



# Discernment

SO THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO DISCERN WHAT IS BEST. PHIL. 1:10

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**Discernment aims to stimulate interest in the moral dimensions of contemporary issues; to provide a forum for Christian reflection; and to foster the teaching of Christian ethics across the curriculum. Published three times a year.**

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## On Being Civil

**C**olumnist David Broder began his first piece for 1996 by repeating the first line from his first piece for 1995: "Nothing would make 1995 a better year in America than a return to civility in our public discourse." He reviewed a long list of political conflicts in which civility could help to bring a measure of resolution, not the least of which was the deadlocked federal budget that was generating an increasing volume of uncivil feelings and rhetoric at the start of the year among unpaid and laid-off civil servants, all of it justified. Broder's concern was that legislators and executives return to democratic discourse—intense, passionate, and civil. He then ended his column with a strong moral declaration: "Social trust and civil debate are the *sine qua non* of a healthy society."

Our contributors to this issue of *Discernment* could have written Mr. Broder's column for him. Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop has often described his sense of unease, chagrin, and downright disgust at the confirmation process he underwent, then again at the reaction from conservative Christians to his public health strategy on AIDS. Author Karen Burton Mains has been the target of considerable criticism, including character assassination and charges of heresy, after the publication of her book, *Lonely No More*. CACE brought these two public figures together for an evening at Wheaton College on the topic of public civility. A condensed version of their presentation begins on page two.

Two other campus guests also have lent their intelligence to the call for Christian civility. Dr. Bryan Hehir spoke to college faculty on Catholic social ethics, with comments on teaching ethics in the modern university. He teaches and does chaplaincy at Harvard, a school on the east coast (okay, you've heard of it). Representing a strong Thomistic tradition, Dr. Hehir kept faculty thinking for nearly two hours, and readers get their smaller share of that ruminatory stimulation on page five. Tom Sine, flying in from the opposite side of the country, spoke at college chapel and other gatherings about his new book, a call for less heat and more light in Christian public policy debate. On page four, Sine discusses the book.

CACE moves out of the family values focus next month, inaugurating a new academic year theme centered around the ethics of welfare reform. I move out of the editor's chair for a year of sabbatical study and overseas teaching, giving the care of this newsletter to others while I bask on some distant shore (okay, swatting pesky mosquitoes, too). Readers of this newsletter will get a refreshing look at a new editorial voice, Dr. Glenn Arnold, Professor of Communications, and the CACE steering committee will fill my empty chair most capably, I believe. Who knows what CACE will be doing when I return? Something good, no doubt. ■

**The first call of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not to doing, but to being. It is a call not to progressive or conservative political action but to a new way to be in the world. The foundation of God's radical third way lies in the family of God, in the eucharist, in worship, and in Scripture.**

—Tom Sine, *Cease Fire*

*Mark Fackler*

# Learning Civility: Two Christians Share Stories of Facing the Whirlwind

**C** Everett Koop, former Surgeon General and chair of the CACE National Advisory Council, joins author Karen Burton Mains at a Wheaton College forum on civility, or lack of it, among Christians today. The forum was chaired by Em Griffin, professor of communications and author of well known books on interpersonal effectiveness.

**Griffin:** Welcome to our discussion on Christian civility amid the culture wars. Should public politeness characterize the Christian voice when truth is at stake? Doesn't tolerance play into the hands of enemies? The gifts mentioned in *Galatians*—peace, patience, longsuffering—seem to many a bit soft as a strategy for public debate. Our participants have been the target of criticism for their efforts to speak the truth, as best they understand it. We welcome them.

**Koop:** By inviting me to speak you get not only a contemporary Christian warrior, but also a combat veteran from the culture wars. But let me remind you that the Public Health Service, which I commanded, is one of the unarmed services of this country, so tonight I carry no weapon, though I miss the uniform which I wore during those days. People would sometimes ask me what those rows of ribbons meant. I would reply that the top row were memorials to my encounters with the liberals. And the second row were for my encounters with the conservatives. And the third row, for my encounters with the Christians.

My story tonight is personal, not philosophical. I did not become aware of my salvation until my mid-thirties, and didn't become surgeon general until the age when most people retire from government instead of joining it. My spiritual awakening had a profound effect on my life and influenced everything that happened to me thereafter. In the Bible, I found my guide for faith and conduct—always tempered, of course, by God's grace and forgiveness.

Before my service as surgeon general, I had an extraordinarily bitter ten-month confirmation struggle. Some accused me of being too old, which was crazy, since the president who appointed me and several congressmen who opposed me were older than I was.

I was accused of being incompetent, which was a smoke-screen for the real issues: my well known opposition to abortion, my national lectures on the pro-life circuit. The press, led by papers like the *Washington Post* and the *New York*

*Times*, mounted a campaign calling for the defeat of the nomination. Even my hometown papers in Philadelphia, in years past my friends, lined up against me. One cartoon published in Philadelphia portrayed me as a two-headed monster. Because of my name, I was called "Dr. Kook."

Those were very difficult days, but we endured them and eventually prevailed, primarily because of the support of Christian people throughout the country who convinced their senators to support me. I was cheered by that support—though my own denomination called me unfit for the job.

But I met with widespread opposition from Christians—evangelicals especially—when I began to discuss a subject some people preferred to leave unmentioned. In the absence of a vaccine or any cure for AIDS, with education as our only weapon, I took a sensible course: promoting sex education as a parent's responsibility centered on moral principles, with schools helping against the powerful and corrupting influence of television and the streets. I told evangelicals about their responsibility—and great opportunity—to shape the sexual behavior of the next generation. I urged evangelicals to influence the schools, not fight them. Still, I was accused of leading America's children down the garden path to immorality. This confrontation with Christians brought me great personal pain.

In one public meeting, one zealot actually admitted that she would rather have teenagers get HIV than to let her own children know that there were such things as condoms. Those teenagers were probably out behind the garage filling condoms with water to see how big they get before bursting. Many Christians opposed me simply because I used that word "condom." But I never discussed condoms without first reminding my audience about my firmly held beliefs on abstinence for young people, and mutually faithful monogamy for adults. Once praised by conservatives and condemned by liberals, I suddenly found myself attacked by former friends and embraced by former foes. Many of the conservatives who now opposed me did so merely because liberals spoke in my favor. You've all heard about "knee-jerk liberals." Let me tell you that conservative knees jerk just as readily.

Christian positions on social issues should reflect the teachings of Scriptures, the character of our Lord, and not conservative political philosophy, not social tradition, nor capitalist economic theory. God, much to the surprise of many people, is not a Republican. AIDS is one of those issues when Christian compassion, not party politics, should chart the course.

It is true that most people get AIDS doing things that most other people do not do or approve of, but American medicine has never discriminated against patients on the basis of the cause of their injury or illness. A doctor in a city hospital treats



C. Everett Koop

the gunshot wound of the thief the same as he would the wound of the policeman. I am sure that many people in this audience will expect healthcare for problems they have brought upon themselves by poor choices in diet, exercise, and lifestyle.

I had my most difficult encounter with evangelicals when President Reagan asked me to write concerning the health effects of abortion on women. I responded by saying that I found it impossible to reach a scientific, statistically significant conclusion, based on available studies. Yet I was in the deepest trouble with conservative Christians. Christian editors, columnists, and church leaders accused me of abandoning the principles which brought me to Washington. A magazine, published by a Christian ministry concerned with family issues, falsely accused me of furthering homosexuality. When I asked the well known leader about the article, he claimed he had not read it or known about it. I told him that was sloppy to the point of negligence.

Abortion is a moral issue, not a medical issue. I had considerable anecdotal evidence, and lots of counseling experience which told me of the guilt women feel over abortions. But I also have encountered many women who say that abortion saved their marriage or their job and therefore, from a mental health point of view, was a positive experience.

The harshness of the attacks on me following my letter to the President prompts my admonitions to Christians eager to shape national policy: the Christian press must demonstrate greater integrity and scholarship.

I was really stung by what happened. I was outraged to have my beliefs distorted. Jesus commanded us to love one another as a sign to the world of the truth of the gospel. Common sense would help a lot, too. One Christian leader took me to task publicly for a headline that appeared in *Time* magazine over an article about me. Did he really think that subjects of *Time* articles were asked to approve headlines?

Make no mistake. More than ever, I believe Christian leaders must exercise ethical diligence and basic civility. Christian public officials are not called to be public preachers. As surgeon general, faith controlled my character and my decisions. I am still embarrassed when people compliment me for great courage. All I did in that job was to try to fulfill it and to tell the truth. Indeed I took an oath to do just that.

**Mains:** "I had a book once in American Christendom, written at the foothills of my midlife. This book for me was an exercise in truth-telling. I dealt with common human themes, such as living with a husband's workaholicism, the relationship between men and women and the positive and negative effects those relationships have had on me. I especially wanted to show through these stories the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. This book was an agonizing work, as reflective works often are, in which we tear apart the meaning of our own life.

When the book entered the publisher's schedule it was still not quite done, and I was caught in this unprofessionalism.

My little book made a lot of people angry as it went naked and transparent into what soon became an ungentle night.

David, my husband, and I were accused of being New Age, being into the occult. I was branded a counterfeit Christian. My book was labelled as dangerous. I was accused of practicing Shamanism. I had to research that because I didn't even know exactly what it was.

At no time did any of my detractors contact me before making public statements about me. I was never invited to respond, dialogue, rebut, or explain. I finally contacted them.

David and I have been part of evangelical Christendom for 35 years. During the last 20 of those years, we have had a daily, national radio program. Millions of people have heard us. We have written books, spoken on platforms, and won prizes for publishing in evangelicalism. We thought things would eventually blow over, but they did not. Contracts were broken, and I was not allowed to talk in my own defense. Because of that, I decided to take myself off the speaker circuit. Station managers began to cancel, again not considering that we had contracts with them—and many of them without consulting with us. You understand that all this occurred in the Christian arena, the evangelical subculture which prizes itself on biblical truth.

Last November, we decided we could no longer continue in radio. We had sold our office building to our largest creditors and remortgaged our house. You are looking at a woman who is married to a man who has served the Lord faithfully all his life, as I have also tried to do, and we have nothing material to show for these years of service. "Words are powerful," Proverbs declares, "life and death are in the power of the tongue."

How should we respond to detractors when damage has been done, and you are truly suffering? I think the answer is really very simple: one must respond as Christianly as one is able—this is not easy. At least know what you are not going to do.



*Karen Burton Mains*

These terrible times test whether you are really the Christian you have been saying you are. We decided not to seek revenge, not to answer in kind, not to revile in return, to speak no evil about those who have spoken evil of us—and if that were not possible, to remain silent.

Then there's Scripture which continually hits you between the eyes of your rising self-pity: "Live in harmony with one

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# A Third Way Toward Civility

Nationally known author and speaker Tom Sine visited Wheaton College recently to speak on his new book, *Cease Fire: Searching for Sanity in America's Culture Wars* (Eerdmans, 1995), 302 pages.

**Sine:** The church in the United States has become deeply polarized along political lines. Many main-line Christians accept as a given almost a congenital need to be on the most aggressive edge of society at any given moment without regard to scriptural mandates. They are caught up in the values of the political correctness movement and other agendas on leftward side of the continuum.

But in my book I spend more time focusing on the religious right, because they are family. I contend that they have hijacked the American evangelical movement, promoting an ideology by which you cannot be born again if you're not a right-wing Republican. Nowhere else in the Christian world—Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Canada, or continental Europe—do evangelicals have to be Republican, or whatever is the equivalent, to be considered Christians.

The religious right has raised issues of values and family. The Christian left has raised issues dealing with violence and intolerance. I am grateful for them both, and I think there are ways we can affirm both strongly without getting caught up in ideology.

In the book I suggest an alternative. Not a middle position between the right and left, but a radical biblical alternative to both—using scripture very consciously and deliberately to define our Christian responsibility.

**Discernment:** How does your title *Cease Fire* describe that radical alternative?

**Sine:** I think of the title in terms of civility. I call for a stop to the name-calling on both sides. Eric Hoffer says any mass movement can exit without a god, but no mass movement can exit without a devil, and devils need to be tangible and vivid. For Christians on the left, the devils are terrorists, and doctor killers. On the right, the enemies are cosmic. To understand the religious right, you have to start with what they are afraid of. And because of dispensational theology, they live in absolute terror of a one-world one-government anti-Christ takeover.

For Pat Robertson and others, the fear has been galvanized into a global conspiracy. At the end of the evil empire [the former Soviet Union], nobody knew who the global conspirators were. But everybody is clear who the conspirators are in America: feminists, liberals, and humanists in Washington D.C.—an evil, sinister elite who want to lay siege to our families, undermine our values, take away our arms, and destroy the American way of life.

I'm calling for a cease fire. The subtitle really describes the book, "Searching for Sanity in America's Culture Wars." In

other words, let's bring this kind of nonsense to a halt so we can talk to one another in a civil way.

**Discernment:** But you do have Waco and Ruby Ridge as rallying cries for people afraid of big government in Washington.

**Sine:** Yes, we do have Waco, Oklahoma City, Ruby Ridge, the Freeman in Montana. They are symptomatic of a society desperately polarized, and the church is at the center of it. In no other Western democracy will you find such rage.

I just got back from Britain. They have much more bureaucracy, more intrusive government, and they pay a lot more taxes. But people are not mad at the government. There's not the rage you find here. In our country, we've reached almost hysterical proportions.

I was just down in Alabama where a wonderful evangelical doctor has given himself to the poor. He is convinced that Blue Cross and Blue Shield are federal agencies with a single agenda to put doctors out of work. I couldn't convince him that BC/BS was not a federal agency.

We have this rage against the federal. Pat Robertson's book, *New World Order*, links the federal government to this one-world conspiracy and then links Republican presidential incumbent George Bush with groups like Illuminati, New-Agers, and humanists. That fuels the rage and makes conversation nearly impossible.

**Discernment:** What "flash point" issues in the book raise hackles as you speak around the country?

**Sine:** One is the evangelical abandonment of public schools. But any time you suggest that there are more issues than abortion, pornography, or gay rights, people get angry. On talk-radio in Colorado Springs, I said that evangelicals in Great Britain care about such things as racism and the environment. A young caller went ballistic, "Where do you get off saying the environment is our issue? That belongs to those blankety-blank liberals." There was anger at the idea of "whale lovers for Jesus."

Research shows that evangelicals have transferred allegiance to the Republican party over the last fifteen years, with abortion the litmus test. But Christians in other countries see hunger as a pro-life issue, too. Evangelicals here have made supporting the NRA a pro-family position, but evangelicals outside the U.S. are much more likely to support hand-gun restrictions. We can learn from them.

Evangelicals confuse the United States with the Kingdom of God. Once you suggest the Kingdom of God is transnational, that God's agenda is not to make America powerful or great, then you've got yourself into a "hot time in this ol' town."

**Discernment:** You cite Enlightenment rationalism as a secularist movement that needs the Gospel corrective, and Martin Luther King as a model for your radical Christian alternative. You seem to warm to the communitarian movement as it supports people of differing faith communities working in common cause. Your response to communitarianism?

**Sine:** I argue that our “fix” on secular humanism as the ultimate culprit is too convenient. I see the Christian left caught up in a social Darwinism, and the right in an economic Darwinism. The direction I would point us may not be called communitarian, but the church must make a difference—in the lives of individuals, yes,—and also in the transformation of communities.

Welfare reform is one area where we can come together, the left and the right, in caring for the poor, rebuilding communities, and helping people relate and care for one another and their kids.

**Discernment:** Do students understand you?

**Sine:** Students are not aware of what’s going on. On another campus, I asked how many students read a daily newspaper. I saw only a dozen or so hands. We are not well-informed today—the way civilized leadership must be. When I talk about political ideology and church trends, well, there is interest and intelligence, but little background for understanding.

**Discernment:** In the Illinois legislature today is a bill to prevent the state from recognizing same-sex marriages, which may in the future receive state sanction elsewhere. How does your “radical alternative” help us with such a specific and volatile policy issue?

**Sine:** First, we need to approach these issues from the gospel rather than from politics. On the Christian left, some want to embrace alternate lifestyles or fully sanction gay unions. On the right is fear of the gay disease. A third way tries to understand and know the gospel, what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The best statement that I found on homosexuality is by a group of Anglican Christians. They claim we are not identified by our sexuality or class or status, but as beings in Jesus Christ. We need to understand our identity as different from our sexuality. When it comes to specific issues, I want to work at a relational theology that reaches out, recognizes human rights, and wants to heal. We have models for this kind of civility in overseas evangelical movements. My book is an appeal to American evangelicals to recover the “radical root” of the gospel.

## Selections from *Cease Fire*

### On race

Frustrated by entrenched racism, some African Americans are now arguing that the strategies used to secure victories during the civil rights era are no longer practical or effective. In order to make a true future for themselves, say these critics, African Americans must stop trying to define themselves in the context of a racist culture. They have to focus on their past, their rich African heritage, and work to create their own separate Afrocentric culture.

In their efforts to overturn Eurocentrism, Afrocentrists contend that all the triumphs of the West are in fact rooted in ancient African wisdom and culture. They argue that the most important

aspects of Western civilization are more significantly grounded in ancient Egyptian culture than in Greek or Roman culture. Further, they insist that Egyptians were all actually black Africans. They attribute any confusion on this point to a long history of European efforts to deny Africans their rightful place in history. Among the better-known proponents of Afrocentric separatism outside the academy is the Nation of Islam. Long a significant force in the African American community, the organization has been reinvigorated in recent years by the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan.

Much is at stake for all Americans if the spirit of divisiveness that has given rise to black separatism spreads further. And, indeed, as I have suggested, it can be found elsewhere on edges of the political correctness movement.

### On diversity

There are signs of a growing movement toward the politics of exclusionism among radical feminists, lesbians, and gays as well. While still using the language of diversity and inclusivity to promote their cause, a number really would like to see the creation of a more exclusive future in which they are calling the shots. Some radical feminists and lesbians would like to see the emergence of a new matriarchal society in which male participation is very tightly circumscribed.

### On the Christian mind

We are in serious trouble, progressive and conservative Christians alike, in that we have allowed the secular impulses of the American dream to define the aspirations that drive our lives and the values on which our lives are premised. And in all candor, I believe the aspirations and values of Enlightenment secularism are often categorically in opposition to the aspirations and values of God’s New Order.

### On moral life

In a very real sense American society and the church in the United States are at a historic watershed time. The decisions we make in the next few years could define the quality of moral life in America and moral leadership in the world well into the third millennium.

Our options seem to be rapidly narrowing to two starkly different alternatives. Either out of our faith and tradition we recover a vision for the common good and aggressively invest enormous private and public resources in working for the renewal of our communities, or we invest enormous resources in razor-wire fencing, guns, and prisons and settle for a permanently polarized society.

I believe that those of us from the Christian faith have it in our power to tip the scales in either direction. It is my sincere prayer that Christians from both sides in America’s culture wars will lay down their arms and join with Christians from all traditions in working to see something of God’s shalom vision of righteousness, justice, and peace become a reality in our nation and our world as together we enter a new millennium. ■

*Excerpts used with permission from Eerdmans Publishing Company.*

# Understand Your Theological Foundations before Launching into Public Policy Debate

Dr. Bryan Hehir, chaplain at Harvard University and professor at its Kennedy School of Government, addresses a workshop of Wheaton faculty on the difficult intersection of Christian ethics, education, and public policy formation.

**M**y life has been the teaching of politics and ethics, and involvement in the national life of the Catholic community, shaping public policy. So my work has been to relate politics, ethics, and public policy. I purpose to talk about the church and public policy, seen from the perspective of the community whose theology I know best.

## Theological foundations

First I'll talk about the theological premises of public policy engagement—things we seldom talk about before the Congress. (The Congress is very happy about that.) Nor do we speak about these matters on television talk shows. But they are the foundations that undergird the church's approach to political issues.

*Theological anthropology* looks at how the Christian tradition understands the human person and history. Augustine, Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr have all made their contributions. My church takes sin seriously, personal sin and public sin. But we differ with Niebuhr in being less apprehensive about the effects of sin, and more optimistic, as Aquinas felt more keenly the possibilities of humanity, and less keenly the evil of humanity.

*Incarnation* is radical grace. Catholics hold a conviction that the Incarnation is a sign of how God will bring about redemption in and through the human. Charles Curran has referred several times to the Catholic "and"—never a question of nature or grace, but always nature and grace. The role of grace is to perfect nature, not to destroy it. Faith takes reason at its highest pinnacle and opens up a new horizon for it. Faith never denigrates the possibilities of rational discourse. We hold to nature *and* grace, faith *and* reason, and very importantly, church *and* world. The incarnation is God's grace at work in the world in a transformative way. We take all the human institutions—politics, law, economics—very seriously, because they are the possibilities through which God will work in history.

The end point of this transformative process is never reached within history. So we need to look at *eschatology* as a way of thinking about history, the kingdom, and the church.

*Ecclesiology.* The church has been designated by Christ as the instrument for the kingdom in history. The kingdom is wider than the church. The kingdom leavens history, like the mustard seed that grows imperceptibly, but really grows, so the grace of the kingdom works in history. The church is to be the sign and instrument of the kingdom in history.

Human activity in culture, law, the arts, is not meant to be expendable at the end of time. These activities prepare the base of the New Jerusalem, though the New Jerusalem is ultimately a gift of the Spirit. But there is continuity between what we do in history and what the Lord will do at the end of history. So our question: how does a church which believes it is called by its ecclesiology to be a major participant in the political order explain and perform its role?

## The constitutional question

Usually this issue is phrased in terms of the separation of church and state, even though that phrase is not found in the Constitution. But I live quite comfortably with this general notion.

John Courtney Murray, a Jesuit and a classical theologian, changed the Catholic argument about church and state to reflect a right to religious liberty against a long history of Catholic belief in itself as the one true church. He was so effective that for ten years before Vatican II he was silenced by the church on this theme. Now, following his work and Vatican II, the church asks one thing—the freedom to function, but not favoritism. Neither should there be discrimination by the state against religious bodies in their fulfillment of their civic duties.

I will not allow church/state separation to be translated into a doctrine of the separation of the church from civil society. If you do that, you end up with a privatized religion.

In America, churches should be understood as voluntary associations, which are crucial to democracy. In the transition from tyranny to democracy, you need to shrink the state and fill in the gaps with voluntary associations capable of effecting political change—cultural groups, unions, religious groups, and others.

So we answer the constitutional question by affirming the separation of church and state, denying the separation of church from civil society, and locating the church as one of several voluntary associations participating in the discussion over public policy.

This is a contested position. Some in the church want a larger role. But many people are very apprehensive about the introduction of religious discourse into public discussion. To them religion is ultimately divisive.

The summary of all this is something I call the worldly church—a church convinced theologically that it belongs in the world, that sees its role at the service of the world, and a church that does not dichotomize history and the kingdom. The function of the church in the world is to dialogue with the world. Our posture in the world ought to be confident modesty—conviction that we have something to offer, and an equal conviction that we don't know everything.

## The moral vision applied

Let me illustrate how this might apply to international politics. The basic view coming out of our theological framework is that we belong to multiple communities (family, nation, etc.) and each of us belongs to the human community. So the starting point for international ethics is a position prior to the existence of states. Before the state is the human community. Among people of that human community exists a body of objectively definable rights and duties.

Then the second step, the nation state has achieved a certain moral status, a real but relative moral value. It organizes the human community relative to larger values. It is never an end in itself. We can never say, "My country right or wrong." So, for example, conscientious objection to military service could flow out of this argument.

Third, we have a "structural defect" (Pope John XIII's phrase in *Pacem in Terris*) in the absence of a government capable of overseeing nation states. In theory, there should be a central political authority with the capacity to coordinate the activity and guarantee the security of states for the welfare of the human community. In the absence of such a supra-government, Catholic teaching affirms the right of nation states to use force to guarantee their security. So "just war" theory is contingent on this structural defect.

In addition, no state can claim that its internal action is immune from criticism from others outside its borders. The wider human community has a duty to be concerned about human rights violations anywhere.

That same duty and vision applies to other issues on the social agenda. Remembering this helps sort out the often contradictory claims of parties in public policy debate. Take, for example, Daniel Callahan on abortion and euthanasia. Callahan is president of the Hastings Institute, the best bioethics research institute in the country. He began writing on the ethics of abortion long before *Roe v Wade*, and he has maintained a modified pro-choice position throughout. But when he turns to euthanasia, he is not pro-choice at all. There his argument is based on the social implications of what euthanasia will do. His position exhibits a fundamental tension. It is interesting how a pro-choice position, cast in social terms, comes out not so pro-choice at all.

On abortion, we need a law that gives presumptive support to fetal life, and then we need to identify exceptions that could override such a law. Valid exceptions could include rape, incest, and known deformity. In a more homogeneous Catholic setting—Ireland for instance—known deformity would not have popular support.

Exactly the opposite is our situation in the United States

today. The law does not support life; only on the edges do we get some concessions on behalf of the fetus. I support drafting the same law in both places—the U.S. and Ireland—with marginal differences based on communal values. Culture makes a difference, no matter where you are. The specifics of civil law are relative to the culture. At a structural level, we can use principles of theological and rational reflection that shape our consensus.

## A posture for social debate

Is a holistic vision possible? Is there any payoff from taking these complicated questions and looking at how decisions on one issue might effect another. Are there principles that cut across a set of problems? We need a consistent ethic, one that works in several situations.

In public policy discussions, Catholics need to put aside the infallibility issue—the notion that the Pope speaking for the whole church can define something as clearly present in the content of revelation and therefore obligatory on all. That teaching has been used on doctrinal (not on moral) issues.

So now we come to authoritative non-infallible teaching. This is where the struggle has been for the last thirty years. Are such moral judgments normative, compelling, and obligatory—or merely one position in an ongoing debate? The "authoritative" side refers to statements by Catholic leaders which become benchmark for each person's

conscience. But the "non-infallible" side means that moral judgments, even from leaders, are open to criticism.

Most of the social encyclicals are authoritative, non-infallible teachings. The current papacy is not open to discussion on the ordination of women, because the Pope believes firmly that revelation precludes it, while the question of celibacy is entirely open.

But Catholic moral teaching surely holds that the moral order is open to reason and open to universal conclusions. If you start a conversation with skeptics (students and faculty at Harvard, for example) by introducing "natural law" as the first topic, you'd better call for a small room. Rather, introduce a discussion on American military policy and non-combatants, and you'll get a group together. That's a live issue.

Apart from my regular teaching, I do "executive seminars." In August a hundred admirals and generals will come together for an intensive program on the state of the world. I lecture there, and the question of non-combatant immunity is very live. Eventually, the generals ask how one makes decisions on these matters, and then we talk options and Catholic theology plays a role. ■



Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, Th.D.

# Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World

by Bernard T. Adeney  
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995, 281 pp.

*Reviewed by Douglas McConnell*  
*Associate Professor of Missions & Intercultural Studies*  
*Wheaton College*

**F**ew of us who have traveled internationally will question the challenge of ethics in a multicultural world. From additional money to expedite documents to the quandary over the values of other religious traditions, ethical struggles abound. Despite a growing body of literature addressing cross cultural adaptation, few have been brave enough to tackle the tough subject of ethics. In *Strange Virtues*, Bernard Adeney provides a comprehensive treatment of ethics across cultures with all the sensitivities of a bicultural person and the insights of a scholar. Adeney's background uniquely suits him for the task. The child of missionary parents, he studied on three continents, taught theology and ethics at New College Berkeley, and is now teaching in Java, Indonesia.

Rather than approaching the subject of comparative ethics, Adeney focuses on differences between broad cultural groups for the purpose of exploring "how Christians should respond to strange values—patterns of meaning that are radically different from theirs" (p. 17). To achieve this purpose, the book begins by introducing a major concern for Christians: the tension between cultural relativity and biblical absolutes. The reader is ushered into this controversial field by focusing on the characteristics and cultural meanings of goodness. Adeney points out that "beyond all pragmatic reasons, the fundamental reason for studying ethics is to become good" (p. 24).

Although goodness may be expressed in various ways across cultures, there are identifiable character qualities or virtues which transcend culture. Virtues which transcend cultures are those the Apostle Paul calls the fruit of the spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). In using this illustration, Adeney points to examples from his own experience of goodness observed from strangers such as, "the modest courage of Chinese activists in Hong Kong . . . [and] the gentle consideration of a Pakistani fellow traveler who took off his coat to cover my sleeping son after many hours on a cold and bumpy bus" (p. 25). In reality, goodness cannot be understood in some abstract form; it is recognizable only in the cultural forms in which it is expressed.

The task of understanding goodness in other contexts requires a commitment to the disciplined study of culture. In

recent years, the new field of intercultural studies has drawn heavily on the social sciences, particularly the methodology of social analysis. This use of social research to better understand context has proven invaluable for the study of ethics. Adeney readily acknowledges the importance of research, but as a Christian ethicist he also stresses the necessity of theological reflection. He writes, "Just as Christian ethics cannot afford to be detached from a rigorous study of the local context, neither can it be separated from its theological commitments. Biblical teaching, the Holy Spirit, reason and tradition are all important sources of moral guidance as they interact with the realities of a particular context" (p. 46). The goal is a praxis approach which depends on the Holy Spirit to guide as learners begin to act in a manner they believe appropriate to the context.

Learning what it means to be good, especially in a different cultural context, exceeds the tourist approach so often adopted by travelers. It is a commitment to learning the nuances of another culture which can only be accomplished in the context of crosscultural relationships. If only it were as easy as it sounds! There are major barriers to relationships, not the least of which are language and ethnic solidarity. Adeney writes, "If friendship is an irreplaceable source of crosscultural knowledge, it is also one of the hardest to achieve. Friendship is both the means and the goal of crosscultural knowledge" (p. 56). A significant part of the solution to this dilemma is found in the experience of community. For the crosscultural Christian there are at least three communities: the culture of origin or native culture, the adopted culture, and the community of faith. The dialogue between these cultures provides the opportunity to understand goodness by comparing the forms in which it is expressed.

The interaction between cultures is not without precedent in the experience of the Christian. Adeney raises the issue of the cultural context of the Bible as significant to both understanding the text and seeing the world. At this point, Adeney acknowledges the controversial nature of his position. In his words, "The primary way we learn goodness from the Bible is by making the story of the Bible the interpretive framework through which we view all of life. This approach does not deny that we learn propositions or doctrines from the Scriptures. But unlike traditional conservative theology, we do not view these doctrines as propositions that we learn and then apply to various contexts. Rather, they are a lens through which we see reality. They help us to see the truth. The lens is not the truth, but it helps us to describe what is true" (p. 85).

Dealing with the relationship between the text and context is critical, not only for Christian ethicists, but for theologians and missiologists as well. The term contextualization has been adopted to describe the process of understanding the text in its context and applying it to other cultural contexts. Because contextualization combines the disciplines of biblical hermeneutics and social research, it is often under attack from scholars in both fields. Inevitably, Adeney had to enter these troubled waters to address the issues of crosscultural ethics. Due to limitations of space and purpose, he cannot deal adequately with either the concerns of theologians or missiologists,



leaving himself open to criticism. However, acknowledging this weakness does not dismiss the contribution Adeney makes to the dialogue. At the level of praxis, Adeney's contribution is invaluable. In developing his position, Adeney states that "the goal of biblical understanding is not the formulation of some transcultural set of ethical principles but obedience to God in a particular time and place" (p. 97).

After establishing the basis for ethics in a multicultural world, Adeney deals with the conceptual issues which emerge from differing value orientations and patterns of communication. Drawing on recent scholarship in intercultural studies, the book provides a good synthesis of relevant information for anyone who is living in another culture. Moving from theory to practice, Adeney then looks extensively at three of the most intriguing ethical dilemmas in our multicultural world: bribery, the challenge of other religions, and gender conflict. Without resorting to simplistic rules for dealing with these ethical problems, he provides some new and helpful insights.

The final chapter of the book is a comprehensive treatment of the unity of personal and social ethics. Adeney introduces the issues through a case study of a couple living in West Africa. Although not the first major case study in the book, it is profound both in the scope of the problem and in the implications for the Christian community. Adeney's analysis of the case reveals both a sensitive treatment of the human element and provides "a framework for unpacking essential elements in Christian social and personal ethics" (p. 225). The case study is particularly helpful because it involves a couple who took a strong stand against injustice and suffered the consequences. For those of us who have lived (or are living) in another country, the challenge of whether to take action against injustice is a haunting problem. It is easy to dismiss our solidarity with those who suffer by reminding ourselves that we are guests in the country; however, I have never personally been satisfied with this rationale for inaction. Adeney uses the case to establish a framework for understanding the issues in a way which is exemplary for anyone who uses the story of others as a basis of instruction.

True to its purpose, *Strange Virtues* is indeed a book which helps us to respond to "strange values." Adeney provides an insightful treatment of a subject that has been in the "too hard basket" long enough. Written in an engaging style, the book is worth the serious attention of people for whom the multicultural world is home. ■

**We gratefully acknowledge the financial help provided by the Kemper Foundation in making this issue of *Discernment* possible.**

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## Learning Civility, *Continued from page 3*

another" ... "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

When you look at Scripture, you test yourself and say, "Do I believe or not? Will I submit myself to the will of God, whatever He chooses, perhaps continual failure?"

How we conduct the battle when we are publicly defamed, when embroiled in controversy, when fighting, is as important as whether we win the battle. I must never lose sight of the soul of the man or woman who stands on the other side of the picket line on whatever issue I am standing against. If it rains, I must share an umbrella with the enemy who shakes a fist at me. I must give him my lunch if he is hungry. The abortion doctor, the atheist, the militant feminist, the redneck, the Ku Klux Klaner must all be reached by Christ's love. In Christian humility, I must sit at each of these person's feet and say, "Tell me, teach me what it is you are so angry about. I'm sure I can understand more about you if I just listen." They will not hear my arguments, I don't think, but they'll remember the umbrella, the tuna salad on wheat bread, and the listening silence.

The culture wars of our days give us this remarkable opportunity to show what Christian civility and love are really about. It's a wonderful time to be alive—painful, but wonderful.

I am all for dissent. Our thinking cannot be formed without listening to a variety of positions and different sides. But I must conduct, dissent, or respond to defamation in the most Christlike manner I know for the sake of those who are not particularly listening to my words, but watching nonetheless.

All my detractors called on me to repent. Not one of them said, "Perhaps I have not understood you correctly." Humility has been a hard won quality. If we can model humility in the midst of these culture wars, if we can ultimately demonstrate reconciliation between warring parties, we have set the watching world aback.

In the seventies, David and I cut our "social concerns" teeth on the counter-culture movement. We went into the city when the church was vacating the city. We dialogued on inter-racial issues and started an inter-racial church. We were concerned about the relationship of the gospel to the needs of the poor and the economics of poverty. During that time in the secular counter-culture movement, the whole world was watching. It was then, and it is now. Christianity has always been a counter-culture movement based on love, tenderness, and surprising compassion.

Christ said, "As you did it unto one of the least of these, you did it unto me." Personally, I prefer not to tear the flesh of his body or break his bones or strike a nail into the hand or press a thorn upon his forehead. Let me instead hold the broken body of Christ in my arms, because I have been privileged to be broken, and I understand a little more of pain.

At times, nothing moves the heart but a long, long look at Calvary. This is what the last three years have taught me. There was no greater point of culture war than the one that occurred at the hill called Calvary. You and I, in a time when culture wars will certainly increase, are called by Christ to be

reconcilers and agents of redemption.

Culture wars at any place, any time, provide us with the opportunity to break down the walls of hostility, making peace, reconciling ourselves to one another and one another to God, and bringing hostility to an end.

I wrote a book at the foothills of midlife, and many people hated it. But I will write another book. Most of all, I hope I will never forget this pain or the privilege it is to begin to understand a little bit more of what it means to see and sense the crucified life.

## Question and Answer

**Q:** Dr. Koop, you've had a number of contacts with the Clinton administration. Would you comment on the Washington scene today, health care or civility in government?

**Koop:** The thing that disturbs me tremendously is the villification now of the President of the United States and his First Lady by Christians. I am really shocked. I know both of these people very well. If you accept me as a Christian brother, you have to accept Hillary as a Christian sister. I've heard Bill Clinton talk about Jesus, about redemption, about sin and forgiveness, and he is either a sinner seeking forgiveness or a sinner saved by grace. In one case, he's our Christian brother, and in the other case, he needs our prayers.

After the Health Care Reform bill was initiated, the President asked me if I would sit in the balcony with the First Lady when he announced it. After I sat with that charming, articulate, very intelligent lady, the hate mail started all over again: "Why would you sit next to a woman like that in the balcony. Don't you feel dirty and contaminated?" I just think it's unconscionable for Christians to take a political party and make it a reason for hatred of the people that lead this government.

**Q:** What's our proper response to other Christians who act uncivily in public?

**Mains:** We're not to defend ourselves, but not to be negligent, either. Christians should defend one another. ■

## Welfare Reform and Biblical Principles

Jim Lewis, PhD  
Professor of World Religions, Wheaton College

*The following discussion was given at the May 6-10, 1996 faculty development seminar on "Welfare Reform, Issues of Justice and Love" sponsored by CACE and funded by the Wheaton College Alumni Association. Fifteen faculty from different disciplines participated under the leadership of Drs. James Halteman and Ashley Woodiwis.*

**T**he Christian is interested in the current issue of welfare reform for several reasons: practical, humane, and biblical. Practically, there is considerable evidence that many modern welfare programs in the United States have evolved into lamentable inefficiencies. In spite of this Christians acknowledge it is only humane to continue short term assistance to needy individuals and families. Lying between the need to rectify current problems while continuing humane assistance is the question of where to find ameliorating guidelines. In a society needing welfare correctives the Christian does well to inquire if there are interpretively sound and properly relevant scriptures which can provide guiding principles in the debate.

In a new book which explores the crisis of welfare reform and proposes Christian responses, John Mason believes that ancient Israel's experiences provide clues on how to deal with the needy in our midst [Stanley W. Carlson-Thies and James W. Skillen, eds. *Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans publishing Company, 1996, 145-185]. His view is that the Mosaic code "most likely" involved government-mediated income redistribution. He says: "When ...the extended or nuclear family becomes broken or dysfunctional, or when it cannot provide the needed help because the condition is too severe, assistance from the wider community becomes necessary. This is the consistent message of the entire Bible."

Admittedly, the societies in which the people of God found themselves in the Old and New Testaments are radically dissimilar to representative governments in the modern world. Yet, if we believe that the Word of God has relevance for our world today, surely it has something to say to us on even such matters as welfare.

There may be situations in the book of Acts which raise questions useful in the welfare debate.

One such instance may be Acts chapter 6. As the first verse indicates, the early Jesus movement constantly grew by attracting sizeable numbers of converts (see the so-called "progress reports" of Luke in 2:42f; 4:32f; 5:12f), but intimidating opposition (which increases after 6:9) seems to have resulted in financial hardship for some. We can imagine that those Christians who bought and sold lost clients; Christian artisans and craftsmen lost patrons. The loss of both influence and family resources were unable to entirely sustain basic subsistence.

**Initially**, generous gifts and a spirit of communal living met that need (4:36f). The apostles themselves were organizers of distribution to the needy (4:35). But as 6:1 indicates, long standing cultural and linguistic divisions within Judaism that predate the Christian era surfaced within the church. These divisions festered and threatened not only equitable care of the disadvantaged but the very life of the community itself. Hebraic/Jewish Christian widows were favored while widows of the Grecian Christian Jews were "being overlooked in the daily distribution of food." Within the church there was an in-group and an out-group. This fault line in the broader Jewish

society was most visibly represented by the Sadducees and the Pharisees whose differences in modern terms might be described as that of liberals and conservatives. As regards the Christian widows, one group spoke Greek and the other Aramaic. Societal faultlines within Jewish society at large become also the church's seismic fissures.

When Luke records the church's solution to the problem we may note some interesting points. First, there was the recognition that this type of inequity was *de facto* truly unjust. Luke does not present this as a spiritual problem but places it before the reader as a matter of fact.

**Second**, to confront the situation "the Twelve gathered all the disciples" and proposed a division of labor to handle the problem. A mini-task force was selected to address the injustice since "it would not be right for us [Apostles] to neglect the ministry to wait on tables..." May we assume that the *ad hoc* committee established in Acts 6 would have to draft some principles to guide it in rectifying this and similar circumstances? If so, would they not have drawn from the rich Old Testament guides to Israel mentioned by Mason?

**Third**, those selected to correct the matter seem to be from the aggrieved Grecian party (their names are all Greek).

### **What questions and relevance might this text have for us today?**

**First**, is there a distributive justice affirmed here? Those who had needs were recognized as deserving assistance until the current crisis was over. Though Acts does not, the Pastorals place limits, not completely defined, on who is entitled to the help (see the qualifications for widows "really in need" - 1 Tim 5:9-16). This presumably has to do with limited resources and the intrinsic unfairness of overburdening the resources of the community. Further, it sought to place responsibility upon the extended family whom it apparently felt was primarily responsible for the elderly and the first line of defense against unacceptable poverty.

**Second**, is "volunteerism" alone adequate in this setting? Mason cites Calvin Beisner as one who argues that there is no biblical warrant for government to assist the poor. Beisner wishes to abolish government payments and "then to learn and practice Biblically just and economically effective ways of helping the poor..." Does this passage have anything to say for or against Beisner's position?

**Third**, can we recognize that if within the church, socio-cultural differences exacerbate economic inequities, how much more in society as a whole? Does this fact compel us to support some institutional form of welfare?

**Finally**, is the witness of Scripture to welfare compassion within Israel and the church a paradigm model for government involvement in welfare? Further, can one of the two great commandments given by Jesus, to love God and neighbor as ourselves (the other to witness - Mt. 28), be reckoned so fundamentally normative as to make the example of Israel and the early church a paradigm for the church's responsibility in a modern state? ■

## CACE News and Notes

CACE will hold a public meeting on September 12, 1996, on "Welfare Reform: Issue of Justice and Love," with Dr. C. Everett Koop and others.

A conference sponsored by the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, **Ethics in the Professions and Practice**, will be held July 21-25, 1996 in Missoula, Montana. The conference is designed for anyone interested in practical or professional ethics—lay persons concerned about ethical issues in society, professors eager to incorporate ethics in their courses, thoughtful professionals outside the academy who want to explore and discuss ethical issues they face in their practice, and faculty who teach ethics but are looking for new ideas. *Ethics in the Professions and Practice* is designed to meet the needs of each group and to provide an opportunity to associate with colleagues and professionals who share these interests.

We are interested in your comments and contributions on any aspect of applied Christian ethics. Our emphasis for the 1996-1997 school year will be "Welfare Reform: Issues of Justice and Love." Thoughtful, cutting edge articles not previously published (1000-2000 words) will be considered for publication. ■

## CACE Monograph Booklets

- **On Being Truthful**, by Lewis Smedes, Ph.D. (1991)
- **In There a Right to Health Care?** by David B. Fletcher, Ph.D. (1991)
- **The Bible, Ethics, and Health Care: Theological Foundations for a Christian Perspective on Health Care**, by John F. Kilner, Ph.D. (1991)
- **The Sin of Greed and the Spirit of Christian Generosity**, by Robert C. Roberts, Ph.D. (1994)
- **Distinctive Responsibility for the Environment: A Christian Perspective**, by Susan Power Bratton, Ph.D. (1995)
- **Understanding Homosexuality**, by Gilbert Bilezikian, Ph.D., Stanton Jones, Ph.D., Don E. Workman, Ph.D., Dallas Willard, Ph.D., and Judy-Rae Karlsen (revised 1995)
- **Valuing Families and Family Values: A Christian Perspective**, by Moira Eastman, Ph.D. (forthcoming, 1996).

(Cost is \$3 per booklet, \$4 for **Understanding Homosexuality**)

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