice will never cross.

Those three or four words which go ahead
like a beautiful pointed prow in front
of a miserable ship,
And which cut through the waves of my wrath
And when the point of the prow has passed,
the ship passes, and the whole fleet
after it.

My son knew full well what to do
To bind the arms of my justice and to
loose the arms of my mercy.
And now I must judge them like a Father...
(Charles Peguy, "The Holy Innocents")

So dost thou deal with us as in loving combat, a living confrontation between thee, thou Maker of all things, and us whom thou has made in thine own image. Such combat does far more justice to our dignity than any slouchy meditation by which we presume to slide into unity with some vague Oversoul of the universe. Instead of hand-holding, dancing, balloon-busting ecstasies, or the sick sweetness of no-cost meditation, our combat with thee does justice to thee who dost hold the nations in the scales of justice, and hold the people in thy hands of mercy. That Son of yours who struggled with the devil in the wilderness and struggled with thee in Gethsemane, he taught us to speak up boldly to thee, to express our needs and deal with thee. "Ask," he said, "knock, seek."

To ask, to beg, to plead and intercede--that is the heart of the matter, for after we declare our praise and thanks, once we confess and commit ourselves, how do we dare not ask? Thy Son meant asking, pleading, as persistent as the widow who cried before the judge day and night. He told us openly to ask, to knock, to seek, and always to pray and never lose heart. One of thy saints promised that

"If work is preceded by prayer, sin will find no entrance into the soul. The farmer who prays finds that his fruit will multiply even on a small plot of land. Prayer will make our nation powerful, will give us victory in war and security in peace. It obtains a good harvest for the farmer and a safe port for the sailor."

(Gregory of Nyssa)

But does it--always? Our Lord Jesus prayed that the terrible cup might pass from him, but it did not pass.

Why bother then? How dare such things? How do we presume to ask of thee, thou creator and governor of all this infinite cosmos, to give us health or harvest? To pray for the hungry, the sick, the troubled--through our thoughts to bring such persons to mind and expose them tenderly to thy love--it seems ridiculous to ask, Does it work? Does it do any good? It makes no difference whether it works! I pray for my loved ones because I have to, not because my prayers might accomplish something!

I am not telling thee what to do. That would be blasphemous if I tried, disastrous if I succeeded. I simply declare my concern which is also thy concern. I pray for health and harvest because I care. I care so deeply I cannot contain myself. I refuse to let things stay the way they are; I yearn and long for changes, and having worked hard for the health and harvest for other people, now I find it intolerable to be defeated, so I pray also! Prayer is not quiet resignation--nay, more like rebellion. Most of what the New Testament teaches about prayer is aimed not to reconcile us to the inevitable, but to get things changed: to increase food, heal disease, cast out demons, establish justice. Seek, knock, ask, and keep asking until I get what is fair!--that is what it teaches me.

"Our Father who art in heaven,
give us"

And what benefit comes from all this crying out? I pray for my mother and my son, what do I expect thee to do? I do not know. I confess I do not know. But at least this I know: I open my heart and voice to thee, so that things may happen. I believe thou dost work thy way in my world through my prayer and my openness, and thou may be able to do things naturally that I dream not of.

My cultured friends object, It doesn't work! What good that Jesus prayed the cup to pass? It did not pass, they laugh. But what did happen outlives their laughter: thy love penetrated the issue he was wrestling with, so he accepted his own death as from thy hands. Then lo! even the pain of that cross--unanswered prayer if ever there was a prayer unanswered--was transformed by thy good purpose and made the means of life for all people, even me.

Therefore, O God, to my petitions give me not the answers I beg for, but give thyself; beyond whatever I think I need, give me what I really need. Give me life, life lived faithfully with thee. All other things--health, harvest, happiness, friends, ego strength, success--they are good things indeed, and thou dost rejoice when they come, but the world being what it is, we learn to live without them. What we learn in all our praying is how thou dost govern things, how we are caught up in thy love and thy work. Then we open our eyes and stand on our feet again. We go forth to work and to suffer, to rejoice and be sad, to succeed and to fail, and so thy governing is established in thy good time in thy good world.

Thus, O Lord my God, when I pray for health and daily bread and all things else that appeal to me, set my asking inside my larger prayer that thy will be done, thy kingdom come. What I ask for myself, do thou consider it a prayer for every other person also. When I pray I have no intent to control thee who dost control the issues of life and death. I pray expecting not that thou wilt change thy mind, but thou will change my mind and bless my life.

O God, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quiet confidence shall be our strength, let thy completeness flow round our incompleteness, around our restlessness, thy rest. Amen.

*Jacques Ellul, Prayer and Modern Man; espec. pp. 173-174.

**Paul W. Hoon, Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Winter 1972, p. 105.

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel Boston University on November 4, 1973.
Additional copies available free.

PRAYER AS COMBAT AND ASKING

(A sermon in the form of prayer)

Luke 18:1-8 and Matt. 7:7-8

Robert H. Hamill

I speak with thee again, O Lord, as my faltering practice leads me to do, because I too, like others, am baffled and confused. I too am tormented by a sense of something missed, something wrong. All around me these days people dabble in spirituality and meditation. They go in for long periods of quiet, with chanting and strange scriptures, with background music, soft lights, incense, and other mood-makers. Even theologians notice that prayer has lost relationship to thee, so they re-define it in this-worldly terms, as a kind of therapy for their damaged souls.

"To pray is to be in touch with oneself in a new way." (Gregory Baum)

"Prayer and ethics are simply the inside and outside of the same thing." (Robinson)

They understand prayer to be reflection on their neighbors' needs, "not conversation with God but conversation with the world." (Rhymes)

"The purpose of prayer is to open our eyes and ears to the fullness of the real world." (Novak)

They understand prayer to be communion with themselves, and its value is measured by the intensity of their experience. The more intense, the more they feel in rapport with the Whole, the All. Strange doctrine!

I am troubled, Lord, when prayers become so "spiritual" they lose all concern for cancer or prisons. My soul aches when prayers are measured by moods and feelings. False prophets shouted Peace, peace! when there was no peace.

But thou hast taught us that prayer is more a struggle than a sleep. Jacob wrestled with thee. Jeremiah argued with thee. Moses complained against thee. For them prayer was less of inner feeling and more of a living encounter with thee the living God, a dialogue with thee in all thy love and judgment.

That man must be right who calls prayer a combat.* Before thee I combat with my own self in my brokenness and distraction, my superficial faith, and the pride and comforts that poison me.

I combat on behalf of others, sometimes against them, all to the single point of their salvation, available to them in Jesus Christ, their lord and mine. Before thee I combat with the world, for the remaking of the world, and I make my prayer a substitute for all violence, because never, never can I pray for a person and then lift up a violent fist or violent voice against him. My prayer calls violence to judgment because it is not radical enough, not rooted enough in thy will, to do any final good.**

Above all else my prayer is combat with none less than thee--a striving like Jacob's striving, and I will not let thee go until thou bless me. Apparently thou hast intended it so, for thou art vulnerable to our praying, and by our lifted heart and voice we penetrate thy silence. A poet has put these words into thy mouth:

Our father who art in heaven,
 he knew what he was doing
 That day, my Son who loved them so,
 Who lived in their midst,
 who was one of them,
 Who went about as they did,
 who talked with them,
 who lived as they lived,...
 who died as they died.

He knew very well what he was doing that day...
 When he placed that barrier between them
 and me,

Our Father Who art in heaven,
 those three or four words,
 That barrier which my anger and perhaps
 my justice will never cross.

Those three or four words which go ahead
 like a beautiful pointed prow in front
 of a miserable ship,
 And which cut through the waves of my wrath
 And when the point of the prow has passed,
 the ship passes, and the whole fleet
 after it.

My son knew full well what to do
 To bind the arms of my justice and to
 loose the arms of my mercy.
 And now I must judge them like a Father...
 (Charles Peguy, "The Holy Innocents")

So dost thou deal with us as in loving combat, a living confrontation between thee, thou Maker of all things, and us whom thou has made in thine own image. Such combat does far more justice to our dignity than any slouchy meditation by which we presume to slide into unity with some vague Oversoul of the universe. Instead of hand-holding, dancing, balloon-busting ecstasies, or the sick sweetness of no-cost meditation, our combat with thee does justice to thee who dost hold the nations in the scales of justice, and hold the people in thy hands of mercy. That Son of yours who struggled with the devil in the wilderness and struggled with thee in Gethsemane, he taught us to speak up boldly to thee, to express our needs and deal with thee. "Ask," he said, "knock, seek."

To ask, to beg, to plead and intercede--that is the heart of the matter, for after we declare our praise and thanks, once we confess and commit ourselves, how do we dare not ask? Thy Son meant asking, pleading, as persistent as the widow who cried before the judge day and night. He told us openly to ask, to knock, to seek, and always to pray and never lose heart. One of thy saints promised that

"If work is preceded by prayer, sin will find no entrance into the soul. The farmer who prays finds that his fruit will multiply even on a small plot of land. Prayer will make our nation powerful, will give us victory in war and security in peace. It obtains a good harvest for the farmer and a safe port for the sailor."

(Gregory of Nyssa)

But does it--always? Our Lord Jesus prayed that the terrible cup might pass from him, but it did not pass.

Why bother then? How dare such things? How do we presume to ask of thee, thou creator and governor of all this infinite cosmos, to give us health or harvest? To pray for the hungry, the sick, the troubled--through our thoughts to bring such persons to mind and expose them tenderly to thy love--it seems ridiculous to ask, Does it work? Does it do any good? It makes no difference whether it works! I pray for my loved ones because I have to, not because my prayers might accomplish something!

I am not telling thee what to do. That would be blasphemous if I tried, disastrous if I succeeded. I simply declare my concern which is also thy concern. I pray for health and harvest because I care. I care so deeply I cannot contain myself. I refuse to let things stay the way they are: I yearn and long for changes, and having worked hard for the health and harvest for other people, now I find it intolerable to be defeated, so I pray also! Prayer is not quiet resignation--nay, more like rebellion. Most of what the New Testament teaches about prayer is aimed not to reconcile us to the inevitable, but to get things changed: to increase food, heal disease, cast out demons, establish justice. Seek, knock, ask, and keep asking until I get what is fair!--that is what it teaches me.

"Our Father who art in heaven,
give us"

And what benefit comes from all this crying out? I pray for my mother and my son, what do I expect thee to do? I do not know. I confess I do not know. But at least this I know: I open my heart and voice to thee, so that things may happen. I believe thou dost work thy way in my world through my prayer and my openness, and thou may be able to do things naturally that I dream not of.

My cultured friends object, It doesn't work! What good that Jesus prayed the cup to pass? It did not pass, they laugh. But what did happen outlives their laughter: thy love penetrated the issue he was wrestling with, so he accepted his own death as from thy hands. Then lo! even the pain of that cross--unanswered prayer if ever there was a prayer unanswered--was transformed by thy good purpose and made the means of life for all people, even me.

Therefore, O God, to my petitions give me not the answers I beg for, but give thyself; beyond whatever I think I need, give me what I really need. Give me life, life lived faithfully with thee. All other things--health, harvest, happiness, friends, ego strength, success--they are good things indeed, and thou dost rejoice when they come, but the world being what it is, we learn to live without them. What we learn in all our praying is how thou dost govern things, how we are caught up in thy love and thy work. Then we open our eyes and stand on our feet again. We go forth to work and to suffer, to rejoice and be sad, to succeed and to fail, and so thy governing is established in thy good time in thy good world.

Thus, O Lord my God, when I pray for health and daily bread and all things else that appeal to me, set my asking inside my larger prayer that thy will be done, thy kingdom come. What I ask for myself, do thou consider it a prayer for every other person also. When I pray I have no intent to control thee who dost control the issues of life and death. I pray expecting not that thou wilt change thy mind, but thou will change my mind and bless my life.

O God, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quiet confidence shall be our strength, let thy completeness flow round our incompleteness, around our restlessness, thy rest. Amen.

*Jacques Ellul, Prayer and Modern Man; espec.
pp. 173-174.

**Paul W. Hoon, Union Seminary Quarterly Review,
Winter 1972, p. 105.

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel
Boston University on November 4, 1973.
Additional copies available free.

RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY, AND THREE ISSUES:
Premarital Sex, Homosexuality, and Abortion

Robert H. Hamill

In the beginning "God created them male and female." Therefore the first thing to be said about sex is a mighty Yes, Thank God for it! Sex is good: the sexual nature of a person is beautiful, and the sexual experience is downright fun.

Sex in the Bible

I notice that the Bible is full of sex, although the word is nowhere to be found! It would be hard to find any other human experience on which the Bible has more to say. It says a great deal about sex and human love; about marriage, monogamy and polygamy, wives and concubines; about sexual intercourse in marriage; about homosexuality, masturbation, rape, incest, bestiality and nakedness.

As for romantic love, the Bible has that too. Jacob was hit by Cupid's arrow from Rachel; he agreed to work seven years to earn her; then her father, Laban, tricked him and pawned off her older sister Leah, whereupon Jacob slaved another seven years for his beloved Rachel. Who in this day would work fourteen years to get the approval of a crafty old father-in-law?

Another man named Amon felt an overpowering desire for Tamar, and he was "so tormented that he made himself ill because of her." (II Sam. 13:2) Infatuation was not invented by American teenagers! The Bible includes those erotic love poems of the Song of Solomon. At one point the maiden replies to the amorous songs of the young man, and boasts to her friends,

My beloved is all radiant and ruddy,
distinguished among ten thousand.

His head is the finest gold,
his locks are wavy, black as a raven...

He was the tall, dark, handsome type.

In the New Testament also we find a healthy though more restrained attitude toward sexuality. Jesus attended the marriage in Cana and provided wine for the feast. He warned people not to love their families "more than me" but nowhere did he advise anyone to abstain from normal married life. St. Paul made some disparaging remarks about sexuality, bachelor that he was, and gloomy-minded, expecting the end of the world. He did acknowledge however that sex belongs to the married couple, and he advised husband and wife not to abstain from intercourse too long lest their privation tempt them to indulge in other ways. (I Cor. 7:2-5)

"Male and female created he them"

In Christian understanding of things, sex was created and ordained by God. In the very beginning, in creation itself,

"he created them male and female." (Gen. 1:27) This was not the cause nor the consequence of man's disobedience. It had nothing to do with the apple. It represents things as they are intended to be, because

"God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." (Gen. 1:31)

Some muddle-headed Christians talk as though sex, or the body, or pleasure were bad. Anything you enjoy doing is wrong! But they are wrong. Christianity approves of the body, it believes that matter is good, and that God Himself once took a human body to live in! The Word became flesh. At the very least this means that God considered the physical, finite human body a fit place for his self-disclosure to us.

Sex is God's gift to men and women, a good thing, to be accepted with rejoicing. And because Christian morality consists (as we said last week) of making proper responses to God, we respond to this gift of sexuality by being sexual people gladly, and by employing our sexual powers responsibly. We accept our status as male or female with thanksgiving and do not try to avoid it or change it. God made us this way. Then we make right use of our sexual faculties as a natural way to glorify God. We glorify God with our bodies! The creation story says that

"a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Gen. 2:24)

This means that man and woman are meant for each other and need each other. It is obvious that a man cannot become a father except by means of his wife; she cannot become a mother except by her husband. More subtle than that, however, is the Christian insight that without each other they cannot become truly human. Humanity cannot be lived alone; each person is meant to relate to the Other who is God and to the other who is the partner. God did not create two independent, self-sufficient species, one male and one female, but one dual being, adam, mankind, consisting of two components male and female, and to be fully human they belong together, they "become one flesh." Thus at the very beginning sexuality is instituted by God to symbolize a person's need for companionship. Humanity is neither male nor female but both, and both the man and the woman need each other. Sexuality expresses that fact.

The free expression of sex

Recognize immediately there is no legal, rigid pattern for Christian sex. There are no rules about how to behave sexually, when, with whom. Jesus set us free from laws on this and every subject. He weighed us down with heavier yet joyful burden of free decision. Jesus calls us to live new life, to subject everything we do to the overriding claim of God's gracious and demanding love. Our response to that gift of love shapes a style of life that is recognizably Christian.

Responsible sexuality puts the emphasis on the quality of human relations, and not on the sex act itself.

"Marriage is not just jumping in and out of bed. Marriage is trust and tenderness-- and jumping into bed--and kids and colds and earaches and finances--and jumping into bed--and (accidents and mortgage payments and house repairs and death)-- and jumping into bed. The chances are that a permanent relationship, with both its sickness and its health, is the strongest guarantee for a wholesome sex life. It is best that we have to show that '...love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.'" (Deane W. Fenn, Responsible Sexuality Now, p. 127)

Sex as a problem

It must be confessed however that sex is also a problem and hard to handle. A volcanic passion stirs up our blood and feels like a tumult inside. Listen to a Biblical example.

"It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking upon the roof of the king's house, that he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful. And David inquired, 'Is that not Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah?' So David sent messengers and took her, and she came, and he lay with her." (II Sam. 11:2f) Then to have her for himself he arranged with the commander of his troops to have Uriah put into the front lines and there to be forsaken, so he would be slain. Thus David's "natural desires" led him into the heartless crime of betraying his own soldier. Sex gave the occasion and the motive for such a sin. And the wise young man and woman will say to himself, "I have that same drive in me that was in David."

But our contemporary drive takes different forms, and I want to suggest the three main forms of the

sexual drive and the questions it raises for responsible sexuality. The three issues are pre-marital sex, homosexuality, and abortion.

1. Pre-marital sex?

Suppose Tom and Jane, two juniors, both good students, have been going together for over a year and plan to become engaged. They are not wild-eyed kids. Their relationship builds steadily and gets intense, but they feel at the end of their emotional rope. "Why shouldn't we express our love for each other and stop bottling up our real feelings? We don't want to live without each other, but we can't marry until we get through school. We love each other so much we can handle anything that happens, but we can't go on this way, we'll go stale. Is there any valid reason to postpone the full expression of our love?"

Indeed, why not? Is there any good reason against it, except taboo? Certainly there are no Christian rules, no absolute prohibition. The decisive thing is love, and just because the sex act occurs inside marriage it is not necessarily right (it may be cruel), and just because it occurs outside marriage it is not necessarily wrong (it may be beautiful). The decisive thing is love, genuine outgoing care for and trust in the other person. To be morally responsible the act of sex before marriage must intend and express genuine love for the other person, and not mere enjoyment, even mutual enjoyment. Such an experience thus may be permitted in some conceivable situation, although it raises in the popular mind the notion that it does not matter what you do provided you express love. So, you may go to bed if you love each other; you may lie and cheat if only you do it with love; or steal and even kill, provided you love your victims. So, we have a problem here, and I believe there are profound psychological and theological reasons why the sexual act is best kept for marriage only.

a) You have noticed how often the Bible describes the sexual act by saying,

"he knew his wife, and she conceived." He knew her. That is no attempt to be delicate in language; the Hebrews were not squeamish. They meant what they said. The husband knows his wife and knows himself, by this act. What is it that husband and wife come to know? Not the facts of life so-called, but themselves. They find out what it is to be male and female. The experience of one-flesh, far from meaning simply physical togetherness, is an act which produces self-knowledge. By this act a man knows what it is to be a man, and a

woman what it is to be a woman, and no one knows this except through this act. Therefore a very special status belongs to the first experience of the sexual act. I am bound in an indelible way to the first man or first woman who shows me who I am and what it means for me to be a woman or a man. That is the strongest possible reason why I should reserve this act for my husband or my wife.

b) Furthermore, unless this act expresses my total involvement with this other person, "for better and for worse, until death does us part,"

it is dishonest. If conducted outside of marriage, this act expresses more than I intend. It says "one flesh" when we are not one-flesh except geographically! Hence it is dishonest, and this is why it arouses feelings of guilt. Guilt comes not from social taboo but from the knowledge that this act is a deceit; it says more than I mean, and that dishonesty makes me feel guilty.

It appears wise and morally responsible therefore, that unmarried people refrain from this sexual act and not because it is bad but precisely because it is good, too good, too good to waste or to play with. It is best to play it cool and cautious. The odds favor the waiting game as the best promise for future happiness.

The new morality of indulgence can be as abusive as the old morality of abstinence.

"Whereas the old doctrine declared: 'Thou shalt not have sexual relations before marriage,' the new puritanism affirms: 'Thou shalt have sexual relations before marriage.' If the old puritanism made a person feel guilty if he did have premarital sexual relations, the new puritanism makes him feel guilty if he does not. In either case there is undue social pressure. Sex obsession is as neurotic as sex repression...It is crucial that sex be united with love in the same way that freedom is yoked with responsibility." (Ferm, 132)

2. Homosexuality

A second form of sexuality which raises questions is homosexuality. And here also there are no rules against it, no prohibition for Christian people. For those men who prefer their sexual life with other men, and women with women, -- provided they are mature people, living freely with one another and without coercion, and with mutual satisfaction -- I consider that permissible for Christian people. The "gay life" is a legitimate style.

It is of course a biological aberration, because it does not contribute to the refinement or even the survival of the human species. Therefore it does not participate in creation; it does not create! Nor does it give to its practitioners the one-flesh experience which makes for the true fulfillment of human life. It falls far short of that self-giving and natural abandonment which man and woman achieve in normal marriage. Nor does it give the self-knowledge which comes in heterosexual relations. Yet as a style of life -- the private experience of two consenting, mature people -- homosexuality is an open choice for people, and it should not be prohibited nor should they be ostracized. Gay people have their rights which are not to be denied.

Their life style however is a fad, a temporary fad, and not a permanent form of sexuality for many people. As an experiment it may be fun, but people should not expect fulfillment from it. It is a detour from the main course of sexual maturity.

3. Abortion

A third anxiety for responsible sexuality is the issue of abortion. As I said last May when we dealt with this question at length,* I have a strong human concern for those women who for any reason feel "caught" and "misused" by the experience of pregnancy, and from my counseling I know how painfully they yearn to be freed from that torment. I know of precise situations, and I can imagine many more, when abortion seems the right and moral thing to do. Here again there is no absolute Christian rule against it. In the sight of God it may be that abortion is the responsible act for the Christian woman.

Before the decision is made she will need to ask herself several severe questions, and I mention only three as illustrations.

a) Whenever a woman willingly engages in coitus she makes an implicit promise that if, despite precautions, conception occurs, she will bear and give life to the fruit of that act. The man of course, shares in this promise, a promise made to the potential child who is conceived and given his genetic destiny by this act. It is an implicit promise, I believe, inseparable from the sexual act. It is a responsibility assumed in the joy and abandon of this act. It is a promise that I am responsible for my

* See the sermon, "Abortion on Request: A Christian Problem," for a fuller treatment of this issue, especially on the rationale for it.

behavior, and I will take the consequences of my act and bring to fulfillment whatever I have begun. The question thus becomes: How can the pregnant woman and impregnating man be responsible persons unless they keep the promise they have implied?

b) Another question is the matter of being unwanted. The chief argument for abortion is that the mother doesn't want this child at this time.

Of course it is highly desirable that every child born into the world be wanted, that he be born into a family that welcomes him gladly and loves him devotedly. Highly desirable, to be sure, but is being wanted absolutely required? Does a person's claim on life depend upon his being wanted? Is being wanted so absolutely necessary that he ought not be permitted to live without it? It has been estimated that unwanted births account for 35% to 45% of population growth in this country. Be conservative and cut this to 33%. To make even this figure dramatic we have numbered your bulletins 1, 2, 3. All those holding 1's and 2's were "wanted" by your parents; welcome to this world! Everyone was glad when you arrived. Those of you holding 3's, I am sorry, were mistakes. You were an inconvenience. Your parents regretted you were born, they gave you life reluctantly. You were not wanted. Being unwanted, would you have been abolished? That is the moral question. Should every unborn child be aborted if it is unwanted?

c) A third question concerns the attitude, the motive, of the prospective mother and father when they ask for abortion. What the woman says is undoubtedly true; it is terribly inconvenient to carry this child to birth. It interferes with everything she has designed for herself, -- her schooling, her freedom, her control of her own future. It means the next years are confined in caring for the child, unless adopted out. It means restricted freedom to go, do, be what she planned. It means another mouth to feed, another person to be responsible for. It means 21 years of responsibility, all because of one moment of carelessness, or one moment of beautiful, joyful passion. Why must she be punished with years of restraint upon her happiness? So she pleads that the doctor help her to abort. For her sake, please!

The doctor however is trained in a different tradition and committed to a different set of values. He has dedicated his life to saving life. He fights against anything that destroys, and in case of doubt he errs on the side of the helpless and he preserves life. Now this woman is asking him to reverse his role. She is asking him to terminate life -- an un-

conscious life, a helpless life, but still a life. She is asking the doctor to assume that the fetus has no right to live that is equal to her right to be happy. So the moral question becomes: By what right does she expect the doctor to put her happiness above another human being's right to live?

Such are the hard questions which the responsible Christian woman must ask when she considers abortion.

In summary then of this whole matter we might turn to Paul's words to the early Christians who were tormented by similar questions. From their new Christian freedom they were trying to work out some responsible attitude toward sex.

"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. So glorify God in your body." (I Cor. 6:19-20)

This is high ground, the very highest ground indeed. The body is sacred, the dwelling place of the Most High God, and sex is one of its functions, a vehicle for the thought and action of God.

"I appeal to you therefore, brethren (brothers and sisters!), by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." (Romans 12:1)

This sermon was preached in Marsh Chapel,
Boston University on November 14, 1971.
Additional copies available free.
