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No Assembly Required

"I will tell of thy name to my brethren," David vows to God in Psalm 22. "In the midst of the assembly I will praise thee. From thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him." David understands that redemption has consequences. His praise must not be private or domestic, but it must be public, in the presence of fellow God-fearers. Not until we worship solemnly with the saints do we express adequately our gratitude to God for our deliverance.

Unlike the psalmist, evangelical Christians today seem terribly confused as to why they are to gather for worship. Consider this metaphor, popularized by Chuck Swindoll. Worship is still important, we are assured, and it is as vital for the church today as the huddle is for a football team, for in both cases that is where the players gather together to learn the plays. The flaw in this metaphor is obvious. The huddle is not the action in football. It is the lull in the action, a moment so uneventful that the well-conditioned TV viewer can use it to race to replenish his beer. So to compare worship to a football huddle is to encourage the mistaken notion that the real world is "out there," and that the church gathered for worship is somehow something less.

As bad as that is, far worse yet is the increasingly popular conviction that Christians can engage the world with a no-huddle offense. As far as assembling together, more and more are encouraged merely to phone it in. This is not entirely new. As early as the 1950s, dial-a-prayer services were as popular as phoning for the time or the weather or for movie announcements. In a 1964 article in *Christianity Today,* many pastors were extolling the efficiency of this automated ministry. Said one, it was the only way he could talk to 200 people a day. What is more, his church could minister this way to people at two in the morning without waking up the pastor. Beyond efficiency, its popularity owed to parishioners enjoying anonymity without feeling lonely.

AND THEN CAME THE INTERNET. Any surfer knows that religious communities are thriving in cyberspace. We visited one recently, the First Church of Cyberspace (found at "Godweb.com"). Characteristic of an age that cannot distinguish between profession and self-promotion, the website opens not with a description of its beliefs but with positive comments from recent visitors. Guest book kudos come from Baptist, Presbyterian, and Universalist circles, from as far away as Germany and Japan. Much of the enthusiasm is brief and to the point: "Wow!" or "Cool!" Perhaps what impresses visitors most is the non-fundamentalist character of First Church. From the church's home page, the surfer is but a couple of hyperlinks from what is euphemistically described as "Adult Christianity."

OF COURSE, A CYBERCHURCH IS admittedly unconventional, and that is its great advantage, boast its afficionados. One church website designer has claimed that "all elements of congregational life can be experienced through the Internet," including the sacraments (don't ask). And all the while – and here is the real virtue – it is in the "real world." By contrast, a church gathered traditionally is mired in the past, with members who are missing the action. We know of one Presbyterian megachurch that recently appointed to its large staff a "Minister of Technology." This minister is urging his church to make room for technology, lest it become "too painfully obvious that we have become completely irrelevant." (He omits the other painful reality of ecclesiastical technophobia: that ministers of technology will find themselves unemployed.)

This then is the church in the technological age – no assembly required. We can forgo the gathering, because technology has conquered the restraints of time and space. One megachurch in Central Florida is explicitly making this claim. Recently this church changed its name from a "Community Church" to "a Church Distributed," because it had discovered a "new form" of the church (which will eventually become the norm, it predicts). The traditional church gathered in one building, but the distributed church "will bring together groups sharing God through communications technology, not

INSIDE

The *Nicotine Theological Journal* will likely be published four times a year. It is sponsored by the Old Life Theological Society, an association dedicated to recovering the riches of confessional Presbyterianism.

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limited to any one building."

IN ITS LITERATURE OUR Central Florida megachurch is vague on the details of a "distributed church," beyond a network of "partners, subsidiaries [sic], and affiliates." One goal is to simulcast worship to various remote locations, to as far away as Sri Lanka. But why go to such expense to hot wire the Great Commission? It would surely cost far less to train indigenous pastors in third world settings than to pipe in worship simulcasts. The reason, of course, is that the distributed church is less interested in the transmission of the word than the worship experience. In the words of Tom Beaudoin (see his book *Virtual Faith*), the fashionable MTV style of these churches enables viewers the "consumption of shared events."

Which brings up a particularly unsightly feature of high tech worship: it all smacks of colonialism. Satellite-linked worship is not a two-way dialogue. It is rather the exportation of a product to subsidize impoverished churches. (As if the technological metaphors aren't already overloaded, our distributed church refers to spiritual giftedness as "wiring."). So it is the spiritually gifted reaching the LDCs (less developed churches).

THIS POINT OUGHT NOT TO BE overlooked. It is commonly observed that we are living in post-denominational times. But curiously, modern technology may be leading independently minded churches to rediscover denominationalism (not what they would call it). "Connectedness" is the new buzzword, though it is based not on shared doctrinal affirmations but on affinities with respect to style. Thus Willow Creek Community Church is denominationally linked to hundreds of dues-paying member churches of the Willow Creek Association. So the well-documented demise of traditional denominations may owe less to de-institutionalization than to re-institutionalization. Within conservative Presbyterianism of late, we see this phenomenon on a smaller scale. The New Life Presbyterian churches (*nee* OPC, now PCA) have formed the New Life Network, and Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City is out to establish "Redeemer-type churches." These are not egalitarian networks. They are empires, or perhaps even more fitting, multi-national corporations.

The Central Florida Distributed Church goes on to claim that its discovery is less a new form than the return to the original form and mission of the church. The parish style church was a departure from the biblical form, but now through communications technology the church fulfills its original mission. The church can be "out there," yet worshiping together every week. Perhaps this church is embracing the Lutheran fallacy of the ubiquity of the body. But we fear it is more serious than that. By proclaiming its limitlessness, it is rejecting the metaphor of the body altogether. For this reason, we agree with its claim that what seems very new about it is really very old. But we prefer Erik Davis' description of human liberation from the embeddedness of time and place: this is Gnosticism (see his *TechGnosis).* For the modern gnostic, natural limits are merely human conventions. Technology permits us to imagine no limits to our lives, including life together in the church.

The apostle Paul returned constantly to the image of the body of Christ in order to remind a church facing the threat of Gnosticism that embodiment was essential to its life. Contrary to the claims of electronically-enhanced churches, there is no such thing as pure, disembodied relationship. Like the human nature of our incarnate Lord, we are creatures of time and space. The church should pattern itself after the incarnate Christ, and not design itself according to the incommunicable attributes of God, idolatrously locating its omnipotence and omnipresence in technology. To strive for limitlessness is to pursue the Promethean pretensions of Babel.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT TO OFFER this critique is to commit the greatest sin of our time: we are standing in the way of progress. After all, technology is merely a tool. "The distributed church," we are told, "is nothing more than a connection device, like a telephone or a

computer." But notice the double speak in this argument: on the one hand, a revolution in the way we do church; on the other hand, merely another tool. But you can't have it both ways. As Romano Guardini has argued, tools become machines when they alter our respect for human limitations, transcending our sense of time and place. The result, in Jacques Ellul's terms, is the deification of technology. In a telling phrase, one church claims that its connectivity in cyberspace is "through the Holy Spirit and technology" – at least that minister of technology is willing to share billing.

C. S. Lewis once wrote about the "tether and pang of the particular." In the folly of his youth, Lewis would later confess, he had imagined that he had "outgrown the local, unique sting" and could live and love universally. This was self-deception, because it was the embeddedness of local life that taught him the true character of love. Technological savvy may generate a cyberchurch with all the appearances of community and none of its awkwardness, inconvenience, or vulnerability. But connectivity is not community. Limitations of time and place, Lewis came to learn, are ultimately liberating by their very restraint.

IT WAS ALWAYS AMONG THE flesh and blood of his assembled people that God established or renewed his covenant. *Ekklesia,* or assembly, referred to an actual, not virtual gathering of God's people in the presence of God. The redeemed of the Lord praised him after he had *gathered* them out of the lands in their wilderness wandering (Ps 107:1-3). This gathering finds its eschatological climax in the heavenly Jerusalem, the city that is to come, where all of God's holy ones gather in joyful assembly according to Heb 12. The writer of that book instructs us as to how we can be assured that we are fixed properly on that eschatological hope: by "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some."

C. Lindsay Palmetto *SC88*

The Bride of Mere Confessionalism

It may be on a short leash, but paranoia runs as wildly as it can at the *NTJ*. We were especially fearful that others don't care for this publication when we read a piece in *Perspectives* (Nov. 1998) by James LaGrand on "The Grammar of Faith." Mr. LaGrand, who pastors a church in Gary, Indiana, makes the astute observation that on one day of each year, October 31st, Martin Luther morphs into the Protestant everyman, as churches across western Michigan, the Dutch Calvinist heartland, join hands with various shades of Lutherans to celebrate Reformation Day. LaGrand's interests are clearly ecumenical. He writes specifically with the news of the Vatican's rejection (recently reversed) of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic statement of justification and is also concerned about Lutheran objections to the document. "Any sectarian definition of the faith which is more distinctive than the 'one faith' identified in Scripture (Ephesians 4:5) will not do."

Why the *NTJ* paranoia? We are not so delusional as to think we had anything to do with the failure of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic accord, though we have been known to pray for the faithful witness of all communions in the visible body of Christ, pluriform though it may be. No, our anxieties stemmed from LaGrand's concluding remarks. "When Reformed Christians refer to 'the Reformed faith' it seems to me that we are making a grammatical error." Though he concedes there is a discernible Reformed tradition, the "best 'Reformed theology' witnesses to the one Christian faith." Since we here at the *NTJ* have been known to speak, nay scream, of the Reformed faith, even to the point of defending Reformed sectarianism, we couldn't help but feel caught with our proverbial pants down.

NOW, ONE TACK IN OUR defensive response is to counter the notion that talking about the Reformed tradition necessarily connotes provincialism. It may, but it may not. There are, for instance, those Christians who merely speak of the gospel's simplicity, or biblical faith, without any awareness of Christian history and the different traditions that have developed since Pentecost. To speak of a biblical faith in such an innocent way is to manifest a parochialism that is markedly different from those like us who celebrate a particular tradition (See "Sectarians All, 2.2). In this manner, talk of the Reformed faith that we engage in may actually reflect a religious cosmopolitanism that acknowledges professing Christianity is bigger and more diverse than our confessional ethnos. Yet, we have known members of other confessional traditions who do not have the slightest awareness of how their expression of the faith differs from or is similar to ours. This is regrettable, but not the worst of errors if it represents one of those remarkable instances where a religious tradition revels in its own ways without having to fear or defend against outsiders. Worse is that kind of sectarianism that masquerades as ecumenism but isn't aware of traditions or communions that might object to its "one faith" and then, upon hearing of objections, responds to critics that criticisms are too late because all of the important communions were part of the process. It is as if having one Presbyterian at the conference table means all Presbyterian and Reformed denominations were represented. If the critics weren't part of the dialogue and weren't even invited, then such exclusion is a form of sectarianism.

Having said all that, we must concede that a "bad" kind of Reformed sectarianism exists from which we want to distinguish our "good" variety. This will also help to clarify what we mean by confessionalism. Thus far in our reflections we have stressed that any form of ecumenism or inter-denominationalism that compromises our commitment to the system of doctrine taught in the Bible and elaborated in the Westminster Standards will not pass our muster. (Oops, there go our invitations from Lausanne 2000 or COCU For A New Millenium.) Our point is that a "mere" Christianity that impedes efforts to articulate and defend the *whole* counsel of God is inherently flawed and denies liberty of conscience to boot. In other words, we want to reserve the right of all interpretive Christian communities to formulate their understanding of God's word without fear of being called fundamentalists (though there are worse epithets).

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THERE is a limit to Reformed sectarianism. We stop it at our confessional standards. In our understanding of conservative American Presbyterianism's recent past, J. Gresham Machen and the Presbyterians who back in 1936 went into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church were committed to preserving the Westminster Standards, nothing more and nothing less. They may not have understood everything involved in that move, but for them the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms were the boundaries of fellowship and trust in all genuinely Presbyterian communions. When, for instance, the OPC refused in 1937 to prohibit ministers from drinking alcohol and instead took its stand upon the Westminster Standards, the denomination showed in some measure what it means to be confessional.

SINCE THEN, HOWEVER, various parties within the conservative Presbyterian fold have tried to provide a surer guide to Reformed orthodoxy than what the Confession and Catechisms offer. The lists vary, but from the requirements outlined by pastoral search committees to the views required for employment at Reformed seminaries, orthodoxy among conservative Presbyterians now consists of, for starters, belief in a young earth (many), a theonomic interpretation of OT law (too many), sending children to Christian day schools (more), the biblical theology of Geerhardus Vos (small but zealous), the biblical counseling methods of Jay Adams (huge!), urban evangelism and church planting (modest), Meredith Kline's articulation of the covenant of works (few) and Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics (the grand daddy of them all).

Many of these different expressions of the Reformed faith are valuable and worthy of study and propagation. But they may not, in our humble opinion, replace or supplement Presbyterian confessional standards. If any of these views is clearly taught in the Westminster Standards, then they may be lawfully required for ordination and communion. But even then, the criteria for admission into fellowship has to use the explicit language of the Confession, not the emphasis of any given party that has appropriated the teaching of the Confession for its particular ends, no matter how worthwhile. In other words, a man is orthodox if he can affirm and articulate, under examination by a legitimate court of the church, the confessional teaching of the communion in which he is about to minister. He does not have to subscribe to any of the particular views of individual ministers, no matter how confessional those ministers may believe their respective views are.

For instance, if a congregation of conservative Presbyterians want their next minister to send his children to a Christian day school, teach regularly about the necessity of Christian education, and challenge those parents who send their little darlings to public schools, they should amend the Westminster Standards to include a chapter on education. But until that happens, this congregation should not use the courts of the church, the process of calling and ordaining a minister, or their trust in fellow church members to promote views that do not find clear sanction in the Westminster Standards. To require more than the teaching of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms is to engage in the "bad" kind of Reformed sectarianism because it involves a position outside and, hence, narrower than the confessional standards.

LEST WE BE MISUNDERSTOOD, we are not trying to impugn the motives of those who hold the various views that we listed as being supplementary to the Westminster Standards. In many cases the aim is the wholesome one of preserving and defending the Reformed faith. But such efforts to propagate the Reformed tradition betray a lack of confidence both in the Standards themselves and in Reformed believers, both living and dead. The dangers are so great, the theological subtleties so complex, the times so confusing, the sentiment runs, that we need a more precise statement or definition of the faith than that of the Standards. If that is so, then revise the Confession. Such a revision would have the merit of allowing the councils of the church, the appropriate vehicle for such reflection and debate, not individuals or cliques, to do the work they are called to do.

Still, we do suspect that those who think the Standards need a little help do not understand or know the Confession and Catechisms as they should. We are convinced that the Westminster Standards express the system of doctrine taught in God's holy word, that they approximate in systematic fashion

the whole counsel of God, and that they contain all truth we may confidently assert about what man needs to know about God and what duty God requires of man. Of course, to those Christians outside the Presbyterian fold, and even some in it, such convictions look about as naive as they sound smug. But we stand by our view that this is the "good" kind of Reformed sectarianism. Surprise!

OTHER READERS MIGHT ACCUSE us of inconsistency. After all, the title of our first article in the very first number of the *NTJ* was "Sabbath, Psalms and Single Malt." Well, two out of three ain't bad. And actually, the first two are not only in the Confession of Faith, as opposed to biblical counseling or Kline's exegesis of Gen 1-3, but many of the various schools of "bad" Reformed sectarianism have abandoned exclusive psalmody while also taking liberty with the sanctification of the Lord's Day. If we have to give up single malt to obtain mere confessionalism, then we are willing to pay that price. But we don't believe such a penalty will be necessary because our commitment to confessionalism involves a Confession that includes a whole chapter on Christian Liberty which teaches that if we don't have to subscribe to Vos, Van Til or even the right Reverend J. Gresham Machen to be confessional, neither do we have to give up scotch. To be confessional is to believe in the adequacy of one's confessional standards, nothing less and surely nothing more.

Henry M. Lewis *SC88*

39 Alexander Hall

This is not Your Father's Oldsmobile, It's Bigger

Editors of *NTJ* may differ on the relative merits of mini-vans. Not to be overly deterministic, but our opinions appear to diverge precisely at the point of having kids, with the father preferring the advantages of mini-vans, and the fatherless the Volvo station wagon for those parents in need of a little extra room on the road. But when it comes to Sport Utility Vehicles we are of one mind. They should be banned by every community across America, just like WalMart, *Penthouse*, and no-smoking legislation.

THE REASONS ARE MANY. FOR those concerned about the environment, the gas consumed and the particles emitted by SUV's should be sufficient to decide the matter. For those who think the Sierra Club is a pawn of the Communist Party, safety should be a good reason for banning these gas hogs. Anyone who has had to drive behind an SUV now knows what it feels like to drive behind a billboard. Which is another way of saying you can't see around these vehicles, and that is a particularly frightening proposition when an SUV is waiting to make a left turn and you, coming from behind, can't tell whether on-coming traffic going left has stopped or is taking advantage of the SUV and turning in front of it. Of course, SUV owners, sitting as high as they do, are sure to enjoy the feeling of superiority over the cars on the road. And that is another strike against the SUV, this time moral. How could any Christian favor a vehicle that fosters pride of height as well as purse?

But these reasons pale beside the greatest objection we have to SUV's. They are simply a means for boomers to drive vehicles as big and as luxurious as their dad's Lincoln or Cadillac, minus the guilt of having a big, corporate and luxurious car. Here the name, Sport Utility Vehicle, is key. It says this truck-like machine is actually healthy and practical (as if a vehicle designed for the bush in Africa now being used to pick up groceries at the supermarket could actually be sensible). It is healthy because it gives the appearance of giving greater access to outdoor activities. Now you can drive to the highest peak in your section of the country and get out to take pictures or sip a fine Chardonnay. Or you can put a couple of canoes on top of your SUV to go fishing while soaking up some sun and suds. So even if you are polluting the environment, the SUV makes you think you are really engaged in outdoor activity and, therefore health conscious in your choice of vehicle. In other words, driving becomes a form of exercise.

The SUV has emerged as the road equivalent of fat-free ice cream. You know you really don't want to have your parents' suburban values or consumerist way of life, just like you know you should probably give up sweets for more than just Lent. But you don't have the courage to recognize that you have grown up to be like your parents or the discipline to give up dessert. So you drive around a vehicle that on the inside would make your dad proud, even though on the outside it says "there's no way you'd ever catch me dead in a Buick." Perhaps to honor these sentiments, in the next twenty years the Hearse company will be coming out with a line of SUV's to transport the remains of boomers to their final resting place and avoid the indignity of having to ride in a luxury vehicle.

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Putting the Idol Back in Idolatry

Idolatry is having a hard time these days in Calvinistic circles. Pick up any rock and underneath you are sure to find an idol of some kind. Do you overeat? Then it must be a function of your putting food on the throne of your life.

Or it has something to do with your making a god of yourself and then serving yourself edibles fit for a king. Do you have large credit card debts? Then you probably have made an idol of all those Italian suits you purchased last fall. Or maybe it was simply making your boss an idol – after all, you purchased those suits to impress him. Do you neglect your wife and kids? Then again, it must have something to do with your making an idol out of your work.

OF COURSE, SOME PARENTS also avoid their kids because of their fascination with a vegetable garden or their compulsiveness with maintaining a weed-free yard. This strikes us as a much more worthy form of idolatry than the sorts just mentioned. Thanks to the logic of the biblical counseling movement all forms of selfishness and what Christians used to call deadly sins have now become idols. Pagans used to worship trees, plants, moons – the sorts of things that were bigger than they were and could not be controlled. The gardener who spends too much time trying to conquer the dandelions in his backyard is closer to the old fashioned form of paganism that was much clearer about idols and false worship than today's brand of idolatry-lite. Paganism was real idolatry. It offered an odd assortment of deities, whether natural or supernatural, and encouraged its followers to engage in rituals and practices that had to do with showing proper honor and respect for these gods as well as trying to gain the deities' favor or mercy. Christian missionaries would try to convert the followers of such pagan religions by persuading them of the only true God's existence, the creator of all things, and by redirecting their misplaced worship toward the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. They also did a fair amount of instruction about the sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ, who once for all satisfied divine wrath and made pagan sacrificial practices unnecessary. But today, idolatry has little to do with paganism or worship. It is simply the cause of sin. And avoiding sin means getting rid of the idols in the human heart.

TO BE SURE, SIN IS A BAD THING and we don't in any way want to suggest that it should be trivialized. And that is precisely what happens when you turn lifestyle into idolatry. Consumerism is an unwise way to live, and the suburbs may function as a plausibility structure for such folly. But can it really qualify as a false god? What is more, such tepid idols – the extra piece of cake I ate after a big dinner, or fearing what my friend will think of me if I tell him he is being a jerk – lower the stakes considerably for worship. If my daughter regards her Barbie doll as her savior, if she grows up wanting to wear clothes like Barbie that accent her ample bosom and thinking she will be a success and find meaning in such sexy clothes, then I have a problem on my hands.

But is it really a problem of idolatry? Stupidity may be the better category. If she can't figure out that this eight-inch figure is nothing more than plastic and possesses no more power than the fuzz accumulating in the dryer's lint screen, then I have failed as a parent and she needs to be brought up to speed about the order of the universe. In fact, it strikes me that my daughter's plight is much worse than the pagans who sacrificed pigs to the moon. At least, they had some sense that they needed to placate the god of darkness or the object that God appointed to govern the night. Those poor heathen knew far more about spiritual life – sin, judgment, redemption – than any modern day consumer who is tempted to derive a sense of comfort and purpose from the purchases they make.

THE SPIRITUAL ILLITERACY inherent in modern day idolatry may explain why evangelical and conservative Protestants are more interested in and reliant upon biblical counselors and at the same time are worshiping in an altogether improper manner (i.e. contemporary worship). If idolatry can be something as simple as the selfish reasons that go into a decision to buy a certain brand of mustard, then people become unaware of what real idolatry is – namely, false worship. So as long as believers are spending their week destroying the idols in their heart, they won't feel the need to give much attention to idols that may actually be on the loose at their local house of worship every Sunday morning. (Those desiring an example of such idolatry may want to think about the reasons for displaying an American flag in the front of their church or the rationale that leads congregations to use overheads instead of hymnals.)

The way out of this mess may be to restore a sense of awe and gravity to worship. And the way to do that may be to follow the lead of the pagans who recognized their inadequacy and offensiveness before their gods and used worship as a means to make amends. In other words, if worship had more to do with human sin and guilt and divine holiness and mercy, idolatry might have more to do with rites and ceremonies employed to appease gods who can't be righteous or merciful because they don't exist. If that happened, then people might figure out the difference between selfishness and idolatry, and worry more about offending the only true and living God with whom they assemble on Sunday than whether their new purchase at Target or their recent disagreement with son Joey or daughter Sarah involved the creation of a new deity.

It Really is the Economy, Stupid!

We don't mean to be reductionistic. But a recent piece in *The New Republic* reminded us once again of just how seductive our socio-economic life is and

how confessional Presbyterians have yet to come to terms with the way capitalism shapes character. The topic was abortion and Christopher Caldwell wrote (April 5, 1999) that most decisions to abort stem from reasons of lifestyle. In fact, he says that lifestyle "always overpowers traditional morality." The reason is that as peripheral or as lightweight as lifestyle appears to be from the perspective of modern ethical reflection, most people consider their own way of life to be fairly important. Caldwell illustrates this point in a particularly apt way: "In a socially stratified era antedating mass contraception, an unwanted pregnancy generally meant you'd get stuck in a cramped, limited village existence with the first man you fell in love with, which is probably what would have happened anyway. Today, it still means getting stuck in a cramped, limited existence – but that's decidedly not what would have happened anyway. What one loses out on is a vastly expanded roster of life choices: education, travel, career advancement, class advancement, money, fine dining, entertainment, and sports, plus a recreational-sex career that can run at full-throttle (if that's what you want) for 30 years or more."

AT THIS POINT, SOME MAY BE tempted to respond that Caldwell's example is not persuasive since Christians ought to be able to sacrifice all of these consumerist trappings and take the moral high ground of accepting the consequences that come with procreation, marriage, and rearing a family. But he cuts close to home when he goes on to talk about the politics of the Republican Party, the political home for most conservative Presbyterians.

REPUBLICANS ARE "IN A WEAK position to argue that Americans should throw [this standard of living] away." In no other realm do they argue "that the quest for lifestyle is a frivolous thing." In fact, the pro-choice position has much in common with the political and economic sensibilities of conservative Christians. If people derive pleasure from buying things or seeing far away places, and if Christians have few qualms about enjoying such pleasures, then how do they expect people to spend most of their lives seeking the delights of the market but then turn their backs on those pleasures once a woman gets pregnant? Even more basic, if the sole factor determining purchases is the lowest cost, rather than neighborly matters like from whom am I buying and who makes this product, then it is very hard in just this one case to say that the cost of having an unwanted baby has no significance. In other words, the Christian right is basically pro-choice on everything but abortion. Call it inconsistency, a blind spot, or what have you, but Caldwell does have a point – although pro-lifers think they can have their cake and eat it too, they can't.

The intent here is not to express sympathy with the pro-choice position or to ridicule the folly of pro-lifers. Instead, it is that the Christian right of which conservative Presbyterians are such enthusiastic members has not thought sufficiently about how much its support of the Republican Party and corporate (nay, global) capitalism ends up encouraging a pro-choice world view. We believe that small-"c" capitalism is better than socialism. But free-market ideology and the commodification of culture that it nurtures does not serve well the defense of human life in the womb. If Christians are going to make abortion a litmus test for political candidates, then they may want to go deeper and ask about a politician's position on the market and pursuit of human happiness.

CHRISTOPHER LASCH WROTE several years ago that it was absurd for the religious right to advocate family values when most of the politicians and administrations for which they voted established and implemented policies (e.g., free trade and big business) that ultimately eroded the legitimate authority of parents (*First Things*, April 1990). By drawing the connection between abortion and the market, Caldwell's article may help conservative Presbyterians finally to get Lasch's point.

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The Dark Side of Evangelicalism

The way to tell the difference between an evangelical and a fundamentalist, who are both supposed to hold the same convictions, is that the fundamentalist is the one who is angry. The implication is that the evangelical is nice. Of course, that is not the way many American's see it since in public opinion polls evangelicalism is right up there with the KKK thanks to the high visibility of the religious right. But whatever the common perceptions or misperceptions of conservative Protestantism may be, we are always struck with the license the supposedly warm and fuzzy evangelicals take when describing fundamentalism.

A reminder of this license came in Mike Hamilton's review of Joel Carpenter's new book, *Revive Us Again* (Oxford, 1997) for the *Evangelical Studies Bulletin* (Winter 1997). Here is how Hamilton describes the leading fundamentalists: "Billy Sunday and his *fist-shaking diatribes*, William Jennings Bryan and the *crusade* against evolution, J. Gresham Machen and the *endless squabbling* among northern Presbyterians, William Bell Riley and his *guerilla warfare* against the Northern Baptist Convention, Gerald Winrod and his *paranoid* anti-communist campaign, and John R. Rice and his *relentless* preaching against equality for women. And we will never forget that J. Frank Norris *actually gunned down a man* in his study, though

this was not, apparently, the *nastiest* thing he ever did" (italics ours). Makes you wonder what it would sound like for evangelicals to take off the gloves.

PART OF HAMILTON'S POINT IS to show that Carpenter brings out a different side of fundamentalism, one less cantankerous and more friendly. Accordingly, fundamentalism was not really about fighting but about reaching lost souls for Christ. This is a debatable point and historians of American Protestantism will continue to assess its merits. Also questionable is the idea that preaching and evangelism can be pursued without a little fighting. Jesus said some remarkable things and one of them is the line about his disciples being unworthy unless they hated their parents (Luke 14:26).

But what struck us as odd was the disparity between the image of nice evangelicals and Hamilton's vilification of fundamentalist leaders. Part of the explanation may be an effort to distance himself from fundamentalism by portraying its leaders as exhibiting all those indecent traits that required the neo-evangelical (i.e. loving) version of conservative Protestantism. Still, the fundamentalists we've read were more cautious in describing individual liberals than Hamilton is in portraying actual fundamentalists. In fact, he almost sounds fundamentalistic in his depiction of fundamentalists. But that could be because evangelicals don't fight, or at least, don't fight for the wrong reasons. So the lesson is that nastiness against liberalism is bad, but nastiness directed against fundamentalists is only fitting. After all, as the bumper sticker has it, "mean people suck."

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Second Hand

Smoke

The following is from the novel, The Enclaves *by Felix Bastian (1965). The plot surrounds a Dr. Attila Harsányi, a Hungarian immigrant who teaches history at a Catholic women's college in New Jersey.*

He was on his way to pick up his mail in the administration building, but since he had no more classes that morning he was in no great hurry. Also, he had an obscure desire to prolong his mood, to avoid anything that might put an end to it. A second breakfast in the coffee shop seemed safe from that point of view. He entered the small, densely packed building. It was one of the few places on campus where St. Ludmilla's girls could legally smoke (a recent concession) and the atmosphere was thick with cigarette fumes. In conjunction with the aroma of coffee and doughnuts this just about eliminated the vernal incense that had been intoxicating Attila all morning, but the change was far from unpleasant. The room had the air of all places where people meet for informal conversation around the symbols of coffee and tobacco, those precious twin gifts of Islam to a nervous West. The tobacco was filtered, the coffee unspeakable, and the conversation best heard as a murmur from afar. Yet Attila felt once more the sense of expansive well-being that went back straight to his early childhood and the *kávéház* around the corner from his parents' home in Szeged where his father spent a good part of the day, supposedly to negotiate with clients of the family law firm and actually to play endless games of cards with other escapees from the boredom of gainful work. After all, Attila had once reflected, it requires a good deal of faith to think of Bishop O'Toole of Hackensack as standing in one long line with the apostles, much more than Attila himself could muster and certainly more than was necessary to think of the coffee shop as standing in the apostolic succession of the great sanctuaries of sociability of Baghdad, Constantinople, Vienna, and Budapest. Whenever Attila entered the coffee shop, his manner became slightly more continental, his accent more Hungarian, and his wit just a little more cutting.

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