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**Is Fear of Punishment an Inadequate Means of  
Nurturing Obedience to  
Morals, Rules, and Christian Life?**

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**Introduction**

The assigned topic introduces a negative thesis. The topic already states a point of view, assuming that fear of punishment is not an adequate means for nurturing obedience to morals, rules and the Christian Life. If fear of punishment proves inadequate, what does prove adequate as a means for nurturing obedience to the Christian life in particular and to morals and rules in the various contexts of religions, cultures and societies? The following essay hypothesizes

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that Pastoral Theology centers attention on the privileges, tasks and duties of Christian clergy in a variety of cultural contexts.

At least 33,000 different kinds of Christian churches in the world today makes one essay on them all impossible, so I have not even tried to do that. There is no one pastoral theology because each type of Christian faith must develop a pastoral theology adapted to the culture in which each version exists. The essay therefore deals with several pedagogies for Pastoral Theology with which I am familiar because of my travels and work on four continents in about seven nations and my years of teaching in an intentionally interdenominational, Afro centric context. Honorably retired, my current adjunct responsibilities of teaching the major religious faiths in the world and Christianity in our contemporary age to students whose folks and some of them have come from all over the world. Including nations I have not yet visited and they also inform my essay. I live and work in the New York City metropolitan area and people who live within twenty miles of the City practice every major religion on the face of planet Earth while seventy percent have no religion at all but are avowed and practicing scientific humanists of various kinds. So, Charles Darwin's belief that the most adaptable species are the most loving and morally sensible as the moral determinant in most Western nations. As a citizen of the United States, I live in the chaotic context of six well endowed belief systems at odds with each other, which creates a constantly chaotic and conflicting religious, cultural and social context. Now you know something about what I bring to this assignment.

Before retiring in 2006, I served as an interim ministry specialist and lecturer after ten years (1980-88) as a professor of homiletics and liturgics and theological reflector in Field Education. To address our theme, as a Pastor I had only blessings, positive gifts and values and no curses of which people had to be afraid. So I could not have threatened fear of punishment in the course of pastoral work beyond the usual fears of the sorts of punishments meted out by the police, civil, and criminal agencies of my government. As a Christian Pastor-Theologian, in fact, my task was to bless many of those cursed by the powers that be. Now you know something else about what I bring to this assignment.

As a Professor I had the blessing and the fear of low grades to motivate students to do the work they contracted with my school to do. In other words, the threat of a grade of D or F struck fear into the hearts of some of the laggards, but not all. Several students every semester would want, by might and main, to remain ignorant of what the school had to teach them. Nevertheless, in Pastoral Theology in our world context of at least 33,000 different varieties of Christianity, with the vast and increasing majority of us coming from the world's South, the voices of Christians previously shut out of the authoritative conversation dominated by the Christians in European and North American nations must be taken seriously. Now you know that this essay will be shaped by the coming world Christianity, not only the minority views of the world's northern nations.

As a churchman, I serve on the Boards of the New Jersey State Council of Churches and the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association from my Synod. I belong to the American Academy of Religion, the American Association of The Scientific Study of Religion, The American Academy of Homiletics, the North American Academy of Liturgy and the Society for Biblical Literature. Now you know the contexts in which I pause to study and reflect on what in the Reformed Tradition is Theology, all of which usually is pastoral in nature. That is because we make no distinction between theory and practice, so there is no such thing with us as theoretical theology. I hope that helps you know where I live and work and exist, too.

I hope you enjoy and learn from my essay. I also hope you enter into a critical conversation with my work so that you may fill your corner of the world with increasingly adequate ways of touching the hearts of people with the Gospel of God which surpasses all our limited understandings.

#### **A. Fear, Deception and Hate**

Fear, deception and hate: Major themes of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures since the combination led to violence. Mohammed's concerns about the deadly trio in the Quran, the holy book of Islam, a form of what we call Pastoral Theology, arose in response to the Byzantine Christian Empire. We should always remember that Islam developed, in part, as a moral protest against the fear mongering, deception and hateful tactics of the Byzantine

Empire. When, throughout the history of our last two millennia, institutions concerned with the Christian life, morals and rules have nurtured obedience using tactics of fear, deception and hate, the divine warrant of Jesus was abandoned. The rainbow, according to Jewish theology, should remind us, as well as the Lord God, to shun violence and take good, loving care of each other and every creature on planet Earth (Genesis 6-9, especially 6.11, 9.12-17, NRSV). The rainbow aims arrows up, toward where ancients believed God lived. The Lord God would never again respond to our violence with greater violence, which should teach us not to respond to violence with greater violence, just as El Shaddai tried to tell violence-prone Cain (Gen 4.6-7). The desire of theologians to counter the dogmatic-political axis of controlling pastoral theologies led to the scientific historical-critical school of Bible interpretation. This stage lasted well into the 20th century, always insisting on establishing accurate Bible readings and better pastoral theologies but still in the context of Western cultures. The Civil Rights and Empires' dissolutions between 1946 and the present day assaulted the closed circle of meaning the historical-critical schools had developed. Nowadays groups of people previously excluded by this closed circle of meaning have scraped and fought their way in, exploding the closed circle of academic domination. Now multiple points of entry into the twin domains of Bible interpretation and pastoral theology exist and the task has become more complicated, challenging and fruitful than ever before.

People fear many things, including fear, deception and hatred. The books of the Bible discuss most everything we fear except the new terrors and tactics of this terrible trio in recent years. Most Biblical theologians agree with 1 John 4.18 that love eliminates fear: “There is no fear in love because perfect love casts out fear since fear has to do with punishment so whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.” The process of learning what to fear and what to love begins within our mothers’ wombs. Once born, experiences teach us what to fear and what to love. We learn essential lessons about sameness and difference; we learn that we cannot relate to our fathers’ chests the same way we relate to our mothers’. We first learn what to love and fear from our parents and family members. When fear, deception and hatred are all we learn from them, what hope is there for us ever to overcome our resulting xenophobia? How can we

possibly experience transformation from fear of strangers to xenophilia, love of strangers? The theme appears throughout all the books of the Bible. We study the literary forms of the Bible to comprehend the layers of cultural meaning therein. Just who wrote and/or edited the material? Social readings try to understand the power relations among the people who developed the text and the environment in which they lived.

Martin Luther King Jr. kept a copy with him throughout the Civil Rights crusade of Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Thurman wrote that the powerful used fear, deception and hatred, which he called hounds of hell, to keep poor, dispossessed people with our backs to the wall under their control. The USA and other powerful nations followed in the train of a very long line of powers that used this deadly triad of tactics to make people do what they wanted against their will. Very often, the various voices of the Bible tell us, the strategy backfired. A culture divided from within by warring tribes and factions quickly unites to ward off attempts by outsiders to intimidate, deceive and conquer them in a hostile takeover bid. Once conquered by external forces, they subvert the resulting rule by devising tactics even more fearful, deceptive and hostile and the cycle of violence multiplies exponentially until hardly anyone remains. So the African American pastoral theologies evolved through various stages only one of which was represented by King and Thurman.

What is one sure way to make a religion, culture, or society thrive? Wage a war against it. Make it illegal, immoral, a sign of stupidity, but then watch it grow. Such tactics create the context that nurtures morale and solidarity. The stories of such conflicts abound in the Bible. The Protestant tradition of translating the Bible into the languages of the people enabled various populations to read the Bible and decide what to do about what they learned from reading. At its best, Christianity incorporates some of the traits of the religion, culture and society of the people while enabling the people receiving the religions of the Bible to develop, govern and sustain their particular critical conversation within their reality and in relation to the forms of Christianity developed in and by peoples of other contexts. More about this issue later.

Benjamin Kidd was the Social Darwinian who argued for the innate superiority of the Anglo Saxon race. He accepted Charles Darwin's definition of what made a species fit to survive: Love and moral sensitivity. Unfortunately he also thought males superior to females and it took an enlightened social Darwinian, Benjamin Kidd, to reverse his interpretation of masculine superiority. This moral truth informed the religious development of John Bascom, an American Social Darwinian. Kidd argued that those qualities came naturally to Anglo Saxons, who could then use religion the same way Aristotle advised Alexander the Great to use local religions: To make people docile and meet their spiritual needs so they would meet Alexander's territorial ambitions. Then Kidd, enriched by his first book, went to Zimbabwe when his people called it Rhodesia, saw what Cecil Rhodes and his men were doing and realized that Anglo Saxons were quite a bit less loving and less morally sensitive than he had given them credit for. So, he wrote *The Science of Power*, in which he repented of his evil views and stated that only the most emotional, religious women were loving and morally sensitive enough to lead our species to survive. Clayton Powell, I discovered in my first book, argued that African people were much more as Darwin described, more loving, emotional and morally sensitive and therefore able to lead authentic progress with the rest of the human race.

The domineering triad forms an ancient way of making masses obey elites. Both of the Islamic professors Averroes (Abu 'I-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushdi, Latin Roschdi) in Cordoba, Spain, a Polymathematician and Abu-Hamid Al Ghazali in Naples, Italy, studied copies of the Greek Philosophers from Coptic Christians. They adopted this scheme from Aristotle's revision of Plato's notion of philosophical government powers, the Philosopher King, which used religions to manipulate the masses. Thomas Aquinas studied under Al Ghazali at Naples and built this notion into his Christian Aristotelian philosophical and theological framework. The teacher eventually grew weary of academic rigors, became very critical of the political misuse of the sacred and returned to Baghdad. There he wrote three books very critical of the position he had long taken, preferring religion to academe, becoming a Sufi Muslim. With the political use of Augustine's Neoplatonic double predestination dogma, the Schoolmen and their Reformation successors turned the

dogs of the Middle Ages loose. Then Aquinas tired and received a greater epiphany than he could express and also abandoned academic theological work for contemplation and prayer. The epoch of the subsequent European world wide hegemony persists today. Mohandas K. Ghandi, Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr manifested perfection in love as the antidote to and prophylactic against manipulation of the religious emotions of masses by power brokers nonviolently while Marx and Mao rebelled violently. Again, each figure I just named related favorably to his particular religious, cultural and social realities as Pastoral Theologians.

The scaring, deceiving and hating of people by God, according to the Bible, are real parts of human experience. The divine use of this triad has been one of the roots of our problem, on the one hand, as well as the root for our love on the other hand. The Lord God scared and deceived Jeremiah but promised to put a new heart of love in Israel and Judah. Fear, deception and hate create the dread of others that makes some nations beat others into submission with the usual result of obedience through clenched teeth, but not love. Power and control by forces of greed, lust and envy seldom care much about love. That tends to concern advocates of religions. As readers undoubtedly know, Akkadian (Canaanite) origins of many of the world's great religious faiths informed religious studies for several decades now. Do we all realize, surely, that Aryans from Persia in the Indus River Valley developed classic Hinduism, which spawned Jainism and Buddhism? Other Persian Aryans spawned Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. I hope we all have learned that the capacity for loving and becoming morally sensitive to varieties of culture enables Christianity to become the world's first truly world religion and some of the historic reasons why. I also hope Christians will continue to learn how to participate in conversations and cooperative efforts with people of other religions without insisting on the superiority of one religion over the other(s).

Some varieties of Christian faith, as you probably know, use the deadly triad extensively to motivate ethical behavior. Christian and Islamic slave traders read the scriptures to sanctify their work. Both the slavers and the slaves who disobeyed their owners' laws and learned how to read and somehow obtained copies of the Bible legitimized their work, both as oppressors and as strugglers for



liberation using the same texts. Notably, Exodus 3.7-8. Just as various cultural contexts determined the various interpretations of the Bible by Pastoral Theologians in the course of nurturing obedience to the Christian life, rules and morals, so also we are aided in this work when we realize that the Bible also contains many different and conflicting theologies and moral systems because the many books in the Bible also occurred in particular, culturally conditioned communities. No one needs to apologize for reading the Bible from the standpoint of her or his religious, cultural and social context.

Officials of churches everywhere read the Bible to develop moral dogmas as expressions of the various churches' cultures. For example, Rudolf Bultmann was inescapably Lutheran while Karl Barth was just as inescapably Reformed. Liturgists and preachers in every culture in which Christianity exists read the Bible to fulfill the task of enabling, equipping and empowering people to fulfill their religious mission in their particular cultures. People in every culture and in every department of religion and theology read the Bible as part of devotional spirituality, all over the world. When a non-Christian religion accepts the scriptures of all religions, they meditate on Hebrew and Christian texts, too. Authors, musicians, composers, artists, dramatists and makers of motion pictures read the Bible as creative contributors to their various cultures. Governments in many nations read the Bible appertaining to politics and economics within their cultures. Biblical scholars in predominantly secular humanist universities must read the Bible as scientifically as their colleagues in the culture of academic, scientific, trial-and-error inquiry. This is only a partial list of culturally varied interpretations of the Bible. The original closed circle of meaning for interpreting the Bible was broken open by Historical Critical methods. They eventually formed a closed circle of meaning which the many post World War II liberation movements and revolutions broke open from both within and outside of the academic circle of meanings.

Pastoral theologians all over the Christian parts of the world have the task of nurturing obedience to the Christian life, rules and morals in their church cultures, indigenous contexts and governmental realities. Negotiating with domineering Christian powers which spread during the days Parry wrote about demanded that conquered



people study and interpret the same texts but, as Jenkins has shown, they read it for their very different aims. Sometimes the reading enabled clandestine solidarity and revolutionary war, as in Haiti. Sometimes indigenous reading led to a critical conversation and some form of accommodation based on the feeling that “we” could do a better job of Christian living and obeying rules and morals than the domineering power in the hope that when they saw this achievement they would go home and then when they did not, resort to revolution, as in Kenya. When domineering powers marginalized populations or segments of populations and/or charismatic leaders, the marginalized formed religious movements outside the existing churches, one of the reasons we now have more than 33,000 different forms of Christianity, as among exploding Pentecostals in Brazil. Sometimes an indigenous Christianity that always has been self-governing, self-propagating and self-sustaining sends out a large number of missionaries to other nations of the South with the appeal that they never have been part of any of the old domineering powers, as in Korea. These phenomena alone demonstrate the realities of Pastoral Theology and why fear, deception and hate fail to motivate the obedience sought by the originating authority, whether ecclesiastical, pastoral, artistic, academic or personal/pietistic. Speaking as a Pastoral Theologian, where the Holy Spirit cannot destroy a limiting power, she will seek and find a receptive people or person who will receive another distinctive, powerful gift to use for the common good.

What happens when parents use religion to scare, deceive and hate their children? No other experience has driven people into the most conservative, natural, organic sects of secular rebellion and or to develop forms of faith as the use of these tactics by their parents. It also produces, beyond adolescent rebellion, a mirror image of what they experienced as children and they become just as hostile, manipulative and fear-mongering as were their parents. Orphaned or abandoned children develop into tyrannical, self-protecting forces. From centuries ago, our ancestors developed institutions to help orphans. First, such care developed among family members, then, when they were not available, among the priestly classes. To care for orphaned children in the hope of assuaging their anxieties, fears and feelings of abandonment so they could fulfill their duties perfectly and not have come from that scared child place within from which so

many evil actions have come from so many to hurt so many more. One of the sayings making the rounds among us Americans today is, “Hurt people, hurt people.” You knew this already because you probably read a basic definition of religion in James 1.27: *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: To care for widows and orphans in their distress and keep oneself free of worldly pollution.* Perhaps we fear the possibility of people hurt by abandonment hurting us?

Chinuwa Achebe, Franz Kafka, Albert Camus and a host of writers from the many nations of the world’s South have written so effectively of what people experienced in the midst of the moral chaos created by hate, deception and fear. All of the religious faiths, whether theistic or atheistic, feared moral chaos and inveighed for moral order. Perhaps the moral chaos that wore the face of religious faith was most dreaded and decadent. The Nazis and Shinto who marched off to wage as much war and inflict as much pain regardless of moral order, the Allied carpet bombing of non–military cities and dropping of the atomic bombs exemplified in most extreme forms the moral chaos we all feared. Waging terror campaigns on entire populations occurred in this nation after the War Between the States. Preachers started the lynching movement and hosts of Jews, Italians, Irish, Africans, Native Americans and others became the strange fruit hanging from trees. Moral chaos drove the British to develop the Westminster Standards, just as it drove Jewish, Christian and Islamic prophets in Western Asia and beyond and Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Confucian and Taoists in East Asia and beyond to have rectified moral chaos by various means, as they utilized a combination of shaming and honoring to effect moral order. Jesus was said to have taught that forgiveness was the key to solving the problem of moral chaos in the Parable of the Prodigal Son and Elder Brother in Luke 15. Many scholars agreed that Jesus consistently ordered superiors to forgive the sins of inferiors while ordering the inferiors to demand justice. Did you already know that?

Beyond fear of moral chaos lies the fear of anarchy, the complete and total break down of religious, cultural and social virtues. Anarchists wage revolutionary wars whenever and wherever the forms and order of their religious faiths, cultural institutions and social morays became unjust toward large chunks of the population.

Augustine taught that Christians must disobey and protest immoral, unjust laws, joining a long line of prophetic protesters from way back in the days of the first civilizations that allowed rulers to stray into moral chaos. Only anarchy could have cleared the decks for building a more just, fair and moral order of religion, culture and society. This was what we learned most massively in the 20<sup>th</sup> century if we learned it before we read this synoptic account of it. Max Scheler, early on in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, predicted a reversal of drives, a total revolution of religious, cultural and social values. Anarchy would have existed during the process of erasing the old, modern forms of these sections of reality and the emergence of the new forms. Nowadays we called this movement postmodernism, or deconstructionism. Did you know this already? Some of you may have discovered Max Scheler for the first time in my wee tome about Clayton Powell.

The fear, deception and hate of God were the *sine qua non* of all theistic religious faiths, morals and religious ways of life, including the Christian life. The fear of the Lord God, the Supreme Being, Great Spirit, super ceded all other fears. God out deceived the deceivers. God out hated the haters. Wisdom, true awareness of the truth, could only have come from the Most High God. Life long study of and prayer to the Lord in utter and complete devotion cures and prevents us from using fear, deception and hatred to nurture our personal obedience to the essential law of Christian living, love. We adapted it to have applied to contexts of manipulative fear, punishment, inadequacy, betrayal, abandonment, moral and/or anarchic chaos. No one exemplified the advocacy of elites using divine terror to govern the masses more than Benjamin Kidd and no one better exemplified a complete reversal of Social Darwinian oppressive theory than he, as stated above. Why? Because the evil we do in the name of good ought to scare us to death. The problem: To look the enemy in the eye and discover ourselves looking back should scare us, but apparently does not, any more than fearing the threat of punishment seems to scare us into obedience.

Pastoral theologians ignore the above questions and problems at our peril. As stated in the above, every religion on the face of planet Earth is practiced within 20 miles of New York City. Hopefully, every practitioner of Pastoral Theology functions in at least a conversational harmony with her or his culture to develop

relationships of nurturing love and moral sensitivity to motivate the development of indigenous morals, rules and forms of Christ-like living. Hopefully, we will search for new forms of Christian life, new rules and new ways of behaving morally as well as new ways to nurture obedience without resorting to threats of violent punishment. In short, new ways of touching the hearts of people with love to establish a close bond and covenanted relationship. Latina/o people constantly must develop new pastoral theologies to nurture changing notions of obedience based on experiences of internal and external unsettlement, travel and resettlement. Native American and Palestinian Christians always identify with the Canaanites and Philistines and, instead of reckoning time in front of an eschatological hope, think of the eschaton as a present unifying and harmonizing of all creatures and cosmos together. So many different nations and cultures exist on the world's largest continent, Asia, as to render useless any so-called Asian pastoral theology. Women similarly cannot be thought of in an artificial stereotyping of any one so-called Feminist or Womanist pastoral theology simply because of the enormous variety of cultural locations. Homosexuals have read the Bible and developed pastoral theologies but always either in closeted quarters of conservative churches or in congregations of their creation just trying to survive and feel at home with their Lord and Savior. Once the Bible comes to a literate people and they find themselves and identify with some of the acculturated, contextual stories of the Bible, no amount of fear, punishment or hatred can ever interfere for very long with the love of God which surpasses all understanding and from which not even angels and devils cannot divide us.

### **B. Rewards, Punishments, Nurture, Obedience and Suggestions**

Punishment appears as an important theme in all religions, cultures and societies. Everyone who sinned, committed *karmic* acts as the Persian-derived Hindus would have said, was punished, either in this life or the next incarnation. If you fulfilled your *dharma* perfectly, amassing little or no *karma*, you would return in a higher caste with higher and better responsibilities until at last you were born a *Brahman*, or Priest. In the case of the Persian-derived religions of West Asia and the Animist religions of Africa and the so-called Americas, good people lived after death in a wonderful heavenly garden of delights. The alternative was unspeakable misery. The

Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians and Muslims all designed rewards to fit good thoughts, good words and good deeds and punishments to fit the crimes. They placed one's eternal life within the power of personal decision making and then developed various judicial systems to mete out the punishments to fit the crimes and socio-economic systems to mete out the rewards to fit the good deeds. No question this was the case and remains so into our present day.

The non-religious governments like the United States, Israel, Russia and more, still have such penal systems. Recovering a sense of goodness and virtue so that upon release from prison one would carry out one's duties so wonderfully well as to live down the *karma* of past crimes was the goal. That was why these religions all called it repentance, turning around, or *metanoia*, transformation from doing evil to do good.

Governments have the authority to punish us when we commit crimes and to reward us when we fulfill our responsibilities obediently. The scriptures of all major religions assign ultimate judicial practice to a Supreme Being or council of divine beings while assigning the everyday practice of judging and either rewarding or punishing miscreants to governments. In our Reformed Christian tradition we ceded generous powers in this regard to the Magistrate, a quaint word for government. So, they have both religious and secular authority to decide with which punishments various criminal actors must receive. Nonetheless, all religions hold that the Supreme Being has mercy. The proper relationship, or ratio between punishment, forgiveness and repentance becomes the focal point for judicial ethics.

How do the various governments with this authority and power decide when the punished person has been punished enough? *The Shawshank Redemption*, a recent novel and motion picture, detailed the story of a penal system caught up in a pattern of institutionalization. Residents who committed minor offences were kept in prison long after their terms were served until they had become so accustomed to the prison culture that, upon release, they committed suicide. An Accountant was imprisoned because they thought he had killed his wife. He endeared himself to fellow inmates with his IRS expertise and to the Warden. He discovered that the Warden committed major crimes, including murder and embezzlement. After stealing enough of the Warden's money and

getting his banks' accounts' numbers, he carried off a brilliant escape plan and eloped to Mexico. He left behind enough data to ensure that the Warden's crimes would become public knowledge. The Warden, the institutionalizer of others, himself institutionalized by the system created by his hypocrisy, committed suicide. The narrator of this story develops the theme of hope. From hope as a dangerous thing at the start of the book to the final words, after both principals are free from the prison, I hope, the dynamics of hope as a struggle to overcome all the powers against freedom and justice compels asking the question how does pastoral theology occur without clergy, among literate captives equipped only with a Bible?

Punishment always inflicts a pain, however silently, however unconsciously, on the punisher of others. Military contractors living in suburban California and Nevada who push buttons to loose armed robots in West Asia that kill people, some of them innocent civilians, experience traumatic guilt and shame, become depressed and commit suicide in the same numbers as pilots, infantrywomen and men in the actual nation. The New York Times just published the story (March 2009) of Israeli reservists being told to shoot any and all Gazans without regard for the consequences. Like the torture policies of both sides in the Second World War, such commands dehumanize all concerned and reveal a remarkable lack of moral sensitivity and love beyond all too obvious closed circles of meaning.

Modern studies of the psychological impact of torture on administrators of torture display this ugly fact. The terrors of domestic abuse among the progenitors of lynching did not, however, come close to the terrors of living through the lynching epoch in US history, visited upon Jews, Blacks, Italians, Irish, Asians and Native Americans. Torture of terror suspects by agencies of the US government certainly did not produce any of the results they desired. CIA statistics showed that almost 90% of what victims of torture disclosed was bogus. Punishment cannot motivate oppressed, embattled people to tell the truth about subversive activity simply because the freedom to choose and practice justice outweighs any benefits of conforming through clenched teeth to an order imposed by others. Instead, the domestic abuse, collegial violence, depression and suicide rates among the administrators of torture increase. No question.

What kind of punishment of crimes could prove adequate? The Quakers in what became the United States established The Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia. Therein, the combination of religious practices and daily toil with education and training proved the kind of punishment that enabled convicted criminals to receive forgiveness, repent and begin doing good works instead of evil works. From the beginning of penal practice in the US, then, both Puritans and Quakers agreed with each other and with Deists of their day about this important problem. The United Kingdom sent more than half their fellow citizens to the colonies to punish them for committing crimes. My ancestors were Northern Irish horse thieves, for example. In the Pennsylvania wilderness, they owned land and became New School Presbyterians and fought to abolish slavery from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward.

How does a father pity his children by rewarding them when they do good deeds and punishing them when they misbehave? The scriptures posed this question of course because punishing children always concerned us after we became urbanized. Every mother wants her children to do more good deeds than evil deeds and must decide how to make sure of the desired results. Repeated whippings were the punishments of choice among the two streams of religion emanating from ancient Persia, whether eastward in India or westward toward the Mediterranean Sea. Such was not the case with the original nations of the Americas. Nurture was their solution to the problem. As the domestic codes of the Stoics and the Jews and Christians of the Common Era attest, the same solution appeared to them, too.

The nurture of disobedient children became more important than whipping them and there is no reason why corporal punishment cannot be replaced when societies inculcate the techniques and practices of nurture among people who have children or adopt them. Parents establish immorality and amorality in many cases today and/or tolerate such evil deeds on the part of their children because they do not believe in the power of nurture as effective punishment. The culture of violence in the US perpetuates the cycle of violence as hurt generation after hurt generation hurts future generations.

Violence has become the solution to every evil person's bad behavior on one Television series after another. No question our belief in violence as the answer to problems and conflicts has made us



the most violent nation on the face of planet Earth. The US even punished people who have not done anything evil, which is why we are finally closing Guantanamo Bay, and many of us want to close down the School of the Americas and our so-called secret CIA prisons around the world and military prisons like Abu Graib. Who will punish the nation that so egregiously punishes others? Alluding to a children's story, who will attach the bell to this cat so the mice may be warned?

Various colleges and seminaries in the US and in other nations have continued the Walnut Street Jail tradition in today's penal justice system. The vocational training, liberal arts education courses and religion and theology courses for residents who have nothing but time on their hands has produced parolees and freed women and men with some of the lowest recidivism rates in history. No question this kind of nurture and empowerment before people get shuffled off into a juvenile criminal justice system is more desirable than waiting until they have been institutionalized into hardened criminals. Who will put the bell on that cat?

I taught a night class for store front preachers in Atlanta back in the 1980s. One night I chose a text in which Jesus commanded people to visit prisoners. One of the students objected. He would never stoop to do such a thing. Such people had brought shame on their families and society. Another student stated that he visited every penal institution in Atlanta every week: The City Jail, the Fulton County Jail, the Georgia State Prison and the Federal Prison. Why would you do such a thing the righteous brother asked him. "Because when I was in prison someone visited me." I recognized him. I moderated a volunteer chaplaincy program in NYC houses of detention when I ministered in East Harlem. The Brooklyn House of Detention was my main beat. There, I connected detainees with the religious communities to which they originally belonged. In his case, an African Methodist Episcopal Church in Brooklyn was the community I contacted on his behalf. His Pastor visited him and got him released on the Pastor's recognizance. That was in 1973. There he was in Atlanta in 1983, an AME Local Pastor.

We have not yet been able to restore Bible study in an Immigration and Naturalization House of Detention in Elizabeth, New Jersey, however much we have jumped up and down about the

problem. The students of the Bible learned how God wanted Israel to treat strangers and demanded that the US treat them that way. The folks who ran this I & N House of Detention were so upset that they eliminated the Bible Study Groups; too controversial, too subversive. How dare the residents demand that they be treated the way their captors would want to be treated? No question the problem of punishing a criminal nation raises a very ugly head. A thirteen year old girl was raped and went to the police to report the crime in Somalia. The police killed her on the spot for being raped. In another rural bastion of conservatism a woman caught committing adultery was buried up to her neck and decapitated while the man who committed the sinful act was fined. How shall we answer the most massive raping and killing of girls and women in human history going on right now in the Congo by teenaged rebel militias?

A Liberian Pastor, his wife, daughter, his and his wife's parents were captured by rebels. They killed both sets of parents and made him sing evangelical songs while they raped his wife and daughter in front of him. What sort of punishment do they deserve? What sort of nurture could ever enable these hard bitten rebels to receive forgiveness, repent of such deeds? What are the real, practical steps Liberians must take to create a new religious, cultural and social reality part of which will consist of men like these? I have no answers, only questions. Kill them and a thousand more just like them will spring up to follow their examples. Evil punishes us for the good we do, and the good we do punishes evil far more than we think or imagine.

The real problem of hurt and broken persons I encountered again and again throughout my years as a pastor and as a professor in a seminary and now in a liberal arts college still troubles me. More than one young man abandoned by father or mother or both found ways to hurt, covertly or overtly, the people around him. More than one young woman abandoned by mother and/or father also found ways to hurt and punish them by trying to manipulate, control and hurt the people around them. Most of the inmates occupying cells in this nation with the largest prison population on the planet were unwanted or abandoned children, and many were both. Therapists as well as chaplains agonize over what sort of nurture can touch the hardest,

most self-protecting, hurt heart of the most sociopathic types of hurt people who hurt people?

The animist father of a young Gold Coast Christian hired an Animist Priest to place a blood curse on him. Blood seeped from every pore of his body. He went to a Western trained physician who prescribed medicine to heal Hemophilia, but since he was not a hemophiliac, the medicine did not heal him. Then he went to the Pastor who prescribed Psalm singing and somewhere between the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalms of Israel, the bleeding stopped. Governments and churches all over AIDS infested African nations are trying to find a way to stop the Animist Priests who tell AIDS stricken men that if they have sexual intercourse with a baby that the innocent baby girl will heal them.

The problem of developing rewards, punishments and nurture methods adequate to motivate obedience has been with the human race ever since we developed urbanized cultures and had the time to ponder moral problems like this. The problem will not go away. Neither should the quest for better systems to nurture freely chosen obedience because unless we freely choose obedience no morality and no way of Christian life can exist.

Two motion pictures, one based on a novel and the other based on a dramatic play recently developed this problem for us all to examine. *Cider House Rules* depicted the coming of age of an adolescent orphan in a state supported orphanage. One summer he went to pick apples and lived with the migrant workers in what they called the Cider House for obvious reasons. They were illiterate while the orphan was literate. So, the migrant workers could not read the rules tacked to the wall of their house. As one character remarked, “The people who wrote those rules do not live here,” after the young man who could read had read the rules to them. So, they broke just about every rule on the list. They developed rewards and punishments and patterns of nurture that created their particular obedience, a parable of what happened in the wake of Western Imperialism.

*Doubt* was the other motion picture, based on a dramatic play. The Catholic Priest in the play preaches that doubt is one of the virtues of Christian faith. As a theologian of pastoral work I delighted in his sermon because after all Augustine of Hippo wrote in his *Confessions* that his doubts led him to Jesus. Two Nuns conspired,

one quite strictly and confidently asserting that the Priest in question had committed unspeakably immoral acts and the other reluctantly being manipulated into agreeing with her older Sister. The older Sister finally created such a climate of suspicion that the Priest was moved to another, larger assignment. Sitting together on a bench in the cold, winter snow, the younger Nun asked her older Sister if she ever had any doubts. Breaking down and crying, she confessed that indeed she did have agonizing doubts. What if that conversation had happened between the older Nun and the younger Priest? Openly sharing our doubts about the systems of nurture that provide rewards and punishments to nurture obedience may be the starting point for new breakthroughs, eh? To my way of thinking, no doubt about it.

### **C. Eight Nurturing Practices**

There are eight nurturing practices I can identify from reading the textbooks I use in the teaching of my undergraduate liberal arts students. These practices may lead us to develop new nurturing patterns of rewards and punishments that enable us to form heart to heart, close relationships with all the burgeoning population on the planet. That is the core issue at stake here, I believe.

Five sixths of the world's people are very poor economically. So I suggest:

#### **1. Responding to Economic Circumstances**

Religion can develop effective ways of nurturing obedience in the future in some of the same ways we did in the past, by responding effectively to the economic circumstances of poor people. A woman made false teeth for Dentists but did not do well at it because her true heart's desire was to rescue and rehabilitate wild animals so they could survive in the wild. Until a Board raised enough money for her to do this work, however, she could not succeed and become a good steward of the birds and animals harmed by development. The problem is how to reach out to the people who suffer silently instead of reaching out for this kind of help.

#### **2. Church Does These Things**

The church provided functional ways of becoming healthier, better educated and better off and still can do these things for and with people. In many poor countries the only available medical care, education and food resources come from religious institutions. The

demand for food among poor people demanded that all the religions cooperate. Alone, in our separate denominations, we could not feed people. Neither could we heal people in our separate places. Soon, we will not be able to educate people in our separated fellowships. The problem in many post-missionary situations is just how to get rivals to get together and develop these new forms of nurture?

### **3. Family Intimacy Real Need**

Especially in nations where the people move in large numbers from close knit rural villages to large metropolitan areas the church must provide a new, intimate family situation to compensate for the closeness urban émigrés miss but really need. I cannot count the number of such lonely people I met when I served urban churches and how emotionally and positively they responded to real relationship capacities that reminded them of the small places from which they came. Who will reach out to the many millions of lonely poor flocking to cities around the world with the kind of education and training that will enable them to help others?

### **4. Churches Provide Refuge**

Churches in urban areas must provide a refuge, a hiding place where people can recover and heal from suffering the slings and arrows of urban violence. A large Communion service with a full house attending was interrupted by a woman dressed in black. She came forward to the Table crying and wailing about her sin, guilt and shame. I asked her to kneel and asked the officers to gather around to anoint her with oil and lay hands on her to heal her while a colleague went to fetch the Emergency Squad from the local Hospital. The entire healing community gathered around her and enabled her to freely choose the kind of obedience that forgives, heals and restores us to a new chance at life. What about the men and women who feel too ashamed and guilty and shy ever to risk the kind of action she took?

### **5. Churches Provide Way for Upward Mobility**

Through our schools and counseling, churches provide the ways and means by which poor people can achieve some sort of upward mobility, whether that upward direction pays a lot of money or not. I am talking about dignity, a sense of being worthy and experiencing religious, cultural and social rewards for a job well done. I helped

poor young people find the sort of education or training they needed to become what they dreamed of becoming. A very dysfunctional custodian I sent to take aptitude tests. They showed that he would be a fine Psychologist. With a wife and two children already, how could he do that, he asked. I sent him to a college with a work study program and now he is a very fine School Psychologist. How do we keep our clergy nurtured and effective so that they can do this kind of work as joyfully and freely as the angels in heaven?

#### **6. Worship Services Allow People to Come with Serious Needs**

Our worship services must manifest immediate blessings from God when people come with serious needs and problems. I have heard many stories from fellow clergy of allowing such events to happen in the midst of worship. Participants must feel free to express their dreams, visions, revelations from God and feelings about what they experience in life today. No matter whether the style of our services is High, Broad, or Pentecostal, we can do this.

#### **7. Churches Allow People to Feel Part of History**

The churches must provide the ways and means for people to feel part of a history changing purpose, a movement that will change religion and/or culture and/or society. The days of throwing off the yokes of oppression are not over, as so many commentators in the world of theology note on a daily basis. Young people everywhere seek to effect changes for the better in a worsening world situation. The church can provide this cutting edge of progress. We cannot do it alone, we must have other religious allies. We must learn effective public policy advocacy techniques. We can and must do this.

#### **8. Nurture Women to Higher Calling of Freedom**

The ways and means we have nurtured the obedience of women to the higher calling of freedom, justice and equality must continue. In fact, many places women still suffer under harmful and oppressive, sometimes violently destructive forms of religions, cultures and social developments. To take these challenges on will require miracles of faith, hope and love through a circle of nurture throughout the world of nations. We can and must do this now. This is a challenge than in my nation, which has shocking rates of domestic violence, date rape and a yet unequal set of pay scales for women and men.

**Conclusion**

The nurture of persons to obedience will produce women and men who experience God's call to ministry. How will we test their callings? How will we enable them to doubt their calling and prove its authenticity when our divinity schools and seminaries just coddle them along even as religious professions must confront and cope with greater, more complex challenges as the world changes?

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