

Our Pastoral Response in an Age of Permissiveness

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He watched nervously down the road wondering if they'd return, if the Lord would even protect them any more. He was afraid...for himself, for his boys, for his people. Then he heard an uproar and asked what it meant. When the messenger reached him, he asked, "What happened, my son?"

The corruption and violence that found its way into the temple and sacred practice of Israel was appalling. Increasingly despicable, Eli's boys, Hophni and Phineas, brought disrepute into fashion among the priesthood. Those who were supposed to be the keepers of souls became madmen, ravaging the sheep like wolves, sacrificial blood dripping from their fangs. They were rebellious, unlawful men, the spoiled offspring of permissiveness.

Eli watched it all happen right in front of his nearsighted eyes. He was worried sick over the fate of the ark which the boys had determined to take with them into battle. Now he heard the verdict. Israel had been pummeled. The ark was in foreign hands. His sons were among the casualties. The ark? His boys? This was more than Eli's blood pressure could take. He fell backward off his chair. Perhaps he fainted or suffered cardiac arrest. Regardless, he landed hard enough to break his neck. Excuse me for thinking it, but one has to say more than, "His boys sure were a pain in the neck." No! They were downright wicked, because he let them be wicked. So Eli died with the double curse of permissiveness: the loss of the morality of his people and worse, the loss of immortality for his sons. (1 Samuel 2:12-4:22)

Permissiveness is not new to our age. It has had its day in the sun, as Solomon might say. Yet every time it raises its hoary head, it marches like the plague of blood water from Moses' staff tainting the Nile, lady of all life in Egypt. Progressing from home to school to city to country, it infects a culture with moral and spiritual disease. It can leave an unfathomable wake of destruction in its path.

Perhaps the most telling point of this discussion is that permissiveness has multiplied itself around us to such an epidemic proportion that we find ourselves at a Pastor's conference in 1994 willing to listen and debate the issue of how this wrong has affected our dear America and what each of us can start to do to make it right. Maybe we're at the edge of our seats looking for how we, the modern spiritual leaders (those to whom God has entrusted the gifts of Word and Sacrament, 2 Timothy 2:1-2) might, will, should, or must respond to the increasing wave of a secular society and its sickening impact on our own families.

The assignment of this paper calls for not just an analysis of societal woes, but also for an appropriate pastoral response in this age of permissiveness. We are concerned for our own sheep, our families and our congregations. With this heart we function in a protection mode. We are also concerned for other sheep: our neighbors, acquaintances, friends and relatives. Here we function in a proclamation mode.

In both areas we will probe for solutions that can keep us safe within the "lion's den" without losing the effectiveness of our testimony (to our king, our enemies and our world—reference to Daniel 6).

Having defined the assignment, I'd like to say first off that there's enough of a challenge here to write a book, but I'll try to scratch the surface with some biblical suggestions to our national and perhaps global dilemma. We'll look initially at what permissiveness is by definition. Then we'll try to swallow the reality of permissiveness through a case history and observe its

effect on society. From there we'll examine the secular answer to the problem based on that world-view. Once we have evaluated what has caused the huge gap between world-views in our day and age, we'll be able to concentrate on the pastoral implications and seek biblical solutions. Too often the cultural influences, both positive and negative, are not deliberated upon, nor articulated. Pastoral ministry then operates in a vacuum..

Permissiveness: A Definition

What is permissiveness? Based on the root verb "permit" from the Latin, it is a willingness to give permission. A permissive parent is a tolerant parent. A permissive society is a tolerant society. While some tolerance is admirable (especially with children), the connotation, when used as it was in this assignment, is an age or culture that no longer sees sin as sin, nor restrains its youth from breaking God's moral law. It creates an air of acceptance for many gods and many moral codes, leading to massive idolatry and sinfulness. Even B.F. Skinner said, "Permissiveness is not a policy; it is the abandonment of policy. And its apparent advantages are illusory."

Many of you may desire specific biblical answers to those sins which come out of a permissive society. I have not pursued that undertaking because of its sizeable dimension. However, I have attached an appendix which lists some of those sins, citing biblical references. I tried to mention several case histories as well.

Permissiveness: A State of Affairs A Modern Case History

The legacy of a permissive home can hit you right between your spiritual solar plexus. Let me share with you a case history from personal experience. I offer this biographical sketch as a first concrete step en route to our examination of the cultural state of affairs which we daily encounter (try to counter) in our American society.

George's story caught me off guard, because I was preparing to use him in a ministry of counseling and advising others. After an evening training session, we took a brief walk from the campfire, toward our cots, and honestly, all I could think about was the comfort of my pillow. Somehow, on the way, I asked him a question that elicited a personal reflection on his own life. He looked and sounded like an old attic door unlatched and creaking its way open. Soon, as I began to listen to his life story, the floodgate was open. His parents had spoiled him as the baby of their two children. He described a life without bedtime routine or curfew, virtually no boundaries physically or morally, early exposure to adult activities, no real love or discipline. Like a ship blowing out into the ocean, he had entered his teens experimenting openly with cigs and drugs, beer and porn. Caught with a girl in bed at home, his mother said, "Now George, you know what your dad and I think about this. Make sure you get her some snacks on your way out." He wept. "They didn't care enough to stop me!" He slammed his fist into the dirt. "I've tried everything. Gay encounters, you name it." His more recent efforts at control had witnessed some success: a semi-stable family, loss of his excessive weight, returning to church. But then he dumped his dark secret. He had frequently beaten his wife...incessantly, uncontrollably. I'd visited her once in the hospital without knowing the real reason she was there.

"Chariots on fire!" I thought to myself. What a great family life! After an hour of listening, advising, sharing Scripture and praying, I poured myself into my sleeping bag. I couldn't close my eyes. I'd heard so much. I hurt.¹

Personal wreckage and incredible pain. That's the immediate legacy of a home and an upbringing of permissiveness. This pain is synonymous with "suffering," "anguish," "tribulation," "adversity," or "trouble."

Let's pause for a moment to consider this problem of pain. The proper good of a person is to surrender himself to his Creator, fulfilling intellectually, volitionally and emotionally, that relationship which is his by mere fact that he is a creature. When he does this, he is pleased and happy. Far from some kind of liability through authoritarian dominance, this kind of good began on a level above the creatures. The Son, as God himself, from all eternity rendered back to God as Father by his complete obedience the being which the Father by paternal love eternally generates in the Son. C.S. Lewis observes, "This is the pattern which man was made to imitate - which Paradisaical man did imitate - and wherever the will conferred by the Creator is thus perfectly offered back in delighted and delighting obedience by the creature, there, most undoubtedly, is Heaven." If we agree, then we can see how close to hell George's life had run. He was left from childhood on to face the tragic consequences of his own sinfulness. In a spiritual sense, he was abused by those whom he should have been able to trust. His parents thought they could teach love without law. As a result George was never able to know love, nor could he grasp the Son's desire to pay for his sins on the cross. Lewis continues, "In the world as we know it, the problem is how to recover this self-surrender. We are not merely imperfect creatures who must be improved. We are, as Newman said, rebels who must lay down our arms."ⁱⁱ

This begs the question of origin, both of rebellion and the desire to "have it our way." An attitude of and yearning for permissiveness can be traced back to the snake-like question, "Did God really say?" Man's momentary inclination for autonomy allowed a diabolical plot to hatch. It ended in severance from God. God was portrayed as the Law-giver who imposed only his own limits, removing all that is good, all pleasure, turning all into slaves. Satan supported the selfish infection of sin's desire to try everything. Adam and Eve and George will tell you (though I'm sure you've heard enough stories of your own), a person's life "ain't a pretty sight" once he or she has tasted all that evil has to offer. Permissiveness distorts and disowns the good. It captivates and masters the soul. It ruins the body and the mind along the way. It runs away from God and looks back only to curse him.

Even as I write this, I thank my Lord for a home where God's boundaries were taught and treasured as a means to see ourselves, to control our sin and to show our love to our Creator. To be sure, the Gospel was the dominant force in my life, but it was not segregated from God's will for my life. My parents, as perhaps also yours, knew the true meaning of Proverbs 22:6, "train a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will "not turn from it." To grow up in a place where the absolutes of God are normative is not a form of poverty, but a blessed safe house. Discipline and self-control are regularly taught as part of Christian training as illustrated by these Proverbs:

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools' despise wisdom and discipline. (*The Hebrew words rendered fool in Proverbs, and often elsewhere in the Old Testament, denote one who is morally deficient*)

Proverbs 13:24 He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

Proverbs 19:18 Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.

(see also Proverbs 3:11; 6:23; 10:17; 13:14; 15:5; 22:15; 23:13; 29:17)

A Societal Survey

Now, let's notch it up a level from individual to societal concerns.

I glanced through the "Life" section of that veritable windsock of the times called the daily Journal and I quickly learned to appreciate Roseanne Arnold's show as a "healthy half-hour dose of realism." (Sarcasm intended) Bringing to vivid life the tired phrase "dysfunctional family" Roseanne's gang treats the problems of family life seriously. That's what I call a seriously smudged set of lenses for viewing the world! No wonder Christians go half schizophrenic in our news-infested, news-infatuated world! Have pages fallen out the dictionary with some of Webster's words like "promiscuous, lascivious, pretentious, lewd, crude; rude; et: (for the entire list consult 2 Timothy 3:1ff)?

You see, on a daily basis I can get nearly as fed up about the societal junkyard of relativistic morals as James Dobson. His February newsletter laments that parents must not only worry about a country rife with physical threats (we'll treat the issue of crime in a moment), but about a culture that impacts the hearts and minds of their precious kids. Columnist Ellen Goodman recently wrote:

Sooner or later; most Americans become card-carrying members of the counterculture. This is not an underground holdout of Hippies. No beads are required. All you need to join is a child.

At some point between Lamaze and PTA, it becomes clear that one of your main jobs as a parent is to counter the culture. What the media deliver to children by the masses, you are expected to rebut one at a time.

But it occurs to me now that the call for 'parental responsibility' is increasing in direct proportion to the irresponsibility of the marketplace. Parents are expected to protect their children from an increasingly hostile environment.

Are the kids being sold junk food? Just say no. Is TV bad? Turn it off. Are there messages about sex, drugs, violence all around? Counter the culture.

Mothers and fathers are expected to screen virtually every aspect of their children's lives. To check the ratings on the movies, to read the labels on the CD's, to find out if there's MTV in the house next door. All the while keeping in touch with school and in their free time, earning a living.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, a research associate at the Institute for American Values, found this out in interviews with middle-class parents. "A common complaint I heard from parents was their sense of being overwhelmed by the culture. They felt relatively more helpless than their parents."

"Parents," she notes, "see themselves in a struggle for the hearts and minds of their own children." It isn't that they can't say no. It's that there's so much more to say no to.

Without wallowing in false nostalgia, there has been a fundamental shift. Americans once expected parents to raise their children in accordance with the dominant cultural messages. Today they are expected to raise their children in opposition.

Once the chorus of cultural values was full of ministers, teachers, neighbors, leaders. They demanded more conformity, but offered more support: Now the messengers are Ninja Turtles, Madonna, rap groups, and celebrities pushing sneakers. Parents are considered 'responsible' only if they are successful in their resistance.

It's what makes child-raising harder: It's why parents feel more isolated: It's not just that American families have less time with their kids, it's that we have to spend more of this time doing battle with our own culture.

It's rather like trying to get your kids to eat their green beans after they've been told all day about the wonders of Milky Way. Come to think of it, it's exactly like that.ⁱⁱⁱ

Whether the mesmerizing media with its amoral mind-set is only reflecting society or actually creating it is a whole different subject. Nevertheless, we sense the actual conditions that a generation afloat have now produced. The quotes and documentation are already venerable, and we find ourselves, along with social workers, psychologists, educators, policemen, legislators and parents choking on them. Rather than a statistical review, permit me to focus on the implications of this tidal wave of outlandish behaviors. I will address a few of the major indicators that I believe permissiveness has produced. (Each of these has further documentation in the endnotes.)

Major Indicators of Permissiveness

1. *Crime and Violence*: All I have to say to evoke a reaction in my community is the name Dale Brietlow. The murder of this high school teacher in a hallway of Tosa West sobered the country, and I heard many say, "We're no longer safe anywhere." A society that must install metal detectors at the schoolhouse door has lost the proper safeguards at the family front door. The recovery of discipline in society will not begin to succeed until the virtue of self-discipline is rediscovered. The barrage of incidents even in our own backyard with drive-by shootings, rape, destruction of church property, vandalism and gang attacks leave a paralyzing imprint on all of us.^{iv}

2. *Legal Leniency*: Closely associated with the crime rate is a tolerance of judicial abuse that let the innocent suffer and wrongdoers go unpunished. Reader's Digest in particular presents story after story about how permissive courts allow serious criminals to go free. Let me cite one: April Dell'Olio, who stabbed her boyfriend to death at age 14, was diagnosed with a personality disorder instead of a dangerous mental disorder, and as such was riot committed to any treatment facility. Even the judge was appalled, "It is a disgrace that a person can stab somebody 22 times and walk away from here after we say, 'Take two counselors and see me in five years.'"^v

3. *Pornography and Gay rights*: Christianity has been turned on its ear in the public mind and portrayed as prudish and archaic. National media brand it reactionary, right-wing, and fundamentalistic, all catchwords for ugliness. Christians, it is said, would have us impose limits on free expression, something we can never allow, even if that expression is hurtful and obscene. Christians, it is said, would impose their rigid beliefs on us all. But is that true? Are Christians

the ones who are imposing their beliefs on everyone? Was it Christian belief that decided in 1970 that pornography is harmless and anti-obscenity laws needn't be enforced, leading to an explosion of violent pornography which causes jury members to gag and the lives of thousands to be ruined? No, it was a presidential commission in 1970. How can gay rights bills move through legislatures on short notice and with little or no public debate? For instance, in March 1991, the Hawaii legislature quietly passed a law defining sexual preference as a civil right. By the time pro-family citizens learned of the bill, it was on its way to the Governor. He signed, despite a last-minute ad campaign and more than 2,000 phone calls opposing the measure. As you are well aware, homosexual initiatives have mounted to a new fervor with the current administrations.^{vi}

4. *Loss of Self-image*: In his classic work *The Closing of the American Mind*, Dr. Allen Bloom explains the reason for the self-centered stance of most students on college campuses by saying, "This turning in on themselves is not, as some would have it, a return to normalcy after the hectic fever of the sixties. It is a new degree of isolation which leaves young people with no alternative to looking inwardCountry, religion, family, ideas of civilization, all the sentimental and historical forces ...providing some notion of a place within the whole, have been rationalized and have lost their compelling force." The self-centered emphasis of this age was not-merely adopted by our society as a nice way of thinking. The "Me-generation" is a result of a profound social revolution, plowing it's way into the 90's with a corporate philosophy that if I can find me, I can fix me. Notice that the proliferation of psychotherapists alone indicates this to be nothing but a mirage.^{vii}

5. *Addictions*: Into the void which Christ alone can fill, people pour alcohol, drugs, sex, pornography, video games, visits to casinos, work.^{viii}

6. *Child abuse and neglect*: It is now an accepted truism that child abuse is on the increase in America. To deal with it, over the past thirty years our nation has put into place a system that operates outside the criminal justice system, and is subject to far fewer constitutional restrictions on its methods. The hair-trigger established by mandatory reporting disarmed as well as alarmed counselors and those in people-interactive professions (ours no less than others). On the Sunday's Milwaukee Journal front cover was an article entitled, "Afraid to hug." The subtitle says even more, "Fear of sex accusations chills caring hearts." Genuine cases of abuse must receive immediate, emergency protection, so that children are not returned to abusive homes. But we must also seek to provide a higher level of due process protection for those who come into contact with the system as suspects of abuse.^{ix}

7. *Abortion*: Was it Christians who unleashed the arbitrary determination of when life begins? No, it was the highest court in our land (Roe vs. Wade); tolerant of murder while attempting to give permission to a woman's "personal rights."^x

Not to mention sexually transmitted diseases which are multiplying at an unparalleled rate or the epidemic attack of AIDS.

From all this we can observe that our society, as we now know it in this post-Cold-War era, must address a greater enemy' from within than from without. Having adopted a nearly national religion of relativism and political correctness, must our leaders continue down the road of recovery as proposed by the very proponents who installed this permissive agenda?

A Secular Answer?

Unfortunately, debates over issues like crime, family structures and sexual conduct have become so politicized that we have nearly lost all shared definitions of such terms as “family” and “values.” This is a loss that renders America incapable of reasoned moral discourse.^{xi}

A poignant illustration of the loss was a report entitled *Code Blue*, issued a few years ago by several professional organizations. *Code Blue* is a phrase used by hospitals to signal a life-threatening emergency; the emergency in this case was a steep rise in adolescent suicide, school failure, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and drug and alcohol abuse. What made this report interesting was its analysis of the source of the problem. A central factor in the youth crisis, they said, was changing families and neighborhoods, which has left many children “on their own ...isolated from adults.” The report also said that the mobility of American families and the need for second incomes “have robbed too many young people of stable families and communities where they are surrounded by caring adults to guide their growth and behavior.”

Surely when mainstream institutions admit that many of our social problems stem directly from family decline and moral training, we’re heading in the right direction, aren’t we? Wouldn’t you expect them, on the basis of this conclusion, to suggest at a minimum some strategy to bind families together, encouraging commitment and faithfulness?

Sorry. The modern humanistic philosophy will not offer even that much hope. In *Code Blue*, all the disorders plaguing youth today, from depression to drug use, were labeled *health* problems. And the solution recommended was guaranteed access to health services, medical as well as psychosocial. The report called for the expansion of school clinics, the establishment of adolescent health centers, and even the creation of neighborhood health Corps to enable “adolescents and their families to actually use health and other services.” (Ergo, if you decide not to use the clinic, can you expect pressure from the local health Corps?)

What *Code Blue* illustrates is a massive failure among health and education professionals even to conceptualize the moral dimension. It’s almost as if we have corporately lost the language of moral discourse.

Some are finally groping their way toward a correct diagnosis of the problem: namely, that modern society has given adults permission to adopt lifestyles out of tune with the needs of their children (and out of tune with God’s command). Too many cultural leaders refuse to recognize that this is fundamentally not a health disorder; nor a result of inadequate services, nor a lack of government funding. It is a moral disorder.

In *Habits of the Heart*, author Robert Bellah maintains that American individualism has grown so acute that we no longer even speak the language of transcendent morality. Most Americans no longer think in conceptual categories of overarching standards of right and wrong, good and evil. They think only in terms of what feels right to the individual. This is the real story behind *Code Blue* and even the Dan Quayle ruckus. We talk about rights and lifestyles and health needs, but we do not talk about morality and virtue.

Why?

Ultimately because amoral law implies an absolute truth, as well as a divine-author of truth. This is what so many people are reluctant to acknowledge: that we are morally obligated to a “being” apart from man and his quagmire of sin. Perhaps they have confused belief in absolutes with absolutism - a rigid mentality that is inflexible, irrational and hostile. But there is a world of difference between absolutes and absolutism: .

Adding an “Ism” onto a term can radically alter its meaning. Consider the difference between material and materialism, feminine and feminism. By contrast to absolutism, a belief in absolutes simply means we believe that there is a created order. That there are virtues like courage, kindness and patience which are obligatory. That there are normative patterns for marriage, business and government.

We believe that there are laws for human behavior as surely as there are laws like gravity for the physical world. We aren’t absolutist because our values aren’t based on private convictions, which we are trying to impose on our neighbors and friends. Values are not relative. They are based on objective truths about the created order, and we can search them out as carefully as a scientist examines and establishes scientific law. They have been established and functioning efficiently since the beginning of time.

The World View Gap

Perhaps the reason that proposed solutions take such an alternative form between those who believe in absolutes and those who don’t is that the individual issues (about crime, legislation, pornography, abortion) all stem from a basic set of assumptions about life. The German label for this, *Weltanschauung*, is what we call a world-view: Our world and particularly our country is being torn between two basic world-views.

One could call it a class war; though it is based on faith versus economics.

On the one side is the middle class, which once supplied most of our nation’s leaders and officeholders and shaped America’s value. Historically, these values were Christian, with a strong Protestant work ethic emphasizing sacrifice, responsibility, loyalty and moral restraint.

On the other side is what Charles Colson and the sociologists are calling the “New Class.” In the early part of this century America’s elite began to develop a distinct world-view. It was secular and liberal; it celebrated America’s growing affluence by developing an ethic of individualism, self-gratification, and rebellion against authority. By the 1960’s the elite outlook spread to a large segment of middle-class youth, now the “New Class.”

This “New Class” is really a “knowledge class,” formed by America’s intelligentsia. They don’t trade in goods and services but in words and ideas. They are journalists and anchors on TV networks. They are educators who are writing curricula for schools. They are lawyers, and legislators working for social causes: They are the public policy analysts who shape where the government will go. *Newsweek* calls them the nation’s “brain workers.”

The first empirical study of this class was conducted by Robert and Linda Lichter and Stanley Rothman for their book, *The Media Elite*. They interviewed the people who bring us nightly news, and found that most leading television journalists and news anchors label themselves politically as liberal: 90 percent are pro-choice; 75 percent believe homosexuality is morally acceptable; and only 8 percent attend religious services regularly. In their sequel, *Watching America*, they turned to Hollywood and interviewed the writers and producers of prime-time entertainment. They discovered a remarkable sameness in outlook: 75 percent place themselves on the left politically; 97 percent are pro-choice; 80 percent believe homosexuality is morally acceptable; and only 7 percent attend any sort of religious service regularly. The same values are held by this “New Class” everywhere they work and live and interact.^{xiii}

What’s caused this world view gap?

One could simplistically say that it is those who are for and those who are against Christ (Luke 11:23). Indeed that is the true dividing line for the world-views. However, a survey of the

presuppositions of our modern culture may help us to modify and adapt the way we present Christ.

1. The General Secularization of our World

Today's question for youth is not, "Does God exist?" but rather, "What difference does it make?" After an age of industrialization, our young have become pragmatists. "What works?" They are not as interested in proofs for the existence of God as they are in the relevancy of God to what is happening, here and now. They've probably never read Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," nor have they heard of Nietzsche or Harvey Cox.^{xiii}

Theologians have begun to call this process of slowly eliminating God from the explanation of the universe and what is happening here "secularization." God is simply left out of the picture, superfluous for daily living. Most of contemporary Europe has advanced ahead of the USA in this process, so that the great cathedrals, including those of Reformation repute, are empty on Sunday.

The results of this secularization process might nudge us slightly beyond our topic of permissiveness, but they are closely enough related to be worthy of mention.

There is despair and disenchantment with our world, which lead to rampant materialism and a weekend cocooning. People don't want to read about all the bad out there anymore, so they take it upon themselves to create their own safe environment. With the advancement of technology, more and more extraction from society and community will take place: You will shop by TV, talk over video phones, work at your home computer. (Does it sound like Orwell's 1984?) Why subject yourself to the trivial affairs of others when you can control your own environment? The danger of this is loss of a communal dimension, obliterating the need to serve each other in love. Perhaps it is unnecessary for me to comment, but the outcome is a selfishness foreign to a follower of Christ.

Then there is a liberation movement for those who have felt oppressed. Their goal is to realize economic or physical freedom, with a mob mentality of getting their rights when the moment arrives. We witnessed the LA looting as a testimony that when victory comes into sight, God is easily forgotten.

Perhaps the basis for this practical atheism is this; our scientific knowledge no longer permits us to see God as the final cause of mysterious phenomena we do not understand. In the last century the Bible was demythologized with scientific professionalism. If we don't know the answer yet, more research will find it. The natural explanation may elude us now, but it will be found in time. Accordingly, God is dead or on vacation simply because we can't find his footprints in the sand.

This sweeping attitude assumes that the only matters of importance are those we know scientifically and can in some way control. Everything else that one does is left up to personal judgment and disposition. As far as daily life is concerned God is "practically" dead. If he doesn't do the laundry, pay the bills, shop or clean, what good is he?

There is also the interiorization or privatization of religion, leading the God-search inward. The mystical, contemplative relationship with God does not start with objective justification or external direction from the Word and Sacraments. It is rather a fascination with one's own sentiment or emotion, which becomes the criteria for God's actions.

It is therefore quite difficult to explain to someone who is the product of our modern culture that, even when there is no emotional affect, God can be truly and objectively present to him or in her. The concept of faith (Hebrews 11:1) is not measured by physical results or

feelings. The degree of emotion may give evidence of relationship with God, but it cannot determine the quality of God's presence. Neither can the absence of emotion measure him.

2. *The Loss of Authority*

Credibility has waned for virtually every institution on earth, "With the media hounding the juiciest story. The image of authority figures is glamorized and satirized at the same time. Get the top position and you can enjoy all the perks (*Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*). But on the other hand, the only reason a person wants authority in the first place is to reap the benefits of the position in terms of power, position or profit (*Whitewater Affair*). Another politician lied on his taxes. Another priest fudged about his private life of sexual deviation.

The problem of religious credibility has increased the skepticism in the average American to the point where it's safer for him to fall back on his own subjective feelings about the faith than trust the doctrine which is being taught by the church. Not only does this lead to a "cafeteria" selection of theology, it severely limits the authority of Scripture.

For example, God reveals to us his inner nature and relationship gradually as we watch him interact with Abraham and his offspring Israel. The revelation progresses through David's story to that of Mary and Joseph. Even prior to the manger stall we hear the angel announce that the Spirit will overshadow this girl so that the Son might be "begotten of the Father." Left to our own devices we could not arrive at this interrelationship between Father and Son and Spirit. We accept such revelation on the authority of God revealing it to us. Such a way of coming to truth is so contrary to what contemporary culture accepts that nothing beyond one's own experience can be considered valid unless scientifically proven. As the question of authority extends to the role of the church, the cultural clash intensifies. How can one believe that the church is the true interpreter of God's message to us?

If one cannot know truth (Pilate's question, John 18:38), then one does not have to have to subject himself to the discipline or supervision of the church (Matthew 18:15ff). This perception, in fact, can lead to a member who might well sue the congregation for its attempt to rein in his or her sinful lifestyle. or to call it into question.

3. *The Loss of Relationships*

Who teaches the children what's right and wrong these days? What ever happened to fathers who would inscribe the commandments of God on the heads, (not literally, but as in Deut. 6) and hearts of their children? Well, dad and mom aren't home much these days because they're more in debt than they are in love. Or maybe they're just so intent on giving little Johnny and Suzi the "quality life" that they've lost sight of what kind of cowboys their babies are becoming. Or is it that modern Americans have grown comfortable with superficial conversation in between commercials or at half time?

Broken or fragmented family is the expected "norm" today. This lack of commitment to solve life's problems is definitely a legacy of a spoiled, tolerant generation. Is it "We can't work it out." Or is it "We won't work it out." Loyalty is at a low-ebb and our society is paying a high price for familial disintegration.

Sad to say, the loss of relationship lingers on into each new generation. In a recent weekend retreat called *Dad, the Family Shepherd*, we studied how father power shapes generations. The way a father leads his child may well determine how that child views the heavenly father, at least initially. Each father has potential to help or handicap three if not four generations who will follow after him. This is not a new problem either, for on the edge of the

Messiah's entrance Malachi wrote, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)

Unless the value of relationships is re-evaluated, our culture may become devoid of the divine presence in a few very short generations.

Some Potential Solutions

I'm certainly no expert sociologist or polished theologian that I can candidly say I know how to solve our societal woes or unravel the mystery that will cure worldliness inside and outside our Christian homes. I look at the pagan, masochistic hedonism all around me and feel as though there were sludge in my pastoral veins. But after prayer and some research, I'll make an effort to propose some initial steps that may form a framework for our pastors in response to this age of permissiveness.

Personal Ministry

On the personal, one-to-one level of ministry our pastoral response must be at the same time compassionate and instructive. Thinking back over the "Georges" which we may have served, we can certainly see a definite need for a ministry of restoration: We must share the Shepherd's compassion for the sheep, asking God in prayer to bless us with the words, the encouragement, the specific advice which will help them reconnect to their only source of healing: Jesus. This is first a response of the heart and secondly a response with educational goals.

I would suggest the following strategy for improving our ministry to those who have been the victims of permissiveness or are, whether by ignorance or intent, perpetrators.

1. Counseling:

Here's where we will experience the ravages of permissiveness in close, as we hear the damage reports. All of us have been worn thin with stories of shattered lives and sin stained dreams. Our tendency today may be to "professionalize" counseling to the degree that we become abstract observers, unable to identify with the pain. Our first step in the process of a viable pastoral response is to do a reality check on ourselves. Ask, "Do I have more than just the facts of this tale of woe, but also the misery which the predicament has brought its owner? Do I care about them as Jesus cares for me? Have I made a hasty judgment about their role and responsibility in this situation with the resultant thought that they got what they deserved? Do I have the courage (and the time) to share *agape* love with them?" (Romans 13:8-10)

A simple but powerful second step is to intercede earnestly on their behalf. Before and after counseling sessions, perhaps even daily, we must carry them to the throne of grace and plea that the Lord deal with them graciously through us.

Then, as we unravel the knot of sin's enterprise, we must be willing to listen to their perception of what happened. This need not last for hours upon hours, but must be enough to comprehend how permissiveness has affected them. Were they not taught boundaries? Is their problem a chronic, wide-spread lack of self-discipline or self-control? Are they in some way addicted to a substance? to a person? I can assure you that confidential notes are often advisable, even during the sessions if necessary, to keep track of the various layers of problems.

Finally, we must administer the counsel of God's word, with an emphasis on recognizing sin and its cost (Matthew 13:41; Mark 9:45, John 16:8), but never withholding forgiveness. Maturity in this department calls for a sound biblical knowledge as well as an awareness of our role in helping them with their burden (Galatians 6:2). We must not remove the consequences of sin, or enable behaviors that continue to contradict or compromise that person's expression of faith (Ezekiel 18:21).^{xiv}

2. *Role Model:*

We might easily assume this as a *given*. "Of course, we are to be examples of a well-balanced personal ministry with our families and friends." Nevertheless, the Lord may well lump the neglectful father (see note #1) in with permissive parents when he doles out his list of vices. Are we so engrossed in our work that we have lost touch with our own children? Will they one day suffer from the same problems that we are continually trying to help others avoid? Do we hold our friends accountable to their profession as Christians, or do we look the other way because the work is just too hard or too much? Teaching Law and Gospel is a task worthy of our best intellectual efforts. Living Law-and Gospel is, however, a greater measure of our integrity before God (Matthew 5:16).

3. *Informal Teaching:*

Here opportunities will abound on a circumstantial (though divinely planned) agenda (Ephesians 2:10). We may have children running in the halls at church. Do we gently yet firmly remind them where they are and how they should be conducting themselves? We may be at a worship service and notice how the parents are ignoring a child's misbehavior to the point where it has become intrusive and obstructive? When do we intervene? What do we say? How can we capitalize on the moment to instruct? Some of the most teachable moments will blossom around us and we can use that brief moment to talk about how our relationship with God must affect our behavior (1 John 5:1-5).

Corporate Ministry

On the corporate level the solutions become much broader and more complex. To address the various aspects, we will look first at our response with the people in our congregations (WELS Christians), with people outside our congregations; (other Christians and non-Christians) and within our role as a citizen of this country.

With our own people...

1. *We must accurately preach and teach sanctified living.*

The hinge for this discussion must begin with the Scriptural balance of objective and subjective faith. Adolf Koeberle in *The Quest for Holiness* identifies the fulcrum of this issue. "It is sure that since justification is the mother of sanctification the chief stress will always be laid on the word forgiveness. But since the daughter "sanctification" though she cannot beget the mother "forgiveness" can destroy her, the significance of sanctification must be presented with all emphasis in evangelical preaching."^{xv} Having been burned by the Pietistic inclination to elevate the sanctified life to central place, Lutheranism has exhibited a real reluctance in dealing with the biblical concept of new life in Christ. Yet our heritage is built on the remarkable feelings of the renewed heart, for the Reformer himself experienced the invigorating freedom of

“righteousness from God.” Despite his insistence that faith must always be based on the external Word; Luther often discussed the reality and necessity of the inner life.

Avoiding the Evangelical tendency toward self-assertion, we must teach that justification (God’s action to save us) and sanctification (our life of service to him) are to be clearly separated temporally and theologically, but not essentially. Scaer in an article from the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* describes the relationship well, “Sanctification describes the same reality as does justification but describes the justified Christian’s relationship to the world and society. Justification and sanctification are not two separate realities, but the same reality viewed from the different perspectives of God and man. from the perspective of God the reality of the Christian is totally passive and non-contributory as it receives Christ only. From the perspective of the world, the same reality never ceases in its activity and tirelessly performs all good works.”^{xvi}

Without or apart from Christ there is no possibility of breaking the selfish heart which desires “permission” not from God, but only from itself. Without or apart from Christ we cannot speak clearly about the better qualities of a truly sanctified life, as Luther states, “Having been justified by grace, we then do good works, yes, Christ himself does all in us.”^{xvii}

If our people will not become prey to this consumer-driven, media-molested world of permissiveness, they must be taught how to lose themselves in Christ that he may be recreated in them and then live through them (John 4:4; Gal. 2:20). Concluding a strong chapter on the subject, Harold Senkbeil says; “Finders may be keepers in the world’s point of view, but Jesus figures things differently. In wanting to keep your life, you lose it. In losing, you win. In dying, you live. This is the lifestyle he holds out for us. It’s not really a life style at all; it is actually Christ’s life—the life he lives through us. It is a joyous life. And from beginning to end it’s always the same life: a life under the cross. This life is not hypothetical, it is an actual reality God offers us in the person of Jesus Christ, his Son.”^{xviii} When our people are consumed with Christ they won’t be continually asking for their rights (Luke 7:10, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31), which is a fundamental truth for secularists, but they will serve with the whole mind and heart of their Lord who is *for* them and *in* them (John 15:1-9).

2. *We must know what the theological battle lines are.*

What’s at stake in the war is not just which commandments are being broken. My core concern is that the First Commandment isn’t even on the modern moral map. We must acclimate ourselves to a presentation of God as God before our people and those around them will begin to think about their moral accountability to him. (Hebrews 4:12...teaching the Word is teaching who God is.)

2.1 God is compassionate. Often those caught in a permissive life style will encounter suffering as the direct consequence of their lascivious experimentation. They need a spiritual prescription for their pain. But until they hear the threat of the law, recognize their sin, and grasp by faith the love of God in Christ (Romans 3:21-24), they will struggle to believe that God would allow such suffering. The cross will continue to be unsettling to them (1 Corinthians 1:18) because it is God’s drastic solution to our drastic problem. Here God dies in our place, a truth Luther clung to with fervor (on Acts 3:15), “If it were not to be said; Gad has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if ‘God’s death’ and ‘God died’ be in the scale of the balance, then he sinks down and we rise up as a light, empty scale.” No one would expect God to love us that much, but all of Scripture labors to tell us this (John 3:16 et al).

Discovering God's presence so intimately in our narcissistic world also entails finding new purpose in human suffering and in some of those aspects of life that seem to be negative and even evil. By nature we are always trying to avoid hardship, pain and death. Yet the cross of Jesus reveals to us that the only life worth living is a life which is given through death—the death of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:15). There's no getting around the cross...our life as Christians is always lived under the cross and sometimes (Mat. 16:24) with a cross. Even though it is difficult for any of us to understand how God could possibly be at work in the darken days of our life, we must strive to make suffering meaningful. This has deep pastoral implications, since the rest of the world is “on the take.” Those who are willing to suffer (carry their cross) because they have lifted up their eyes to their suffering Savior (John 3:15) will make a mark wherever they go, work and serve.^{xix}

2.2 God is Transcendent. If God is to have any meaning at all in our secular age, he must be viewed as “something” which is not identical with humanity, the, world and history (John 1:1-5). We must emphasize this “otherness” aspect of God. Only in this way can we offset some of the here-and-now pragmatism of the privatization of faith. We must not only realize but teach that there is a God beyond us that is, independent of us, dragging us forward to a higher destiny. Perhaps the words “reverence” and “awe” do not wear well with our culture, but, anyone who is seeking definition of life beyond the limitations of human knowledge will experience this when they lay hold on the ultimate explanation (John 1:14-18). Science, while it may have appeared to be a substitute for religion, will yet serve our God in this quest for answers about things like creation, the origin of life, the human genome. These horizons make our culture ripe for a deeper, more spiritual approach.^{xx}

2.3 God is Incarnate. So much could be said about this. The Son of God did not remain in the safe immunity of heaven, remote from tragedy and pain in this world. He emptied himself of glory and humbled himself to serve. Experiencing our dimension, he took our nature, endured our strife, experienced our temptation, died our death. The Son of God could not have identified himself more completely with us than he did (Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:14-16, 9:24-26). Out of his commission from the Father we find ours (John 17:8). As Christ entered our world, we must enter the world of others. We have to enter their thought world in order to understand their misunderstandings of the gospel. We have to enter the world of their alienation, their pain. If we will serve them we must enter their doubts, their questions, their loneliness; their lostness (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

God entered human history to give it a new and higher meaning. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit, all reality has taken on his new, though invisible, dimension. To experience reality in that different way under faith, knowing that the resurrection posts the ultimate victory over evil, changes the way a person lives (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Peter 1:18-19). God is not necessarily found within (through whisperings) or by miracles (through the supernatural), but rather through the love, joy, friendship, and trust of others. Human relationships, based on *agape*, fidelity, and trust, testify to God's practical presence among us (1 John 1:2-4).

2.4 God is soteriological. God's mission is to save. (Mark 10:45) To connect us with eternity, he not only came to be one with us, but he also showed us the way to join him in heaven (John 14:6). He genuinely loves those who are caught up in this world's mentality of desire, craving and fulfillment of appetite. He designed a plan to reach into their mess and aggressively lead them out (Ephesians 2:8-9). He instigated the plan through his own Son, but has, through his Spirit, spread the delight across the centuries, even to our day and age. Consider this quote by

John Stott, “Nobody can possess the Spirit and keep that Spirit to himself. Where the Spirit is, he flows forth and where there is no flowing forth, he is not there. That’s why we see in the Acts of the Apostles the missionary Spirit creating a missionary church, driving it out in ever-widening circles.” Contrary to all the confidence of our sociological and technological conclusions today, man can have no more confidence in saving himself than when he invented the wheel. Only the Holy Spirit can take the Word, spoken in human weakness (ours) and carry it home in power to the heart and mind and conscience of the hearer. The Holy Spirit is the chief witness (John 15:26) that God has come to take us to be forever with him (John 14:1-2). Without his witness ours becomes futile.

3. We must seek to create a genuine, caring community.

In a course which he taught at our congregation recently Prof. David Valleskey emphasized the need and the biblical mandate for forging our congregations into a caring community. We are the family of faith who support and encourage each other. We are bound by the blood of Christ into a communion of believers who serve one another in love. (John 13:34-35) Scriptures are flooded with passages about “one anothering,” consider just these few from Romans:

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another: Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.

Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

In this genuine Christian community our people will not only be accepted, but encouraged to live lives that count. Consider what Paul said about unity and the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3-6) and service to each other (Philippians 2:1-10). Much of the New Testament talks about this familial closeness of faith, where people are taught to set their minds on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1-11). Peter says we ought to be a holy people (1 Peter 2:9-10) whose godly lives give testimony that together we look forward to Christ’s return (2 Peter 3:11-12). Our whole goal for living is to be reunited with Christ (Revelation 22:20) who will soon return to gather us to himself for eternity.

With others...

1. We must use our caring community as a basis for witnessing Christ.

Biblical Christianity is relationship with God through Christ and with each other as part of the body of Christ. Augsburg Confession Article 7 is a key example of this confessional principle: the church comes into being as “congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.” So becoming part of the assembly where Christ’s presence in Word and Sacrament are shared is an enormously important step. Anyone who is haphazard about this relationship, or who side-steps it is very likely to become a product of the secular domain, for he has become an isolated “limb,” cut off from Christ. Community is the living bond of faith between members of the house of God, so centered in Word and Sacrament, that the body of Christ cannot exist apart from these central actions.

In this day and age of “every man for himself” we must staunchly deny forms of spirituality or theology which rely upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit apart from the means to which the Spirit is committed. We must make every effort to draw our community into the means of grace, knowing that this is how God shares himself with us.

Secular Europeans do not get this concept, but tend to see themselves as Christians simply because they are members of an institutional church. That Christian beliefs might affect behavior or require commitment could be a novel idea. When we begin by communicating to the individual that prayer and Bible study, as well as worship attendance could reasonably be expected of one who claims to be a Christian. This is a moving, yet tender challenge to cause a person who has wide open, liberal views yet shows no evidence of personal responsibility that to be a Christian is to be a disciple. All depends on being personally related to the one who lived and died and rose again. Only within the context of this intensely personal relationship can anyone hope to receive an affirmation of his own worth, unconditional love and confidence.

So community begins, usually, on a personal interaction level. The person who is a worldly Christian or apart from Christ will begin his journey into the body of Christ by observing his “mentor’s life.” This includes all the we might consider to be part of friendship witnessing and leans into the larger concept of the Christian community. As he or she grows more comfortable with Christ, the circle of Christian friendships can be enlarged. Here he finds that there are others who take their relationship with God as seriously as his mentor. Here she finds people who want to listen and help. Here there are really significant, lasting relationships (1 John 4:7-12).

2. We must emphasize the joy and responsibility of family.

With my calling and interest in this field of ministry, I could easily ramble. Let me at least say that I am thrilled with the Family Ministry Committee’s model for a healthy Christian family and see it as a major opportunity to reach out to those who do not know our Lord Jesus. Whether they will admit it at first or not, their family life is in shambles. They do not know how to relate to each other, to forgive each other, to support each other because this is not their world-view nor their habit. We have much to teach our own people about building strong homes. But as we build healthy Christian families they will become the role models in our neighborhoods. They will be the ones who can share their values up and down the street. They will be noticed because their children, exhibit a healthy Christ-esteem and know love. They will be asked how they do it. Then, with the door wide open, they can proclaim that once you have been baptized and accepted into the family of faith, serving your family at home is second nature.

3. *We must call sin what it is.*

We must never be ashamed of God's call to purity nor of the Gospel message (Romans 1:16). What God labels as sin, we must share with those who are caught in its tangled web. Who else can hold up the mirror for them (James 1:22-25)? Who else will curb their sinful appetite (Ephesians 4:17-20)? Who else will teach them how to love God (Jeremiah 31:31-34)?

4. *We must know where to walk away.*

Even the Savior said we should not throw our pearls before swine. The secular world will ridicule and malign us because of our connection with Christ. They will, in fact, along with Satan, seek to bring us down to their level of wallowing in misery and sin's muck. There comes a time when we can no longer witness and we are in danger of catching the disease of worldliness. True wisdom will tell us that we must back away and await a better time for discourse about why we do not relish sin or its mastery of our lives. When God's time is right we will be able to express the truth in a loving, effective manner.

As Christian citizens...

We must be willing to pray for our country, vote, to engage our culture in dialogue, to write letters opposing false or dangerous legislation, to talk about these problems with one another and seek solutions.

In Conclusion...

Permissiveness may be the chosen path of life for our culture, yet we are called to reach out with the truth to those who are broken and wounded by sin (Ezekiel 34:16, Hosea 6:1). Observing Jesus and his ministry, we may learn not to be so intimidated by these problems. He viewed those whose lives were wrecked by sin as opportunities for ministry. Just think of Mary Magdalene, Zaccheus, the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.

It is my hope and prayer that we do not lose sight of our Savior or his strength for these perilous times. In an age of permissiveness there is an ever increasing need for forgiveness ...and after all, isn't that our greatest heritage as Christians? We have the "balm to cure Gilead." So let us never waver or worry, but gladly administer the Sacraments, preach the Word and strive to create congregations where people can find a truly safe and caring community. To this end we labor.

Soli Deo Gloria.

Sins of Permissiveness: Word Study

Sexual Immorality:

1 CO 6:18 Flea from sexual, immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

1 CO 7:2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have,; his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

1Co 14:8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.

EPH 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

COL 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

1 TH 4:3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;

1 TH 4:4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable,

JUD 1:7 in a similar way Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

REV 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Case Histories abound on this one: Consider these few...

Numbers 25:1-9 - Ties together with the story about Balaam. The Israelite men indulge in Moabite women and their gods. 24,000 died in a plague as a result.

2 Samuel 11-12 - David takes Bathsheba because of her beauty. The sin latches on to him for many months, along with guilt of covering up the murder of Uriah.

Proverbs 7 - The seductress leads a young man down the highway to the grave.

1 Cor 5:1-11 - The case of Corinthian tolerance of incest appalls us even today. Paul's method of handling the sin is to hand the man over to Satan, that he might repent and be restored.

Homosexuality:

ROM 1:27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

JUD 1:7 in a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Case Histories...

Genesis 19:5 - While Lot befriends the angels the men of Sodom and Gomorrah angrily seek to sodomize his guests: You know what the Lord thought of this!

Judges 19:22 - A Levite traveler found safety under the roof of an old man only to discover that the Benjamites had plans to enjoy him. This one caused an outbreak of war between Israel and the Benjamites.

Lasciviousness, Debauchery and Drunkenness:

ISA 56:11-12 They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all run to their own way, each seeks his own gain. "Come," each

one cries, “let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better.

LUK 21:34 Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

GAL 5:19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

GAL 5:20 idolatry and witch hatred,, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

GAL 5:21 add envy; drunkenness, orgie, and the like. I warn you, as I did before; that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

PH 5:18 Do not get drunk an wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit..

1 TI 3:2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled,: respectable; hospitable, able to teach,

1 TI 3:3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money:

1 PE 4:3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry..

Case Histories...

Genesis 9:20 Noah drank too much wine: Cancan’s inappropriate response netted him a Sizable curve:

Genesis 19 - Lot’s daughters use the power of inebriation to slip one over on their dad.

Daniel 5 - Belshazzar has the party of his life. He was more intoxicated with himself than with wine.

Idolatry:

Too numerous to list: The derivatives of idol contain 200 references.

Consider but these few... -

EXO 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol. in the form of anything. in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters flow.

DEU 32:21 They made me jealous by what is god and angered ma with their worthless Idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding. ,

PS 31:6 I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the Lord.

IS. 44:10 Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit him nothing?

JON 2:8 “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

1 Co 10:14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

Case History...

Genesis 32 - Perhaps the most notorious incident of outright idolatry. While Moses is up on the mountain with God the children of Israel worship a golden calf.

Abortion:

I’m sure you can find references on this, including the 5th commandment.

ⁱ Jim Murray, *An Autobiography* (New York: MacMillan, 1993); p. 228. In his eighteenth chapter entitled, “The Baby of the Family,” sports columnist Murray describes his youngest son’s *katabasis* (spiral down) into drugs; guitars, girls and scrapes with the law. The story is a chilling testimony to the end result of permissive and neglectful parenting. I’ll share only a small portion to identify his review of the personal tragedy:

I still have that awful card. “Please contact the LA county coroner at 226-8001 re: case # 82-7193. I shake as I write this. I do not want to re-create that terrible scene that afternoon in my mind. I remember the voice on the phone saying, “We’ve got your son down here in the morgue.” And remember saying, “Which son?” It was Rick. Case # 82-7193 was our Rick. He was twenty-nine years old. It had been a party. Drums beating, guitars strumming, girls laughing. Rick had laced his drinks with codeine...“a load.” He drank too much of it, went to bed—and never woke up. His mother was inconsolable. The dreams were gone. The sight is seared in my mind of her running blindly into the bedroom; where the picture of her child was; throwing herself on the floor and weeping uncontrollably and saying over and over, “My baby! My baby! Not my baby!” He was that little boy in the picture with the stuffed toy. Did she blame me? No. But I did...Part of the problem was the famous-father syndrome. But it was part paternal neglect. I had gone chasing after my career, and in so doing, had lateraled off the main work of raising the kids to my wife while I went after “success.” I plead guilty.

ⁱⁱ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: MacMillan, 1940), p. 90. He also says, “The first answer, then, to the question why our cure should be painful, is that to render back the will which we have so long claimed for our own, is in itself, wherever and however it is done, a grievous pain.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Ellen Goodman, “Battling Our Culture Is Parent’s Task,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1993.

^{iv} Crime. A special report from the Family Research Council is as sobering as it is clear in documented statistics. Edited by Gary Bauer, *Free to be Family*, (Washington D.C., Family Research Council, 1992) looks at the correlation between family breakup and child abuse, the kinds of homes which are producing violent crimes. One need not look only at the murder rates in Milwaukee and in our capitol city to shudder. A scan of statistics about the ratio of serious crime and fatherless children will soon tell you that loss of control at home (permissiveness at the basic level of community) is the core factor of crime. In a 1988 study Smith and Jarjoura found that the proportion of single-parent households in a community predicts its rates of violent crime and burglary, but the community’s poverty level does not. (p. 29) David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values has written compellingly of the decline of fatherhood as a major source of violence among youths. “There are exceptions” he writes, “but here is the rule. Boys raised by traditionally masculine fathers generally do not commit crimes. Fatherless boys commit crimes.” (p. 98) The Bureau of Justice Statistics has noted that 70 percent of the juveniles in state reform institutions grew up in single-parent or no-parent situations. Studies of adolescent killers and street gang membership reveal similar proportions.

^v Reader’s Digest, *Crime & Punishment (U.S.A.)*, April 1994, p. 93. Charles Colson in an excerpt from his *Breakpoint* radio talk entitled “Do We Need Another Study on Crime?” said, “Thomas Jefferson once wrote that disagreements over religion never hurt anyone. If my neighbor says there is no God, he said, ‘it neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.’ Well, with all due respect, Jefferson was wrong. Atheism does pick my pocket and yours; too. As a case in point, Harvard School of Public Health is gearing up for a new ten-year study that will cast upward of \$80 million. Researchers will study children across several age groups to identify the causes of crime. \$80 million is a pretty hefty price tag and all to search for something we already know. That’s right. If we’re Christians, we already know what causes crime. The Bible teaches that human beings are morally responsible, capable of choosing between right and wrong. Choosing to do wrong is what the Bible calls sin.

^{vi} Citizen, *How Homosexuals Push their Agenda*, (June 17, 1991). Tom Minnery writes convincingly that permissiveness is the agenda for many liberal legislators. In *The Sex Revolution’s Phony Foundation*, (September 1, 1991) Bruce Westfall identifies Alfred Kinsey as the statistical father of the American sexual revolution. His two thick studies legitimized a range of sexual taboos, including promiscuity, pedophilia and homosexuality. “Sex between children and adults is not likely to do the child any appreciable harm,” Kinsey said.

^{vii} Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster), pp. 84-85. Of all the books panned most recently on this subject of self-image, I appreciate Don Matzat’s *Christ Esteem* most. On p. 43 he concludes his chapter by saying, “Biblical Christianity and humanistic psychology do agree on the one basic point that we must come to a knowledge of ourselves, but for different reasons. While humanistic psychology teaches us to know ourselves so that we might feel good about ourselves, biblical Christianity teaches us to know ourselves so that we might turn away from ourselves and discover our life and identity in Christ Jesus! When a person (or for that matter a whole culture), looks for himself he will discover only the mess of sin, with anger,

despair, destruction and decay. But when a person (or culture) looks for Christ, they will find him and through him everything else.

^{viii} Addictions are commonplace in American life, from Glen Campbell's testimony on 20/20 to Darrell Strawberry's admission to the Betty Ford clinic. Addressing the problem is another issue however. I recently read an evaluation of the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) Program developed jointly by the Los Angeles Unified School District and the LAPD. Written by Pastor Larry Cross, the analysis describes how the central mechanism utilized by the proponents of DARE is a doctrine of self-esteem. Pastas Cross, among other criticisms, says, "The self-esteem philosophy is antithetical to God's will that he, not the believer's self, be most highly valued and feared by his elect" (p. 6). In other words, the method out of this madness as taught in the public sector will lead to an addiction deeper than a physical or emotional need. It will lead to spiritual slavery.

^{ix} Even the definition of family has been altered to include forms of alternate lifestyle. "Social science experts succeeded in convincing the Carter campaign in 1976 that the proposed meeting be renamed the 'White House Conference on Families' with "any hint of a normative idea of family carefully excised." *Free to be Family*, p. 104.

^x Are you in touch with our national agency and its newsletter, *Beginnings*?

^{xi} Gary Bauer, *Free to be Family*, (Washington D.C., Family Research Council, 1992), pp. 101-103.

^{xii} An attractive young woman whose career necessitated a good deal of traveling was asked if she was ever bothered by uninvited male attention. She answered, "Never, I just say five words and immediately I am left alone." "What are the five words?" She said, "I simply ask, 'Are you a born-again Christian?'"

^{xiii} Harvey Cox wrote *The Secular City* 29 years ago as a prophecy of a world gone secular. Aldous Huxley gave a utopian twist to his novel, *Brand New World*. "The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off ...they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave." Harold Watts, Aldous Huxley, (Boston: Twayne, 1960) p. 81.

^{xiv} *Shepherd Under Christ* emphasizes this kind of "Seelsorge" in Chapter 8, beginning on p.179. It is well worth reviewing.

^{xv} Adolf Koeberle, *The Quest for Holiness* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1938; reprint ed., St. Louis: Concordia Heritage Series, 1982), p. 259.

^{xvi} Dr. Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 49:2, 3, p. 188.

^{xvii} Luther, *LW* 34, p. 111.

^{xviii} Harold Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1989), p. 148. A brief thought about the Prodigal son (Luke 15:11ff) occurred to me just as I finished writing this section. Certainly he felt that the rules of home were restrictive and so he struck out on his own to a land swelling with permissive entertainment. Did he, upon his devastation and return, serve his father with the same attitude as before? Or did he value his life and its limits with a new found appreciation? We are nothing but prodigals who breath out our thanksgiving to God through our thanksgiving. On this we might also marvel at the penitential demeanor of Augustine who in his *Confessions*, breathes a love for God and his grace that summons response from us as well.

^{xix} John R.W. Stott, "Reaching Unreached People—An Evaluation and a Challenge," *Evangelism* (Cedarburg: Concordia, Nov. 1987), p.10. Slott says, "All this sounds very alien to our twentieth century evangelical ears. Where is the willingness to suffer today? Our evangelical tendency to triumphalism, we often overlook the necessity of tribulation...The Gospel is still foolishness to the intellectually proud, and it's still a stumbling block to those who think they can save themselves...So I want to ask you, as I ask myself, are we ready for the pain of being ridiculed? Are we ready for the loneliness of being ostracized? Are we ready to die to popularity and to promotion and to climbing the ladder of the institution to which we belong ...? We don't think of mission in terms of the cross." *Ibid.*, p. 9.

^{xx} Is Bonhoeffer right when he says, "In the secular age, God is discontinuous from the world. This is not loss, but gain because it enables the church to return to its proper task: to proclaim the in-breaking of God's kingdom Into the world." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 327. Bonhoeffer knows the world as the one sphere of the Christians' activity, whereas religion in his view allows for two spheres, one which is individual and inward and oriented toward private piety, one which is worldly and in which one may live independent of relationship to God. (Note that this is not talking about the historical Lutheran leaching of two realms meaning church state relationships.) The real question is not, "How secular is the world?" but "How concerned about saving souls is the church?"