Trust

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INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Williams used to say that "at New York cocktail parties, I drink martinis almost as fast as I can snatch them from the tray." He said it was at these parties that he "always had a particularly keen and truly awful sense of impermanence" that, he said, haunts all of us. He called "fear and evasion ... the two little beasts that chase each other's tails in the revolving wirecage of our nervous world."

Fear and Primal Fear aren't just Marky Mark and Richard Gere movies. They're our own home videos, channeled through the little amygdala alarm in our brains. Once that alarm goes off, we experience fear, whether or not there's any good reason to be afraid. Psychiatrist Karl Menninger said that "fear is probably the first emotion experienced" though he added that it's "so inextricably fused and regularly associated [with anger] that it is difficult to make useful distinctions" between them. Overcoming such fear becomes our "first spiritual duty," according to philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev. Freud called fear "the fundamental phenomenon and the central problem of neurosis." According to the National Institute of Mental Health, more than 23 million Americans suffer from serious anxiety, over twice as many as suffer from depression and other psychiatric disorders.

Cognitively speaking, fears and anxiety can be prompted and sustained by lack of trust. They can also be resolved by trust. Psychologically, trust is an absence of anxiety. Philosopher John Dewey once said: "To me, faith [or trust] means not worrying." Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr defined trust as "the final triumph over incongruity." He went on to say that trust is "the final assertion of the meaningfulness of existence."

In April, *Time* headlined: "The real issue this year is which candidate has the character to help us deal with THE NEW AGE OF ANXIETY." But this so-called "new age" of anxiety is just *Time*-ese for age-old anxiety in our own age. It's the anxiety we feel in the pit of our stomachs instead of the anxiety we only read or hear about that's in the pits of other stomachs. *Time* asks: Do we trust Dole or Clinton?

But even as anxiety can be *relieved* by trust, anxiety can be *revived* by trust. After all, trusting is a dependency. It places one in a position of risk, whether real or imagined. The trust may be

misplaced, and we think we're in danger all over again, and consequently we feel anxious. Misplaced trust is not only dangerous in itself, but its painful consequences can foster an unnecessarily fearful resistance to trust even wisely.

Robert Louis Stevenson put the mix of distrust, anger and fear in these words: "A grain of anger or a grain of suspicion produces strange acoustical effects, and makes the ear greedy to remark offense. Hence we find those who have once quarreled carry themselves distantly, and are ever ready to break the truce." The psychiatrist who wrote *Listening to Prozac* asserts that "our capacity for resentment and mistrust seems limitless." [Peter D. Kramer] No wonder only 37 percent of Americans now say that most people can be trusted. That's down by more than a third in 30 years.

The word "trust" sounds good, doesn't it? "Trust" is trusted. That's why the notion of trust sells. Trust even has an 800 number— at least U. S. Trust does. The word "trust" is incorporated into the names of financial institutions and it appears on our money in connection with God. The money itself is backed by nothing but trust. Appeals to trust push everything from the military-industrial complex to condoms: "Build a World of Trust' with Lockheed and have sex with "Ramses. A trusted companion." Trust can be ambiguous and cynical. Double-talking "ex-gay" pamphlets carry American evangelicalism's seal of approval called "the Symbol of Trust." Out-of-office politicians warn us that we should not trust all those politicians "inside the Beltway" even while they're coveting our votes to put themselves inside the Beltway. The so-called Freemen of Montana say government can't be trusted even as they try to set up their own hoax. We say we can't trust what we read in all those national tabloids, but we read them in record numbers— more than any other papers. A college president wrote recently: "We live in what may be the most cynical age in history— and the most gullible .... We Americans are skeptical about many of the things we should believe, while we blindly accept many of the things we should question." [George Roche]

A few months ago I read an article in the travel section of *The New York Times* on an international membership network of thousands of hosts who provide free room and board to thousands of member travelers. The writer began by saying that when she first heard about it, "it sounded too good to be true. I was suspicious of an organization founded on trust— on the implicit understanding that travelers wouldn't steal the silver, and hosts wouldn't wield axes in the night." Finding that this system works well, she happily concludes that "Trust is a sound worldwide currency." Indeed, trust is what one social scientist calls "social capital" that's not unlike financial capital. [Francis Fukuyama] He too, however, warns that the ground for such trust seems to be slipping. All transactions, all relationships, do depend on trust. As another behavioral scientist says: "The only major precondition for dialogue is trust." [James J. Lynch] And such trust, of course, rests in good will and agreed-upon expectations.

But there are people who are unable or unwilling to engage in dialogue because, in fear or in retaliative anger, they can't or won't trust another enough to even begin, in good will, to

negotiate expectations. They hear only themselves. Someone has said "they listen with their mouths." Some don't even do that. Over-trusting in their own voices, they're up for nothing but distrust of others' voices. Healthy relationship is therefore impossible.

Today, psychological research demonstrates the scientific basis of what's been known for ages: "Suspicion is a thing very few people can entertain without letting the hypothesis turn, in their minds, into fact." [David Cort] Said an ancient Latin writer: "Suspicion begets suspicion." [Publilius Syrus] Thoreau put it this way: "We are paid for our suspicions by finding what we suspected."

But then there are those who are not simply honestly unable or frankly unwilling to dialogue. They are the ones who say they're ready to "dialogue" but it's in bad faith and on their terms only. Well, it never has made any sense to give pearls to pigs, as Jesus said. Pigs don't appreciate pearls. United Methodist executive (and lesbian) Jeanne Audrey Powers applies this guidance from Jesus to circumstances in which gay and lesbian clergy find themselves up against ecclesiastical homophobia. Trusting homophobes to be homophobes, she urges a "subversive strategy" including "false claims"— hardly the makings of trust. Powers says that "perhaps there are times when lying, deception, and operating under false pretenses is the most life-giving action, the most faithful response for Christians." What do you think about that? Clouds of witnesses shout "Amen!"— including biblical characters as well as Augustine, Luther, Joseph Fletcher, Corrie ten Boom, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Barbara Jordan, John Howard Yoder, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and on and on. They all have known that some people and purposes are not to be trusted with the truth. We dare not ever forget who's up for what. Well-placed trust is necessary currency for any good relationship, but not everyone is up for that.

We're going to look at trust and trustworthiness as these relate to our connections with each other and ourselves as well as with God. Later we'll discuss the trusting of ideas.

To begin with, let's notice four general observations. 1. Trust is a psychological ability that varies from person to person. 2. Trust is a social phenomenon that varies from culture to culture. 3. There's a difference between trust and trustworthiness. 4. Notions of "trust," so-called, can be manipulation.

1. *Trust is a psychological ability that varies from person to person*. Trust's harder for some of us than for others. That's largely because we've had different experiences of interpersonal relations and we've interpreted these differently. The first year of life is crucial for developing the potential for trust for which we're biochemically prepared during the nine months in our mothers' wombs. But stress can rewire our brain circuits before we can know what in the world to think. The development of our abilities to trust depends thereafter on what happens at these critical periods and on our idiosyncratic and subjective sense of stimuli— touch, sight, and sound between us and our parents, especially in the first 18 months— and, later, in widening worlds of interpersonal experience. All this involves trillions of neural connections. Fortunately, we're not

entirely at the mercy of either our physiological responses or our so-called formative years. We can cognitively intervene to increase our abilities at rational trusting.

2. *Trust is a social phenomenon that varies from culture to culture*. Besides biochemical and personal differences, trust seems to be enculturated differently in different societies. Group identity is also an important influence.

According to Rand research, people in the United States, Germany and Japan may be better conditioned to trust those outside their own immediate families than are people in France, Italy and China. This may be so since Americans, Germans and Japanese are more readily joiners than are the others and it's argued that greater association with others improves the ability to trust. This is a standard view on prejudice, holding that the more interaction one has with others, the less one is likely to stereotype negatively. More experience with others can and should inform our ability to trust. But we can just as easily confirm negative stereotypes with more interaction. We risk seeing only what we're looking for, what fits with our prejudice. Moreover, "many of the small groups that have formed in America over the last two decades have been thoroughly illiberal in spirit: victims' groups, ... minority clubs that have Balkanized the campus and the workplace, pseudoreligious cults with violent agendas." [Fareed Zakaria] We've pushed a mindset of hyphenated identities, groups within groups that never stop demanding to know "What's in it for us?" There's a refusal to see that what we have in common is more important than our differences: "We're queer, we're here, get used to it!" "Gay rights = Special rights!" We've pushed a hyperindividualism that never stops demanding to know "What's in it for me?" "I'm different, therefore, I am!" All such fine-tuned in-your-face isolationism breeds distrust. A former president of the leftist SDS of the '60s now says: "For too long, too many Americans have busied themselves digging trenches to fortify their cultural borders, lining their trenches with insulation. Enough bunkers! Enough of the perfection of differences! We ought to be building bridges!" [Todd Gitlin] A British philosopher observes an "intense public concern about the growing fragility of trust in modern society." He notes that "Traditional reasons for trusting and being trustworthy seem in decline ... as an instrumental notion of rationality spreads." He joins other social observers in recognizing that the use of people as means to ends "breeds distrust, erodes the bonds between us and increases the fragility." Or, as he puts it in a less refined way: "The more people come to believe that it is irrational to give a sucker an even break the more rational it becomes not to be a sucker." [Martin Hollis] All this self-centeredness can, of course, be both symptom and seeming solution of mistrust and anxiety— not to mention, its cause.

3. *There's a difference between trust and trustworthiness*. There's no real connection between the two— there only seems to be. To trust means to count on, to place confidence in, to rely or depend upon. Trust is dependent on expectations. They may or may not be reasonable expectations. Trust, as an action of confidence, always requires a corresponding object of confidence: that in whom or in what we trust. It makes no sense to speak of trusting without speaking of the object of that trust. There is no free-floating trust, no trust-in-the-abstract. If "to

trust" is "to count on," then the question is: "On whom?" or "On what?" It was always silly for Julie Andrews to celebrate "confidence in confidence alone!"

Trustworthiness is independent of expectations of trust. The object of trust may or may not be worthy of trust. So just because you trust someone doesn't make her trustworthy and just because you don't trust someone doesn't make him untrustworthy. Both the trustworthy and the untrustworthy are trusted by someone— for this or for that— and both the untrustworthy and the trustworthy are distrusted by someone— for this or for that. Neither trust nor distrust is validity of trustworthiness.

Trust and distrust can be irrational as well as rational. Both irrational trust as well as irrational distrust can get us into trouble. Therefore, we have responsibilities not only to distrust the untrustworthy but, at times, to distrust our distrust itself.

Trust is the story of the one who trusts, whether or not it's reasonable trust. Trustworthiness is the story of the one in whom trust is placed.

What we trust determines our experience. What we feel and what we see our way clear to do or not to do depends on what we tell ourselves about the trustworthiness of someone or something. Let me illustrate this with your own experience of the next few moments. I'm going to read just two sentences from Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. Notice that it's what you are telling yourself— notions that you trust—that will determine your reaction to Dillard's words. She writes: "To travel from camp to camp in summer, coastal Eskimos ply the open seas in big umiaks paddled by women. They eat fish, goose or duck eggs, fresh meat, and anything else they can get, including fresh 'salad' of greens." What's your reaction so far? It's fine, right? Now let me read the rest of her sentence, starting over with "They eat fish, goose or duck eggs, fresh meat, and anything else they can get, including fresh 'salad' of greens still raw in a killed caribou's stomach and dressed with the delicate acids of digestion." You see, what we feel or see our way clear to do or not to do does depend on what we're telling ourselves. The Eskimos trust what they think about the "salad" and we trust what we think about the "salad." So the Eskimos see their way clear to eat it and we don't. Our mindset sets our trust— without regard to "objectivity."

4. *Notions of "trust" so called, can be manipulation*. A closer look at popular usage of the term, "trust," reveals that we tend to say we "trust" when really, we mean we are looking to get what we want. We tend to say we "don't trust" when we mean we don't expect to get what we want. So trust and distrust can be two sides of the same agenda about getting our way. When some people say they can't trust you, they're using what functions as an accusation, as a weapon, in retaliation for not getting their way or as intimidation in order to get their way after all. Either way, they're up to no good.

Apart from interpersonal manipulation in the name of "trust," there is also institutional and ideological manipulation in the name of "trust." A plane crashes and the media rush to judgment

with provocative questions such as: “Can we trust the FAA?” A priest molests an altar boy and the headlines shout: “Can we trust the Catholic Church?” Someone shoots an abortion doctor and the media raise questions about the sanity of the entire pro-life movement. In his new book, *Feeding the Beast*, the senior White House correspondent for *U.S. News and World Report* criticizes such manipulation of trust saying that “journalists too often have filtered out the good, embellished the bad and produced a distorted image.” He says journalists “have too much attitude ... too often rush to judgment ... and are too negative.” [Kenneth Walsh] Most of the religious press, the gay press, and other special interest journalism is no less manipulative of trust.

And if even sincerely held prejudices predetermine the perceived trustworthiness of anyone or anything, imagine what one is up against when one is at the mercy of truly malicious gossip that never gets anything straight. Manipulated half-truths, innuendo, and the “insinuations [that] are the rhetoric of the devil” [Goethe] set limits on trust and perceived trustworthiness that are usually impossible to prevent or overcome since such gossip knows and cares nothing for the fuller truth that never catches up with the powerful impressions left by the gossip.

So what have we said in these four general observations to begin with? We’ve seen that trust is a psychological ability that varies from person to person, that trust is a social phenomenon that can vary from culture to culture and can be influenced by group identity, that trust and trustworthiness are not the same things, and that sometimes so-called “trust” and distrust can be interpersonal, institutional and ideological manipulation. Now let’s move on to discuss trusting each other, ourselves and God. Later we’ll examine the trusting of ideas.

TRUSTING EACH OTHER

Who can we trust? We hear all sorts of advice on this. Remember Oscar Wilde’s Lord Illingworth? He was that obnoxious wit who was finally dubbed “a man of no importance” by the one he’d put down as “a woman of no importance.” He asserted that “One should never trust a woman who tells one her age. A woman who would tell one that would tell one anything.” And so would Lord Illingworth! And so he did! Back in the 1960s, when some of us were still under 30, we used to say: “Don’t trust anyone over 30.” Recently some well-scrubbed midwestern teens heard their New York hotel doorman shorten that warning to “Don’t trust anyone!” On the one hand, we’re all susceptible to being unduly-distrustful. Such cynicism is cowardice, however. It’s not rational; it’s rash. We’re prone to a xenophobia, an unreasonable fear, contempt or distrust of those we see as “different.” It’s “us” versus “them”— whether put in terms of “pride” (e.g. “the brothers,” “people of color,” “the Aryan race,” “womyn,” etc.) or in terms of hateful putdown (e.g. “the kike,” “the goy,” “the nigger,” “the fag,” etc.) It’s “us” versus the un-“us”— interracial, interethnic, intergenerational, interreligious, etc.

On the other hand, we’re all quite susceptible to being unduly trustful. Such gullibility is foolhardy. It’s not rational; it’s rash. Do you know people who trust that those who gossip with

them about others won't gossip with others about them? Do you know people who, before using strangers for sex, make sure to ask them about their HIV status— as if one can reasonably trust a stranger to tell the truth in such a situation?

How can we overcome our unreasonable distrust that, in effect, reinforces anxiety even while it's intended to protect against it? How can we become more reasonably trusting and thereby overcome the anxiety that is the source and symptom of distrust? And how can we avoid the hare-brained trusting that not only puts us in immediate danger but also sets us up for a far too hair-triggered suspicion thereafter?

I'd like to recommend that we keep in mind three basic truths of a rational trust. 1. Rational trust keeps perspective. 2. Rational trust expects imperfection. 3. Rational trust assumes some degree of unawareness.

1. *Rational trust keeps perspective*. It has a sense of proportion, even a sense of humor. Rational trust makes room for both/and and is suspicious of too much either/or. It resists expectations of all-or-nothing. Rational trust knows how to subsume what is less significant under what is more significant. Rational trust is specific rather than generalized or abstract. It is contextual. It realizes that whatever is taken out of context cannot be trusted as though it's still in context.

We hear someone complain: "Sharon can't be trusted." That news can raise some anxiety about Sharon. But then we hear. "She can't be trusted; she's always late!" She's *always* late? Then Sharon can be trusted to be late. We'd better count on it. We'd better take it into consideration in making plans to meet her for lunch. We'll take along something to read while waiting for her, or we'll delay our own arrival to be in sync with Sharon s predictably late arrival. Nonetheless, her repeated tardiness doesn't mean that she can't be trusted to pay her fair share of the bill or be generally pleasant company. Evidence may well indicate that she can be trusted to do this in these circumstances, but that she can be trusted to do that in those circumstances. We'll miscalculate if we paint her trustworthiness or untrustworthiness with too broad a brush. Trust must be specific and contextual, not abstract and all-or-nothing because trustworthiness is specific and contextual, not abstract and all-or-nothing. Trustworthiness is hardly ever as simple as trust wants it to be.

You've heard people caution against trusting a stranger. That's silly. I trust every stranger— to be a stranger— who will get stranger before getting more familiar. You can trust every stranger to be a stranger. You'd better do that, no matter who you might wish her to turn out to be, no matter how cute you think he is. Eventually, through observation and screening, testing - but not without the distraction of self-interest— you'll learn who the person is typically, under these or under those conditions. You'll then be able to trust this person to be who you've learned she or he is.

When we demand that someone be *all* we want him to be, we'll be in danger of regarding him to be *nothing* when we discover he's not *all* we want him to be. When the religious right, for

example, demands that Presidential candidates be all it wants to count on, inevitably, some flaws will be found. The religious right then complains that "none of the Republican candidates for president is 'really one of us,"' that "we're passing through still another election cycle ... without a serious representative of evangelical thought and action." [Joel Belz] This complaint is the actual wording of an editorial in the religious right press. But this lack of trust on the part of the editor does not mean that several candidates were not, in fact, very conservative Christians.

In the recent Taiwan presidential election, most Christians did not vote for President Lee Teng-hui even though he is a good Presbyterian in a country that is only 2 percent Christian. Christians complained that he's not to be trusted. Why? Because he stopped speaking of his Christian faith and attended Buddhist and Taoist temples during his campaign. The erroneous thinking was that if he's not to be trusted to keep speaking of his Christian faith and avoid campaigning at non-Christian centers, he's not to be trusted as president. Their irrational thinking is illustrated by an ironic perversion of a signature motto of the Apostle Paul. As one disgruntled Christian put it, Lee "has become all things to all men and is a disappointment to the Christian community."

These two were illustrations of the error of all-or-nothing trust or distrust on the Christian right. Here's one on the Christian left. In a review of *The New Testament of the Inclusive Language Bible*, a Christian feminist objects to its retaining the term "Son" in "Son of Humanity," a substitute for "Son of Man." She objects to the capitalizing of "He" and "His" with reference to Jesus. She faults the work for its saying that the disciples saw "a man" instead of "someone" casting out demons. Isn't it enough that *anyone* was casting out demons? She complains that all "this is off-putting enough to render the volume useless" and she says she "cannot ... recommend it." It must either be all she wants or it's "useless!"

The man many consider to have been the greatest theologian of the 20th century— Karl Barth— was a very complicated man of both tremendous Christian insight and personal flaws. He was not all-or-nothing. Nobody is. One of his wisest observations was that God's yes to us is really a nevertheless. We'd all be more wisely prepared for our interpersonal trusting of each other if we'd remember that our yes to each other should really be a nevertheless. However, that's not often what we do. Our all-or-nothing irrationality awfulizes, personalizes, and otherwise extrapolates the worst as the whole of the story. And this, of course, destroys trust.

In his *Virginibus Puerisque*, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote. "Let but a doubt arise, and alas! all the previous intimacy and confidence is but another charge against the person doubted. *'What a monstrous dishonesty is this if I have been deceived so long and so completely!'* Let but that thought gain entrance, and you plead before a deaf tribunal. Appeal to the past; why, that is your crime! Make all clear, convince the reason, alas! speciousness is but a proof against you. *'If you can abuse me now, the more likely that you have abused me from the first."*

We also can make the mistake of thinking that because someone can be trusted to be a generally good person, all her opinions, for example, are likewise good and can be trusted to be opinions

we should adopt. (Or, if the person is generally nasty, we can make the mistake of thinking that none of her opinions is any good at all.) But even a person of integrity can be mistaken at times— *will* be mistaken at times. At times we all can behave in ways that confuse or bewilder others as well as ourselves. However, this need not destroy basic trust. Wisdom knows that trust in a person's basic integrity can override the relatively less important mistakes, poor judgment, and seemingly inexplicable behavior while nonetheless not completely ignoring these.

In one of Thomas Carlyle's unpublished letters, we have an illustration of such uncommon wisdom. He replies to Mary Rich, a friend who had written with concern about his and his wife's health. Rich had offered a homeopathic remedy for Carlyle's sick wife. He writes back: "My wife thanks you much. She will swallow any *infinitesimal* dose from so kind a Doctor, and be quite sure of benefit from the sound of a friendly voice, from the light of friendly eyes: but as to Homeopathy, she is, I fear, hopelessly skeptical, not to say altogether incredulous." Rich was trusted for her familiar kindness, but her strange remedy was not. The Carlyles had the good sense and the good will to distinguish between their friend's kindness and her medical recommendation. As William James said, "The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook."

Here's now an example where trust in a person's basic integrity overrides not only innocent disagreement, as in the Carlyles' case, but even seemingly inexplicable behavior. Most scholars don't like the fact that after the Second World War, the German Jewish debunker of totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt, reconciled with the Nazi-sympathizing philosopher Martin Heidegger, her mentor and ex-lover. A French philosopher wisely notes that "There is a concept that is very important in Hannah Arendt's thinking. It's the concept of friendship. When you read her, you get this feeling of friendship, and that's one of the reasons she is so highly praised .... It's as if when reading her, we are becoming friends with her. But friendship means trust. So if she decided to reconcile herself with Heidegger, I trust her. I want to know her reasons, but I have confidence in her." He trusted *her* even against the seeming evidence, even when he didn't really know her reasons and assumes that he would not approve of them if he did know them. He trusted *her*.

The fuller context for reasonable trust can be wider and deeper than any alleged "evidence" against trustworthiness, whether that "evidence" is based on malicious gossip or a misconstrued eyewitness experience. Said Stevenson: "Truth to facts is not always truth to sentiment; and part of the truth ... may be the foulest calumny .... The whole tenor of a conversation is a part of the meaning of each separate statement; ... truth in spirit, not truth to letter, is the true veracity." And yet there are those who have destroyed relationship by reducing the whole of a friendship to their too-trusting reading of one moment torn from the context by personalizing or by gossip or by exaggeration or by plain old miscommunication. C. S. Lewis said: "To love involves trusting the beloved beyond the evidence, even against the evidence. No one is our friend who believes in our good intentions only when they are proved. No one is our friend who will not be very slow to accept evidence against them." Isn't this what Hannah Arendt did with Martin Heidegger? Isn't

it what her French admirer did with her? Isn't it what Jesus did with the one who said "Lord, I trust; help my lack of trust?" Isn't it what Jesus did with Peter when he entrusted this so-humanly both/and apostle with the building of the church?

2. *Rational trust expects imperfection*. It's particularly perverse of Christians who recite prayers of confession of sin at each weekly worship service and pray that "Our Father ... forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" to nonetheless reject and refuse to trust or really forgive those whose lives show that they too are sinners. One would think that Christians would know better than to expect that anyone's life is other than "wheat and tares together sown." Rational trust expects imperfection in the object of trust as well as in the trusting self. Rational trust expects certain imperfection even in the trusting. Expectations for impossibly "perfect" people and relationships not only destroy people and relationships, but such expectations destroy even the very possibility of covenant or commitment. In reality of course, the so-called perfection of perfectionism is imperfect. It is, itself, flawed because it is a fraud, a fantasy, an illusion. It is not to be trusted as a reflection of any reality. But since we make it all up to look perfect to ourselves, in terms of our own short-sightedness, we will mislead and disappoint ourselves when the fantasy never materializes.

To expect imperfection doesn't mean that we're settling for imperfection. To settle would mean that we're making do with something less than an available perfection. But perfection isn't available. So we're not settling or lowering our standards. Imperfection is the best any of us can do. There's actually no lower standard than perfectionism, since the presumed perfection of perfectionism is a delusion.

We do people no favor when we put them up on our god shelf. It's bad for us and bad for them, for they are not gods. When we weigh them down with ridiculous burdens of perfectionism, they will fall under these unwarranted weights and then— hurt and anxious and frustrated and angry that they're mere mortals— we'll bitterly denounce them as "untrustworthy." And of course they are "untrustworthy" in that they cannot be trusted to live up to our own unrealistic expectations of perfectionism. But we should know better. Especially as those who are among the people who take the Bible seriously. After all, doesn't the very first Commandment warn us against trusting in any gods but God? Among the last words the venerable George MacDonald ever wrote was this wise sentence: "The most degrading wrong to ourselves, and the worst eventual wrong to others, is to trust in anything or person but the living God."

Listen to the sobering confessions of Mike Yaconelli, senior editor of *The Door*, a sort of evangelical Mad magazine. Yaconelli says that "The more time I spent with the people I admired, the more flawed they became. Damn them!" He says that he "was angry— outraged that yet another 'extra-ordinary' person who I'd looked up to turned out to be 'ordinary.' Another mentor was flawed ... a lot more flawed than I wanted him to be. Admiration turned to disappointment. Disappointment turned to anger." The anger at a person's not living up to unreasonably perfectionistic expectations then turns to distrust. Believing that one could be safe

only within the other person's perfection, one suffers anxiety at the "loss" of such "safety." Yaconelli goes on: "How dare they disappoint me! They were supposed to be godly, spiritual, radiant, organized, patient, loving, humble, peaceful, sensitive, caring, pure, wise, kind, simple, secure saints. And many of them did possess those qualities. But at the same time, they were insecure, neurotic, demanding, insensitive, unstable, lonely, depressed, melancholy, dysfunctional, self-absorbed, inconsistent sinners. They were *ambiguous!* ... Damn them!" He realizes that "What bothered me about my knowledge of these people was that they were neither saint nor sinner. They were both, damn them! *Both!*" Of course.

These all-or-nothing expectations are especially tempting when it comes to expectations for those who are in the spiritual or helping vocations. In his book, *Married to the Church*, an Indiana University English professor observes: "As a culture, we tend to acknowledge the humanity of priests only when it reflects our own best side, our selves stripped of our flaws or failings. We do not readily extend recognition or acceptance to any complex, ambiguous form of behavior in them or to any other trait facilely labeled 'darker'— i.e., we imagine them as free of those aspects of human nature from which we would love to be free, and we get angry when they turn out not to be exempt." He goes on to say that "The cultural assumption that priests are fundamentally 'other' thus damages us as much as it damages them; the basic difference we impute to them does not serve to keep alive our idealism so much as it keeps alive in us the illusory possibility of a superhuman immunity we can continue passively to admire or long for. The otherness of the priest has become a psychic utopia, a realm we can visit and admire that ends up rendering us discontent with our own grubby terrain but no better equipped or inclined to till it." [Raymond Hedin]

No wonder the founder of *The Catholic Worker*, Dorothy Day, used to say: "Don't call me a saint! I don't want to be dismissed so easily." There is a cruel naïvete in both the idolization of Mother Teresa and Christopher Hitchens' trashing of her. Of course Mother Teresa is not a mere saint. Of course Dorothy Day was not a mere saint. They're both/and— like everyone else, though perhaps not necessarily in the same proportions.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote critically of those who "have an eye for faults and failures, who take pleasure to find and publish them, and who forget the overveiling virtues and the real success." His spirited defense of Father Damien, the Catholic missionary to the lepers of Molokai, following a Protestant missionary's mean attack on the priest was written, at considerable risk, to put into perspective the fuller story of one who died in the service of others. (Later, Stevenson felt that he had, himself, been too one-sided about the Protestant missionary.) Stevenson knew that "There are many ... who require their heroes and saints to be infallible" and he wrote that "to these the story [of Damien] will be painful." But, Stevenson wrote, it won't be painful "to the true lovers, patrons, and servants of mankind" who know better than to assess in all-or-nothing terms. He noted that "ten thousand bad traits cannot make a single good one any the less good." In a later letter to his good friend, Sir Sidney Colvin, Stevenson said that Damien was, indeed, as he'd been maliciously portrayed by the Protestant missionary, "dirty, bigoted,

untruthful, unwise, tricky, but [nevertheless also] superb with generosity, residual candour and fundamental good humour .... A man, with all the grime and paltriness of mankind, but a saint and hero all the more for that."

For all Carl Jung could be trusted to make significant contributions to the welfare of his patients and to the emerging field of psychotherapy, he too was a man who was both/and. For example, he continued to have sexual affairs with other women even from the first day of his marriage. He maintained one of these sexual relationships, one with a former patient, for the rest of his life. In her review of a recent Jung biography, Victoria Funk grants that "Jung could be foul-mouthed, abusive and insulting. He was notoriously bullying and authoritarian" but she concludes by stating: "If, in the end, we find it difficult to reconcile Dr. Carl Jung the Great Thinker with Dr. Carl Jung the Great Creep, the problem probably lies in our own need to keep our heroes safely on their pedestals."

A new biography of the late Anglo/Catholic-Evangelical (and homosexual) Bishop of Southwark, the popular pulpit preacher Mervyn Stockwood, sums him up thusly: "Often predictable, he was even more frequently unfathomable. There are few tints or shades. He could be immensely kind and considerate, cruel and rude; by turns funny and exasperating, pompous and humble." A new biography of G. K. Chesterton shows him to have been a man of sadistic rage as well as loving generosity. A new biography of Bertrand Russell presents him as both a tireless worker for international peace and an egotistical abuser in interpersonal relations.

In our greedy and angrily litigious society, it's rare to hear such gracious good sense as that which was recently expressed in a *Newsweek* "My Turn" essay by Alden Blodget. He tells of his responses following his father's bleeding to death after elective knee surgery. The doctors gave his father too large a dose of an anticoagulant. As Blodget met with these doctors, he says that he realized that they were not the "gods or magicians" we want them to be. "They were men—imperfect and fallible— frightened to appear so in a society that expects perfection and infallibility from its professionals, especially its doctors." He goes on to say that "These men were just like the rest of us. ... They'd made mistakes that they could see only in hindsight, the perspective from which society makes its judgments. In hindsight, everything is obvious." Blodget concludes by saying that "to sue someone for failing to be the god we wanted strikes me as wrong. Why is it that we know so little ourselves yet expect so much from others? We refuse to recognize the flimsy curtain that separates the intention from the result." .

All these living examples illustrate the caution of one Christian spiritual director who states: "Mature trust has open eyes; it is not naive .... At times others will betray our trust; we will betray theirs, and perhaps even our very own." Perfection is not what's "the essence of being human." [George Orwell] We must trust that we're all mixed bags. We all make mistakes. Who'd want to be a stone saint? Who'd want anyone else to be a stone saint? Robert Frost put it in these words: "To err is human, not to, animal." "You will always do wrong," said Stevenson, "You must try to get used to that .... Our business in this world is not to succeed, but to continue

to fail in good spirits." We must trust all others to be our failing fellows. Stevenson knew that we're all both Jekyll and Hyde. His Dr. Jekyll said of his Mr. Hyde: "This, too, was myself." Commenting on Jekyll and Hyde, Chesterton observed: "The real stab of the story is not in the discovery that one man is two men; but in the discovery that the two men are one man."

3. *Rational trust assumes some degree of unawareness*. In any case that calls for trust, we should know that we don't know it all. We don't know everything we might think we do. We don't know all we might wish to know. And we should know that we're not without our own agenda. Much of it, too, escapes our clear understanding if not our awareness altogether. There are times when we have only misinformation. But we don't realize this because what we have to go on is even disinformation, the rotten fruit of malicious gossip, half-truths, or innuendo. We mistakenly trust this to be "the whole truth and nothing but the truth." Even when we're aware that we probably don't have all the information— and perhaps especially when we know we don't— a habituated distrust can take over all reason. The books of Richard Condon (*The Manchurian Candidate*, *Prizzi's Honor*, etc.) are all so dark and conspiratorial that one reviewer coined what's now called Condon's Law: "When you don't know the whole truth, the worst you can imagine is bound to be close." Do we too readily resort to such a poor approach in our

own interpersonal relations? Whatever we see or hear, it's never the whole story. That's true of what we see or hear that we don't like as well as of what we don't see or hear but wouldn't like if we did. That's true of what we see or hear that we like as well as of what we don't see or hear but would like if we did.

After seven hours on the set for ABC's coverage of the recent national election, newsman David Brinkley was evidently unaware he was still on the air when he told his colleagues that Americans were in for four more years of "god-damned nonsense" from the President. The veteran commentator went on to denounce Clinton by saying that he "has not a creative bone in his body" and "therefore he is a bore and always will be a bore." Two days later, at the beginning of a previously-scheduled interview with the President, Brinkley apologized for what he termed his "impolite and unfair" comments. President Clinton smiled and observed wisely: "I always believe you have to judge people on their whole work, and if you get judged based on your whole work, you come out way ahead." Most of us— as well as our friends and foes— are not in danger of speaking into an open microphone on national television. We all know, though, that we do say unflattering things about others. We should trust that things are said about us that we wouldn't find flattering. It's true, too, that we say nice things about others who never hear what we say. We may also trust that nice things are said about us and we never hear about them. We just never know what all is being said. Trusting that much of all kinds is being said— unless nothing at all is being said— we move on. We shouldn't trip ourselves up over everything we do know about because there's plenty we don't know about and we get on just the same. Even negative comments about us— of which we know so little— are made by those who wouldn't necessarily see them as representative of their basic view of us, any more than we believe that what negative remarks we may make about them represent our basic view of them. At any rate,

Pascal was undoubtedly right when he said that "If everyone knew what each said of the other, there would not be four friends in the world."

Well then, what is the relevance for trusting someone's good will to us after we hear that he said something unflattering about us outside our hearing? Probably not much, perhaps zero. Sadly, though, we probably won't act on that.

Rational trust that must assume some unawareness can be put in Christian perspective when we recall that Francois Mauriac mused prayerfully: "There would be no idiots and no bores for us if we could see far enough into this part of them, the part which You know and where You are."

Another way in which awareness of unawareness must be factored into rational interpersonal trust is to realize that relationships of trust rest upon implicit as well as explicit expectations. We make the mistake of thinking that what's said covers all expectations. It does not. Besides the fact that what one means to say must be what is heard— and that is not always the case— research shows that "the essential core of all dialogue ... remains nonverbal." [James J. Lynch] Our own internal "contractual" monologues are so immediately experiential to us that we fail to realize that they may remain, nonetheless, one-sided contracts that are not readily, if at all, apparent to others. The seeming mutuality of such "contracts" is an *assumed* mutuality, not necessarily an actual mutuality. We're all then caught off guard when these unspoken and unnegotiated expectations don't get fulfilled.

Gabriel Marcel has said that "To believe in someone" or "to place confidence in him, is to say 'I am sure that you will not betray my hope, that you will respond to it, that you will fulfill it.'" And that, at first glance, seems quite a reasonable idea of trust. But not so fast. There may be unexamined expectations here, unspecified predictions in the mind of the one who is placing trust. Just what is the content of Marcel's "hope?" Notice that he refers to it as "my hope." Just what is the "it" to which response is expected? Here's the self-talk of the one who places trust, but it remains to be seen whether it's clearly communicated or agreed upon by the one who is expected to fulfill the trust. Is the person in whom trust is placed for this or for that "hope" responsible to fulfill that hope? And if that one does not do so, is he or she betraying trust? Is he or she untrustworthy unless the hope is realized? The answer too often is a naive yes. Unfortunately, relationships can be destroyed through disappointment, fear, and anger arising from just such failures to adequately appreciate the impact of the implicit expectations of one party in a relationship.

A research psychologist correctly states that "If either person becomes unpredictable in areas of behavior crucial to the other person then trust is placed in jeopardy. This can happen if both components of the contract, the implicit commitments and the explicit commitments, are not adhered to." [Lynch] He explains that "even in the most clear-cut types of human interactions, there are implicit commitments ... which the parties themselves may not even be aware of." Social psychologist David Myers agrees, saying: "to a striking degree, the misperceptions of

those in conflict are mutual." He adds: "Each party's misperception triggers behavior that reinforces the misperception, creating a vicious circle of conflict." He says that "such diabolical images tend to be self-confirming"— hardly conducive to the trust that either party has had in mind.

All of this applies as well to matters of intentions or motives— so often associated with matters of trust and distrust— but so often these motives and intentions are matters of unawareness. We trust that we know our own intentions. We may know some of them. We don't know them all. But, with Aristotle, we do know that "All that we do is done with an eye to something else." And motives are not only mixed. Motives are complex. Said Coleridge: "No one does anything from a single motive." Moreover, no matter what mixed and multiple motives we may have, our actions may produce indirect or even contrary results. As Chesterton reminds us, we're "not only bad from good motives, but also good from bad motives." For example, trying to meet our needs for sexual intimacy, there are times when we've all misbehaved. And at other times, we've all refrained from such misbehavior largely out of a fear of rejection.

We also trust that we know another person's intentions. We may know some of them and we may not. But we don't know them all. What is more, we may not know the other's most significant motives— though we may trust erroneously that we do. Our own agendas, our own experience and expectations, and our ignorance of the other's, our confusing him or her with someone else— all these and more factors may blind us to the other's major motives. At any rate, all that person's motives are also mixed and multiple. Furthermore, someone has cautioned that "We are not more ingenious in searching out bad motives for good actions when performed by others, than good motives for bad actions when performed by ourselves." [Charles Caleb Colton] So we need to keep all this in mind in matters of trust and distrust. All these observations— of ourselves and of others— add up to circumstances of serious ignorance or unawareness. Rational trust at least must be aware of the inevitability of unawareness, even if unaware of particulars.

Clearly, too much attention is too often paid to motives. In H. L. Mencken's view, "The value the world sets upon motives is often grossly unjust and inaccurate." In her novel, *Middlemarch*, George Eliot pens these lines: "We must not inquire too curiously into motives. ... They are apt to become feeble in the utterance: the aroma is mixed with the grosser air. We must keep the germinating grain away from the light." After all, whatever the intentions, whatever mixed and complex motives are discovered or not— how much can we really know? Besides, whatever motives there may be, they do not account for all the unintended effects.

The unawareness assumed in rational trust includes the common unawareness of our being wrong this time and of another's being right. We need to be open to an awareness that, by definition, we're unaware of our own mistaken perceptions. But let's get into the habit of granting that we might be wrong this time and he or she might be right. Trust, and therefore relationship, suffers when we're wrong and don't realize it and when the other's right and we

don't realize it. Usually there are ways in which we're both wrong and we're both right. At the end of his long life, Mauriac penned these wise words: " ... it is to the degree that we admit not only that the enemy may be right, partially from his viewpoint, but to the willingness we also admit that we ourselves are capable of error, that we will move in his direction and that he will consent to move toward us." But a blind, self-righteous cocksureness knows nothing of such a spirit and so will not move into a fuller awareness of the truth and the re-establishment of trust for relationship.

All of these observations on rational trust of each other— the specific contexts of trust, the imperfections that must be expected and the unawarenesses that must be assumed— lead us to conclude that rational trust is *trust within limits*. Rational trust is trust within the limits of circumstances, experience, abilities, knowledge, wisdom, communication, and even limitations of good will. These many limits result in a basic limit on control. Since trusting is an effort at controlling outcomes for one's perceived benefit, an effort to overcome the fear that we're otherwise in danger, trust within limits is less than we want to trust trust to be. Trust within limits is hardly the unconditional trust we think we need to be able to place in another person and think another person needs to be able to place in us. However, trust within limits better be what we need, and it better be what that other person needs, for interpersonal trust within limits is the only trust that's possible in this world. Trust within limits is trust within reality. Trust without limits is trust without reality. If we place ourselves out of touch with reality, however difficult and obscure that reality may be, we thus place ourselves out of touch with each other. But if we trust within these limits, we'll be able to place ourselves in touch with each other. To be realistically in touch with each other is, after all, what trusting each other is all about.

TRUSTING ONESELF

If I were to ask you if you trust yourself, what would your answer be? Do you trust you? Yes? No? You don't know? You're not sure? Sometimes? Most of the time? All the time? Do you realize that you're trusting yourself even as you try to answer this question? It may be surprising for you to think of it this way but each of you trusts yourself all the time. You can't help it. We trust ourselves when we trust other people and ideas, for we trust them. We trust ourselves even when we distrust other people and ideas, for we distrust them. We're always trusting ourselves. How can we not?

Psychiatrist Robert Coles says that he's found, in the testimonies of disillusioned former Catholic seminarians, "a way of thinking [that] promotes a ... skepticism of anyone and anything except its own validity." I read of a Fuller Seminary professor who is frustrated with his first-year students who confront him with a know-it-all attitude that knows nothing of the history of Christian theology before the time of their own brand of fundamentalism. [Miroslav Volf] Mennonite New Testament scholar Reta Finger reports that at Messiah College, she "run[s] into problems with some of the conservative students who may not know what's in the Bible any more than students to the Left of them." She says "They think they do, but with the sort of

literalism with which they approach [the Bible] they do very little contextualizing .... They say, this is the word of God without any error— but then they also assume that the way they interpret it is without any error. This kind of view leads to the attitude that 'We're right, and if you don't think the way we think, you're wrong.'" A Duke University theology professor says that his liberal students combine a "radical suspicion of historic, institutionally embodied faith with a naive faith in [their own] ability to think for [them]selves." [William H. Willimon] Robert Louis Stevenson once put it in these words: "Every man is his own doctor of divinity, in the last resort." Of course. When all is said and done, we all trust ourselves - always and in all ways.

But is this wise? Dare we put such trust in our ability to think for ourselves, to judge for ourselves? Is our sense of anything really trustworthy? If it isn't, how can we hope to answer these questions?

In a sense, we have no choice. Little by little, ever since our first year of life, we've been conditioned to trust in our own perceptions of anything. We're in an ever reinforcing but closed circuit of interpreted experience after interpreted experience in which we trust. And we not only trust our perceptions but we universalize our perceptions so that we make no distinction between our experience and what we call "reality." Our subjective experience is not perceived as different from what we may think of as "objectivity." We extrapolate from our versions of ourselves and everything else and irrationally assume that our versions are the same as others' versions.

Social psychological studies show that "we are never in an intellectual vacuum, thinking free of the control of prior thought. Our basic belief system ... shapes our interpretation of everything else ... In every area of human thinking our prior beliefs bias our perceptions, interpretations, and memories." [David Myers] But we're so easily unaware of both the connections and the disconnections. A Nobel-winning psychologist explains that we construct a simplified model of the real situation in order to deal with it." Even when we behave in an understandable way relative to this constructed model, our behavior, he says, "is not even approximately optimal with respect to the real world." [Herbert Simon] Freud himself warned that even psychoanalysis gives us an untrustworthy sense of certainty because it relies on what is, after all, only a reconstruction— what someone has called "the foxed narration"— of the past. And though some who don't know better think that hypnosis can "recover memory," the truth is that hypnosis is particularly efficacious in creating false memory. Moreover, the more we "give verbal or written witness to something," no matter how much we may be in doubt at first, the more we'll "generally begin to believe" what we're saying. [David Myers] So it's not a bit funny when one observer points out with some wit that "she who remembers the past is condemned to repeat it." [Verlyn Klinkerborg] Klinkerborg reminds us that "some of the most hideous acts of this century have been committed in the name of memory, and the past, as Orwell knew, is as pliable in its uses as the future."

Mark Twain, who wrote a number of memoirs, acknowledged to William Dean Howells that "autobiography ... inevitably consists mainly of extinctions of the truth, shirkings of the truth,

partial revealments of the truth, with hardly an instance of plain straight truth" and went on to say that autobiography is nonetheless "the truest of all books!" He said that the truth is there "between the lines." But we don't write between the lines and those who read between the lines are, themselves, their own authors. In a reappraisal of retrospective reports, published recently in the *Psychological Bulletin*, researchers conclude that autobiographical memory involves a "constant process of selection, revision, and reinterpretation." In other words, we're not to be trusted to be as fair, objective, generous, sensitive to others as we think we are. But it's worse than even this.

Psychological experiments on illusory thinking reveal that an even "artificially constructed belief about reality feels much like an objectively correct belief." We find it difficult, even impossible, to tell the difference. Researchers from Harvard and the University of Arizona report in the journal *Neuron* that people cannot tell the difference between an accurate memory and a mistaken memory. They feel the same. But PET scans reveal temporal lobe activity in true memories and an absence of such activity in false memory. Research subjects believed that they could trust their memories in every situation "remembered" even though 58 percent of the time what they "remembered" was demonstrably false. The line between the truly remembered and the merely imagined is both complicated and fragile and it is quickly dissolved in the brain.

The 16th century Carmelite mystic, Teresa of Avila, did not have to wait for confirmation from PET scans to have the good sense to caution that we "consider the memory no better than a mad man, and leave it alone with its folly, for God alone can check its extravagances."

Today, there are those who urge us to listen to what they all-too-confidently assure us is our "inner child." But we do well to ask: Just whose voice do we hear? Nobody was ever more companioned through life by both the joy and the pain of his childhood than was Robert Louis Stevenson: "I always have some childishness on hand." But the poet knew what "inner child" promoters seem to miss. In one of his "Songs of Travel," he wrote: "Sing me a song of a lad that is gone, / Say, could that lad be I? ... Give me the eyes, give me the soul, / Give me the lad that's gone!" But alas, says he: "All that was good, all that was fair, / All that was me is gone." All that *was* me is gone. Of course, not *all*; but, yes, all that was. And in his "Envoys" he wrote "To Any Reader," a postscript poem usually printed at the end of any collection of his poetry. He pictures himself as the child he was, at play in his parents' garden in Edinburgh. But he warns: " ... do not think you can at all, / By knocking on the window, call / That child to hear you .... He does not hear; he will not look, / Nor yet be lured out of this book. / For long ago, the truth to say, / He has grown up and gone away, / And it is but a child of air / that lingers in the garden there." In *Memories and Portraits*, Stevenson writes of "Memories of childhood and youth ... the face of what was once myself ... my own young face (which is a face of the dead)." And in another work, RLS lamented the loss of "that little, beautiful brother whom we once all had, and whom we have all lost and mourned: the man we ought to have been, the man we hoped to be." One's childhood is lost, even if childishness and childlikeness remain, as he said elsewhere: "when [one] is already old and honoured, and Lord Chancellor of England."

The other day I was reading a mental health journal and I came across a statement that's right on target— almost. (That's not bad for a mental health journal these days.) The author— founder and medical director of a mental health clinic— went on to make some cogent observations as well. Here's that first statement: "I am convinced," he wrote, "that all pathologic behavior that is not the result of a physiologic imbalance can be traced to one central cause: an unwarranted feeling of negativity and inferiority." [Abraham J. Twerski] He tells us that his staff says: "There's no use asking Abe to evaluate a patient, ... his response will be, 'Patient suffers from low self-esteem.'" On the basis of my own experience doing counseling for over 27 years, I think he's right about the experiencing of a sense of inferiority that underpins so much psychopathology and problems of adjustment. But I don't think we should call it "low self-esteem." I'd call it a misuse of one's too self-confident sense of self. That's why I say that calls for increased self-confidence cannot remedy so-called low self-esteem. One's sense of inferiority vis a vis others makes its self-sabotaging case in an already all too self-confident extrapolating from the self's own version of the self. We trust our sense of ourselves inordinately, albeit naively. Instead of increasing trust in one's self-perceptions, judgments and extrapolations therefrom, one would be more realistic to humbly decrease trust in one's self-perception, judgments and extrapolations.

But getting back to our clinic director. He points out that "One of the defense mechanisms to overcoming ... psychological pain ... is to exert control and to wield power." We see many expressions of this in all sorts of everyday posturing and put-down. He says that it all "reaches its zenith in acts of violence, whether domestic, social or political." He understands that such effort to control is a "desperate, sick way to overcome [the] gnawing sensation of nothingness." He's correct to diagnose such an effort as a "delusion of control." To counter the psychological pain, he prescribes what he calls a sense of "true humility." That's very good as far as it goes. The humility could allow one to stop trusting the self so unreasonably and go on to identify, challenge and change irrational beliefs— even the belief that one needs such control. But rational thinking can carry one only so far. After all, rational thinking is itself a means of control, even though a reasonable means.

With all the contingencies of time, place, relative ability and willingness, hidden as well as obvious agendas, information and ignorance, self-awareness and self-delusion, intentions as well as oversights, experience and lack of it, we nonetheless have no choice but to trust ourselves in some sense. We must do the best we can with what we've got. But certainly a starting point for doing our best is to trust ourselves within the humbling context of many limitations. Rational trust is, as we've said, trust within limits. And such a radical humility means a tentative trust, a trusting with reservations, even a healthy distrust, of self and self's perceptions and judgments.

TRUSTING GOD

If it is delusional to try to exert irrational control in order to overcome what's been called our "gnawing sensation of nothingness" in relation to other *people*, one could certainly say that such

control would be at least as delusional if attempted in more ultimate relationships with the wider universe and with God. And yet theists as well as atheists have tried to exert such control by *defining* God in or out of existence. And if an acknowledgment of true humility is the best starting point for dealing with that "gnawing sensation of nothingness" in relation to mere mortals, wouldn't acknowledgment of humility be a fitting beginning in one's more ultimate relationships with the wider universe and with God?

If our psychological problem is our irrational sense that we don't measure up to our expectations of ourselves and other people, our spiritual problem must be our deep consciousness that we truly do not measure up to our calling as image-bearers of God. What if our irrational and inordinately self-centered worries that we don't measure up to our fantasy selves are really symptoms of our deep failure to live up to our calling as God's image-bearers? Might not our merely interpersonal insecurity and attempted cover-ups betray a deeper guilty consciousness of ingratitude before God? After all, are not our own pretensions of autonomy, self-confidence and our blame-game "solutions" not the same bizarre delusions that defeated our ancestors in Eden and beyond? Indeed, might not these insecurities, guilt feelings and cover-ups be all the more expected in our self-obsessed relationships with others who also bear the same gifted image of God?

Although it's absurd to try to control God or to try to conceal from God our own failures to live up to the gift of our calling as God's image-bearers, the history of religion is filled with magic and other methods to manipulate gods and goddesses. In almost 2,000 years of Christian theology and practice, we've devised all sorts of self-righteous schemes to control God by putting God in our debt instead of trusting God as those who are in God's debt for everything.

Efforts at controlling God are totally at odds with trusting God. Trying to control God is an expression of misplaced trust: trust in our delusions of self instead of trust in God. And though left to ourselves, we place trust in ourselves, left to God's grace, God places our trust in Him. In e e cummings' words: "now the ears of my ears awake and / now the eyes of my eyes are opened ... how should tasting touching hearing seeing / breathing any— lifted from the no / of all nothing— human being / doubt unimaginable You?"

What if even all our seeming self-doubt or misplaced trust in ourselves and all our own efforts at selfishly controlling others and even God are but our foolish responses to God's relentlessly loving invitation to trust Him? Might not even all the restlessness and counter-productivity of our misplaced trust itself be divinely compelling us to give up such stupid self-confidence and trust the One who is truly our trustworthy Source and Destiny— our Home? Blaise Pascal asked: "What does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in [us] a true happiness, of which all that remains is the empty print and trace?" He says that we try "in vain to fill [this loss] with everything around" us and yet "none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words," he says, "by God."

Others, too, have recognized that our hunger for wholeness is, from beginning to end, a hunger for God that God gives us all, even apart from the witness of church and scripture. They describe it in terms of a passionate homesickness for another world. C. S. Lewis calls even this "unsatisfied desire ... itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." George MacDonald confesses that "never, in the midst of the good things of this lovely world, have I felt quite at home in it. Never has it shown me things lovely or grand enough to satisfy me. It is not all I should like for a place to live in. It may be that my unsatisfaction comes from not having eyes open enough, or keen enough, to see and understand what He has given; but it matters little whether the cause lie in the world or in myself, both being incomplete: God is, and all is well."

If this is true— and Christians believe it is— then it means that in God's reaching out to us— in wisdom, patience and love— God is trusting *us*. Even the ancient Stoics knew that God tells us "I had no fitter to trust than you." Before we trust God, God already trusts us. When it's difficult for us to trust in God, God nonetheless is trusting us. Even when we *distrust* God, God still trusts us. Doesn't our creation in the image of God mean at least that? God entrusts *His* likeness to us. Doesn't the Word made flesh mean at least that? God entrusts Himself to *our* likeness. Doesn't God's invitation to trust Him mean at least that? God trusts us to be able by God's grace and in the full context of the bigger picture of redemption, to trust Him.

And yet we're all so often distrustful and untrustworthy. Is God's trust in humanity misplaced? Shouldn't God know better than to entrust His image to us and to entrust Himself to our image? Well despite our own distrustfulness and untrustworthiness, God's trust in us is not misplaced. But it is a very costly trust. God's confidence is not in us as we are in ourselves— as though we, God's creation, could be anything in ourselves. But God's confidence is in who we're becoming as the sisters and brothers of Christ Jesus, the Child who was born, the Son who was given, our Savior who died and our Lord who was raised from the dead.

Our own healthiest self-confidence then, can be self-skeptical without despair. Augustine's strengthening words are these: "Beware of despairing about yourself: you are commanded to put your trust in God, and not in yourself." Said another: "Distrust thyself, but trust alone / In him, for all — forever!" [Frances Ridley Havergal] And yet another: "If I put my trust in human beings first, I will end in despairing of everyone; I will become bitter, because I have insisted on a man [or woman] being what no man [or woman] ever can be— absolutely right. Never trust anything but the grace of God in yourself or in anyone else." [Oswald Chambers]

These perspectives are rooted in the scriptures. As a biblical scholar points out, "when referring to reliance on human beings or anything other than God, the term [trust] usually carries a negative connotation [in the Bible]; these passages usually indicate that such trust is ill-advised." [P. L. Redditt] Biblically speaking, trust can be misplaced in religion, wealth, the military, and even in one's very best friends and neighbors as well as in oneself. In short, trust can be misplaced in anything apart from God. Jeremiah speaks for all true prophets when he thunders: "This is what the Lord says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in humanity, who depends on human

strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord ... But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him." [17:5ff] And remember that such prophetic words are always really more radically descriptive of reality than merely religiously prescriptive or proscriptive.

Since God can be trusted to be uncontrollable, it isn't realistic to try to control God. Someone has said that God is "The Great Surpriser." [Martin Marty] But that's *our* story, not God's. *We're* surprised. We're even shocked — because we expect that our limited and self-serving thoughts and ways can be trusted to be God's thoughts and ways. They're not. [Isa 55:8] And they can't be. So it's futile to try to get the upper hand in theory or in practice. God has the upper hand— in which we're all enclosed.

To trust God is to trust The Other. To trust God is to trust the One who comes as a Stranger. And the more we're moved by that Stranger, the stranger that Stranger seems. We're not searching for *this* God any more than a mouse is searching for the cat, as C. S. Lewis used to say. God is searching for us. As one theologian puts it: "Apart from the access to himself which he himself affords, no thinking will ever find its way to him." [Eberhard Jüngel] Indeed, far from searching for God, we flee this "Hound of Heaven, ... down the nights and down the days; / ... down the arches of the years; / ... down the labyrinthine ways / Of [our] own mind[s]; and in the mist of tears / ... and under running laughter." [Francis Thompson] Paul Tillich described trust in God as "an act of the finite being who is grasped by and turned to the Infinite." And even the One in whom God came out most clearly was and remains too strange to be anticipated, recognized or accepted very readily by those of us who are resistant to turning away from our own unimaginative, expectations, orthodoxies or trendy demands for cheap gods, cheap goddesses, and cheap godlinesses.

Trusting God is not only not what we too quickly think it is, it's not what we *want* it to be. Listen to Luther and see if you want what he's talking about: "Our trust in God will be mature when life and death, glory and shame, adversity and prosperity, will be the same to us. But," he said, "this attitude is not achieved by speculation; it must be learned in the school of temptation and prayer." Do we readily pray with W. H. Auden his poem-prayer for the *infliction* of God's gift of trust? Listen to Auden's prayer: "Inflict Thy promises with each / Occasion of distress, / That from our incoherence we / May learn to put our trust in Thee, / And brutal fact persuade us to / Adventure, Art, and Peace."

Such realistic reliance in what Reynolds Price calls "the now appalling, now astonishing grace of God" is obviously not "the sunny, epiphanies sort of faith advertised by preachers," as even a New York Times book reviewer recognizes. It is rather, as she says, "a more mundane, hard-won sort of faith, a faith tested by death and loss and daily reaffirmed, however haltingly, by myriad small choices and acts." [Michiko Kakutani] Says another writer: "I cringe when people talk about trusting God ... as if trusting God were a way to escape the complexities of life." [Jean Blomquist] And yet that's what so much of our contemporary idolatries are all about— from the "health and wealth" gospel's gods and the secular idols of a market mentality to New Age

goddesses as feel-good therapists, seemingly nonjudgmental spirituality life, and liberal religion's "experiential-expressionism." It's deity as cosmic concierge! It's a what's-in-it-for-me spirituality. Bestsellers by Tim LaHaye, Robert Schuller, Frank Peretti, John Shelby Spong, James Redfield, Thomas Moore, Marianne Williamson and others clutter the bookshelves of superstores in malls across America. It's a "Jesus" that's, guess what,— unintrusively up-to-date: an all-American boy on skateboard, a good ol' boy of the boardroom, one in a string of "ascended masters," or the beloved disciple's "main squeeze." Each such "Jesus" says just what we want him to say: "I will follow *thee*. " The only cross *he* asks us to bear is the silver one we bought from Cher.

No wonder a pastoral theologian says that "foolish religion and silly spirituality ... are epidemic in our land." [Eugene Peterson] He was endorsing a new book by the president of San Francisco Theological Seminary. It's title: *The Trivialization of God: The dangerous illusion of a manageable diety*. [Donald W. McCullough]

Well, with Luther, we may agree that "The main part of Christian doctrine is to learn to trust in God." But after all, since as Luther himself acknowledged, "where our trust is, there is our god"— we all do trust in a god. The question is: In *what* god do we trust?

All serious faithers have had to trust the God who is hidden, *deus absconditus*, as Luther put it in Latin— the hidden God. They have trusted God even where they couldn't see a trace of God. In the terms of the biblical appeal, they have lived by faith, by trusting, and not by sight. Therefore, they have lived with their doubts. They have run the risks of faith. But those who tried to live by sight, to avoid all risks by calculating detailed explanations, by demanding certain experience, good feelings and so-called facts— those who hid their doubts because their god was no mystery at all— they lost such faith when what they so self-confidently defined as the Godhead turned out to be but a godlet. Blind as they were, they never could make it "by sight." Who but a fool tries to see into the deepest Darkness or the blazing Light? In one of the hardest testing times of his life, George MacDonald wrote to Louisa, his wife: "I think faith can never have a greater victory than when it will trust even in the midst of darkness and doubt and temptation."

Of course God is hidden; God is God. But God is also revealed. Luther encouraged his students to flee the hidden God. He urged them to run to Jesus, the one in whom the hidden God is revealed most fully, most intimately.

So, like that one who said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe, help, thou, my unbelief," serious faithers have trusted Jesus with both their trust and their distrust, with both faith and doubt, because with Jesus and his Abba, it's not all or nothing, now or never. The Father of our Lord Jesus grants and receives a person's trust as a living and growing reliance even when it begins as no more than a mustard seed. Serious trust in God is always an in-spite-of-sight trust, a nevertheless trust, a trust at the very confusing intersection of our being "already" and "not yet" Home.

In George MacDonald's novel, *Warlock O' Glenwarlock*, we find these wise words: "To trust in spite of the look of being forgotten; to keep crying out into the vast whence comes no voice, and where seems no hearing; to struggle after light, where is no glimmer to guide; at every turn to find a doorless wall, yet ever seek a door; to see the machinery of the world pauselessly grinding on as if self-moved, caring for no life, not shifting a hair's-breadth for all entreaty, and yet believe that God is awake and utterly loving; to desire nothing but what comes meant for us from his hand; to wait patiently, willing to die of hunger, fearing only lest faith should fail— such is the victory that overcometh the world, such is faith indeed." Said Alfred, Lord Tennyson: "Behold, we know not anything; / I can but trust that good shall fall / At last— far off— at last, to all."

A rabbi tells a story he heard from his uncle who was in a subcamp of Buchenwald. He reports that one afternoon orthodox Jewish inmates decided to put God on trial for abandoning them to the Nazis. God was quickly found guilty. There was silence. And then an elderly prisoner stood up and said: "Nevertheless, ... it is time for our evening prayers." Hadn't the Psalmist faithed: "We will not fear even though the very earth may change, and though the mountains slip into the sea, for God is our refuge and strength?" [Ps 46:1] Had not Habakkuk prayed: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, nevertheless I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in God my Savior. ADONAI is my strength?" [3:17ff] Had not Job declared in confidence of vindication: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him?" [13:15] Oswald Chambers said that that affirmation from Job "is the most sublime utterance of faith in the Old Testament." And such affirmation was echoed even in Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross. His words were from the Psalm that begins: "My God, My God, why have You betrayed my trust?" and that ends in praise for deliverance in the Lord God's own good time and way. [Matt 27:46; Psalm 22]

If we are called to lose our fantasy selves in order to find our true selves— and Jesus calls us to do just that— might that not at least mean that we will lose our way in order to be found in the One who is Himself, The Way? In losing our own way, we will be free to be found by the One we no more intended to find than *did* those two travelers on the Emmaus Road. He is the One we never could have trusted on our own. But against all the seeming evidence, Jesus entrusted himself and us to his Abba so that, together, we may be welcomed Home.

Our trust in God is, itself, God's gift entrusted to us, lest we trust our own distrusting and have to make do with empty boasting. [Eph 2:8f] It is with God's given trust that we trust God. So trust in God could not be better founded. It's not based in ourselves, whether in "inner child" infantilism, poor reconstructions of a self-serving memory, or fantasies of wishful thinking. It's not based in the mixed motives, weak wills and inabilities of even our best friends and family members. It reaches farther back and further in and farther out into infinitely wise and powerful Love. That Love is both the Trust and the Trustworthiness from Beginning to End.

In the end, "the only and greatest thing [one] is capable of is Trust in God." [George MacDonald] But to what end? After surviving life-threatening surgery that he had thought would have meant his "homecoming" to "the risen Jesus," Henri Nouwen woke to realize afresh that "the great spiritual task facing me is to so fully trust that I belong to God that I can be free in the world— free to speak even when my words are not received; free to act even when my actions are criticized, ridiculed, or considered useless; free also to receive love from people and to be grateful for all the signs of God's presence in the world. When I awoke from my operation and realized I was not yet in God's house, I felt I was being sent: sent to make the all-embracing love of God known to people who hunger and thirst for love, but who often look for it within a world where it cannot be found."

TRUSTING IDEAS

"Believe it or not!" That's what Ripley has always said. But what "it" can we believe? And what not? What information and ideas can we trust? Which are trustworthy? What is true? And why or why not? By what authority or standard can we judge?

Many of us tend to assume that a trusted idea should be a trustworthy idea and that a trustworthy idea should be true. But believe it or not, there are those who are now saying that even the very idea of truth should be distrusted. They push the idea that truth, i.e. objective truth, does not exist. If this is true, objective truth can't be a necessary test of trustworthiness. Their trust is endorsed seemingly without reliance on a trustworthiness rooted in truth. To this American cultural elite— though it's found beyond our borders— traditional ideas of objective truth are rejected and the biblical idea of revealed truth isn't even considered.

These newer ideas are most immediately and widely encountered in popular culture. Here are a few examples. Even though a thorough investigation uncovered the fact that Lorenzo Carcaterra's allegedly autobiographical book of sexual abuse, on which the film *Sleepers* was based, could not have been based in his actual life history, *Newsweek* film critic David Ansen states: "Whether the book was true or not does not concern me." Columnist Liz Smith reports that "That big, volatile, brilliant celeb who has made so much headline hay by recounting various childhood traumas, recently confessed to a new assistant, 'I made most of it up.' When the assistant asked why, the celeb shrugged, 'Well, it was *emotionally* true!" An "abuse counselor" of some repute is quoted as saying that he couldn't care less whether or not a "recovered memory" of abuse is true: "I don't care if it's true. What's important to me is that I hear the [inner] child's truth." He rationalizes: "We all live in a delusion." I heard even a Christian pop pysch writer say on a recent television show that "It's not my thing to challenge" the truth of a woman's self-report. She said: "It's my thing to believe her."

Such pop cultural "truth" as a matter of relativism and rationalization derives from the works of Michel Foucault and Jean-Franfois Lyotard, postmodernist intellectuals who have never been read by most of those who nonetheless have come under their considerable influence. Thus so

many people today naively take for granted that what is true or false, right or wrong, is merely a matter of taste or preference, what is "true for you" but not necessarily "true for me," "right for you" but not at the same time "right for me." They're not simply describing the fact that different people see things differently or hold values that are in conflict with values held by others. This is not simply "different strokes for different folks." They're prescribing their idea and proscribing its refutation. They mean that they have "their truth" and nobody should "oppress" them by imposing his or her truth on them: "Don't you dare tell me that my truth isn't valid for me!" According to those who are under the spell of postmodernism, we should not say that one's idea is right and another's is wrong. They claim that there is no truly true truth about right or wrong. To hold otherwise, they say, is an illusion that oppresses.

But those who push the idea that there is no objective truth, no objective right and wrong and that the very idea of such truth or such right and wrong is illusory and oppressive, refuse somehow to admit that they are being self-contradictory— even delusionally and oppressively so. They obviously trust that at least one idea is not illusory or oppressive and is actually true: their idea that all objective truth is illusory and oppressive. They obviously trust that at least one idea is actually right: the idea that there is no objective right and wrong. They obviously trust that at least one idea is wrong: the idea that something can indeed be objectively wrong. What's more, they hold that their notion of oppression is objectively right: oppression is always wrong. They hold that their notion of counter-oppression or justice is objectively right: counter-oppression or justice is always right. To all their double-talking postmodernist nonsense George Orwell would have said: "One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that: no ordinary man could be such a fool." But alas, evidently not.

Moreover, in today's marketplace of ideas, the selections one makes are often more a matter of the efficacy of prevailing publicity than of any intrinsic meaning. And just as anywhere else in the marketplace, the ideas that are touted so repeatedly as ideas to be trusted are ideas that the market research finds to be the most desired ideas. No wonder then that there's a market mentality of what's-in-it-for-me philosophy, what's-in-it-for-me spirituality. People are trying to live in what Elton Trueblood used to call "the blasphemy of optimism." That gets expressed in many guises since market research shows that that's exactly what so many people are clamoring for. It's found in market-driven "family values" nostalgia, God-blessed American nationalistic religiosity, the power of positive thinking," the prosperity gospel of "health 'n' wealth," New Age herbal spirituality, liberalism's assumptions of progress and perfectibility, etc. It's so tempting to trust what we want to hear, what we want to believe.

Here are some contemporary examples of popular invitations to trust in ourselves— something everyone is doing already. People turn to Thomas Moore, trusting they'll "learn ways to restore paradise in all areas of life." They turn to Anthony Robbins, trusting that they'll learn how to "create leverage to 'Super-Charge' and immediately accomplish any goal" by "unleashing their personal power." They turn to Marianne Williamson to learn to "accept the Christ within" by "merely a shift in self-perception." They turn to Susan Shumsky, trusting that they'll "develop a

deep spiritual connection within themselves by learning to listen to and trust the 'still, small voice' within, the voice that embodies the wisdom needed to set a clear direction in life and make the biggest decisions with peaceful confidence." They turn to Laura Day, trusting they'll tap their "Sixth Sense." They trust Robert Johnson to channel them into exciting past life regression to "clear away the puzzlements and mysteries of life." They turn to Doreen Virtue, trusting this self-styled "clairvoyant psychologist" to awaken their powers through the use of "ancient Mystery School methods for rapid manifestations of [their] dreams." They trust Jean Houston to guide them into "Jump Time." They trust Wicca to "develop the psychic and healing skills we all have inside us." They trust "renowned psychic to the stars" Maria Papapetros to teach them "psychic development skills for empowerment" from deep within. On and on it goes. There are billions of dollars to be made by dishing out the mindless junk food that millions are desperate enough to swallow.

"Miracles are everyone's right," says *A Course in Miracles*. We live in an "Age of Entitlement" [Robert J. Samuelson] that makes this attractive idea sound trustworthy. We expect a free lunch or, if not something for nothing, at least a whole lot more for a whole lot less. The postwar boom and its institutions and social movements set us up for exaggerated and unrealistic expectations. Sooner or later we were sure to be disappointed. It's not strange therefore that we're now in what has been called "an almost permanent state of public grumpiness." [Samuelson] In his book, *The Sibling Society*, Robert Bly decries a wallowing in aged adolescence that demands quick pleasures and excitements. He says that such an adolescent mentality characterizes too much of society.

The prevailing spirits of our times control our confidence in ideas. These spirits attack from the left and right, from church circles as well as from secular society. The strength with which they hold us hostage depends on the even subtle ways in which we hold on to them. It is unfortunate that we're not always aware that we're the dependent children of these spirits. This lack of awareness is due to a large degree to the fact that we are, indeed, such children of our times. These spirits manipulate us in the forms of hidden and unquestioned assumptions as well as by too-familiar cliches. They diminish and even deaden our discernment. No wonder demon Screwtape insisted that Wormwood make his "moral assaults by darkening [the] intellect" of his victims.

Even among the college-educated today, there is less and less training and experience in even simple logic let alone critical theoretical analysis and the history of ideas. In some cases there's none. Such cognitive impoverishment is especially true of biblical and theological knowledge. With such illiteracy, how can reasonable and informed choices be made in the worlds of ideas? No wonder people are falling for the nonsense of astrology, psychic advice, radical individualism, neo-Rousseauian ideas of the Noble Savage, postmodernist notions of "my truth / your truth," and all sorts of crazy fundamentalisms.

The prevailing spirit of one's own day is, of course, the most seductive. Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago describes the prevailing spirit of our day when he writes that "the danger [today] is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue .... Openness— and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth and the various ways of life and kinds of human beings— is the great insight of our times." But of course, such a spirit recycles itself over the years. Alice Meynell caught the irony— indeed, the hypocrisy— when she wrote "The Newer Vainglory" earlier in this century: "For I am tolerant, generous, keep no rules, / And the age honors me. / Thank God, I am not as these rigid fools, / Even as this Pharisee."

Best-selling author Tom Wolfe has been saying for years that "ideas can become articles of fashion which are adopted with no more foundation than styles of clothing." He says he sees this "as the key to the intellectual history of the United States in the 20th century." That the spirits of a time come into fashion and go out of fashion like all things trendy is obvious. Trouble is, we tend to miss this fact. And as Christians, we're not exempt. Christians are too often tempted to bow down and worship the prevailing spirit of the day. And according to sociologist Peter Berger: "The various efforts by Christians to accommodate to the 'wisdom of the world' ... becomes a difficult, frantic and more than a little ridiculous affair. Each time that one has, after an enormous effort, managed to adjust the faith to the prevailing culture, that culture turns around and changes .... Our pluralistic culture forces those who would 'update' Christianity into a state of permanent nervousness." Berger goes on to caution that if the adjustments are made "with the cultural elite in mind, then it is important to appreciate that the beliefs of this particular group are the most fickle of all." Trying to keep up with erratic pop-thought fashion that's "in" at this moment but "out" at the next reminds me of the *New Yorker* cartoon couple in a cab, pressing the driver to "step on it. This restaurant may be over any minute."

In the contemporary context of self-deluded relativism and self-centered entitlement, much of the gay/lesbian movement is pushing a party line of endorsement of a junk food diet of sex candy without consequences. It's really no different from the consumer sex mentality that's being pushed for heterosexuals except that it's even propagandized by some as being of the very essence of "gayness" itself. It's rationalized that there's nothing wrong with genitalizing "recreationally" with as many people as we can get to cooperate, just so long as it's "safe sex" and we don't intend to "hurt" anybody. "Consensual and safe" is the motto. But even while realizing that "our sense of entitlement exceeds our sense of vulnerability," one writer nevertheless complains that in "the pursuit of a sex life ... We've entered a period where mistrust equals responsibility ... we're not allowed to believe anyone anymore ... we have learned thoroughly ... how not to enjoy ourselves .... [we're] discouraged from doing what feels good ... [and] we're being encouraged to keep our fantasies on a tight rein." She concludes: "the whole thing simply 'sucks.' It's a bummer on a grand scale." Sadly, she's unable or unwilling to come to more realistic terms with sexuality. All she does is gripe and grumble: "What my peers and I

are left with is a generalized anxiety, a low-grade fear and anger that resides at the core of everything we do." [Meghen Daum]

There is in all this self-indulgent grievance, a misplaced trust in what Peter Homans observes to be "a culture of fantasy [that] has grown so large that it threatens to overwhelm the culture of reality, if it has not already done so." He points out that "Reality deals with tough issues of struggle, power, and loss. It asks something of us, makes demands, calls for renunciation or deferred gratification. The culture of fantasy asks nothing of us, since its function is to gratify, to create the illusion that life is smooth and without rupture." He illustrates with our obsessive curiosity with celebrities who, as such, "ask nothing of us— they 'give' the pleasurable illusion that life can be effortless and have no ambiguities ... [and they] offer a vicarious experience of those things we often seek in our own lives, including power, wealth, and fame."

A lively debate was sparked when the Evangelicals Concerned group of gay and lesbian Christians in Laguna proposed that a statement of sexual integrity be considered for adoption by the entire western regional EC. In the often heated discussions around that statement, many of the ungrounded assumptions, irrationalities and misunderstandings that characterize our wider contemporary cultures of individualism, relativism, entitlement and fantasy have emerged. Perhaps we can go further into an understanding of what's involved in trusting ideas by analyzing various points that have been asserted in the debate over this statement of sexual integrity.

Here's the text of the statement: "EC Laguna believes that God intended for human sexuality to be optimally expressed within the context of a loving, committed, monogamous and lifelong relationship of mutual respect and integrity between two adults; and we commend all sexually active Christians (regardless of sexual orientation) toward this goal, which we support and promote within our community of faith in Christ."

Some of the debate has been carried in the ECWR newsletter, *thECable*. It has been reported there that "many [have] a problem with the phrase *God intended*. " Someone is quoted as saying that "That's my biggest problem" with the statement. Another declares: "It is presumptuous to say God says it."

Now as soon as anyone raises a question about what God says, we'd all do well to remember that it was the very first theologian of all time who raised such a question and it was the very first theological question ever raised. The question was rhetorical: "Did God *really* say that?" The answer elicited is, of course, No. And though No is technically correct, *this* No is contextually a lie. It was the theologizing of a snake. No wonder the theology was based in a misrepresentation of what God really had said. And the misrepresentation was a deliberately over-restrictive distortion. It was also framed in terms of what the person with whom the snake was speaking wanted to hear. Building her own case against what God had said, the person complained to the snake by inventing her own overly restrictive distortion of what God had said. She framed her

own theology in terms of what she fantasized she wanted. Ever since this first theological discussion, people have distorted in overly restrictive as well as in overly permissive directions— all claiming to be speaking for God. But so much of the time they're practicing ventriloquism and their gods and goddesses are their own wooden dummies.

The fundamentalist and even the evangelical backgrounds of many people in EC have been overly restrictive. It's not strange that even misconceived questions that are reactions to such overly restrictive distortions of God's word might now be expressed in overly permissive directions. Though readily available in gay/lesbian subcultures, such "correctives" are no less distortions. As a psychologist observes: "Trying to find our way out of repressive paternalism, we have created a society where giving way to impulse is the rule and regression to childhood reigns supreme." [Margaret Gramatky Alter] Given the same overly restrictive background, others might be too dependent on the seduction of seeming safety in such over-restriction and cling to it just as uncritically and irrationally and even unbiblically as others try to escape it. Then too, whether or not they come from an overly restrictive or overly permissive background, many have "come out" and learned the ropes of a homosexuality overly identified and associated with the assumptions and lifestyles of a promiscuity-proselytizing urban subculture. Overcoming the seduction of the snake's question will require an honestly critical evaluation of the extent to which they've been influenced by that subculture.

The other day I saw a t-shirt that shouted: "God said it! I believe it! That's it! Period!" Notice that the "That's it!" comes in only after "I believe it!" rather than right after "God said it!" The t-shirt doesn't say: "God said it! That's it! Period! [therefore] I believe it."‘ It says: "God said it! I believe it! That's it! Period!" When "I believe it!" *that's it!* When "I believe it!" it's settled. And the order might just as well have been "I believe it! That's it! Period! [therefore] God said it!" Doesn't that tend to be our chronology anyway? We're all quite comfortable saying "God says it" when the "it" is a projection of our own views, values and agendas. For example, as gay and lesbian Christians of the 1990s, we don't have any trouble saying that God says slavery and racial segregation are wrong and lesbian and gay civil rights are right. We don't say it's "presumptuous to say God says it" when we're throwing up our own ideas and calling them God's.

Throughout history, though, our Lord's name has been violated for all sorts of self-serving reasons. And as a biblical scholar reminds us, the Bible itself shows that "it is fatally easy, in all sincerity, to confuse the will of God with our own desires, or with the interests of our own country or our own church" or our own special interest group. [Robert Davidson] So when some folk say they feel "discomfort with daring to speak for God," their concern should not be dismissed lightly. They may well be speaking out of their painful experience in churches that even took the name of the Lord in vain in order to preach a cocksure hatred of others. We should not, in our turn, preach more abuse in the name of the Lord.

But there may be another reason for discomfort in speaking for God. After all, God's own true prophets suffered discomfort in speaking God's word. They were reluctant out of a healthy humility. And they were reluctant because of what they correctly anticipated would be the people's negative reaction to God's message. They knew that God's word can be a hard word. They knew that God's hard word was so very often not at all what the people wanted to hear. It wasn't what even the prophets themselves wanted to hear. After all, they were among the rest to which the word of the Lord's judgment was to be preached.

Incidentally, the Laguna statement is not in fact so bold as to declare: "thus saith the Lord." The Laguna statement pastorally commends what its authors believe "God intended." That's not quite the same as "God says." It is indirect. It is inferred. At any rate, I'd like us to notice a crucial difference between, on the one hand, the antigay preaching of modem day ecclesiastical powers and the words of the lying prophets of ancient Israel and, on the other hand, the Laguna appeal and the proclamation of the Lord's true prophets. Indeed, this crucial difference is what, according to scripture, separates the preaching of the false prophets from that of the true prophets of the Lord. This crucial distinction can then enable us to see a significant difference between the harsh homophobia of fundamentalism and the pastoral appeal of our brothers and sisters from Laguna.

Throughout the Bible, the preaching of the Lord's prophets— from Moses to John the Baptist— is just as much judgment preaching as is the preaching of fundamentalism today. For that matter, it's just as much judgment preaching as the preaching of liberals today. Judgment preaching is judgment preaching, no matter what the subject or target. However, the preaching of the Lord's prophets was not well received by the prophets' own people and yet the preaching of today's fundamentalists and liberals is very well received by their people. Why is that? It's because true prophets of Israel typically preached judgment against Israel itself, Israel's own sin, the sin of the insiders, but today's fundamentalist preachers and liberal preachers typically preach judgment against outsiders, e.g., the religious right self-righteously preaches against the left and the religious left does the same against the right. Too much lesbian and gay preaching is also against outsiders. All insiders like to hear judgments against outsiders but insiders never like to hear judgments against themselves. None of us enjoys hearing judgments against ourselves. This is, of course, especially true if we buy into what we perceive as the truth of the judgment. If we don't buy into the judgment, it tends to go in one ear and out the other. What the Laguna statement calls for is a sober discipleship among those within our fold— where judgment, after all, should begin.

Just as columnist Stanley Crouch dares to speak up as a black man to denounce what he calls "the dark side of black studies" and just as theologian Alister McGrath dares to speak up as an evangelical to denounce what he calls "the dark side of evangelicalism," gay and lesbian Christians must dare to speak up against the dark side of secular gay/lesbian rhetoric as well as the dark side of lesbian/gay "spirituality."

If we didn't know that the Lord's prophets in Israel were Jewish, we may well mistake their preaching as centuries-long anti-Semitism. In contrast to the realistically self-critical spirit of the Hebrew prophets and the modest challenge from Laguna, almost everything that's usually preached in our gay and lesbian religious circles is a self-centered congratulations. It seems that identification as gay or lesbian is often more important than identification with Christ Jesus. Coming out is conversion, lesbian/gay pride is salvation, gay rights campaigns constitute evangelism, rhetoric of "our rights" and political power displaces consideration of our responsibilities and call to servanthood. I was disappointed and disheartened — as were the judges — to find that almost everything that was presented in the homilies submitted in EC's 20th anniversary homily contest was just such self-serving homosexism. I felt like theologian Ronald C. Potter must have felt when he addressed his fellow black Christian leaders after the "Million Man March." He asked: "Are we as black Christians affected by a new radicalism, where it is more important to be identified with blackness than Christianity?"

But listen to Jeremiah's distinguishing between lies and true words: "I have heard what the prophets say who tell lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' How long will this continue in the hearts of these liars, who prophesy the personal delusions of their own imaginations? ... Let the prophet who has a dream spout his dream. But let the one who has my word speak it accurately! For what has straw to do with wheat? declares Yahweh. Is not my word like fire, declares Yahweh, and like a hammer that breaks a rock to pieces?" [Jeremiah 23: 25-29]

That's it! The Lord's word is a *hard* word that shatters our own self-satisfied obsessions. It's a word we don't want. It's inconvenient, to say the least. It's a surprising and even shocking word. We don't dream it up on our own. It doesn't baptize Baal. The preaching of the false prophets is the flattering rationalization of disobedience, a word we readily welcome in self-deceit. It's borrowed from pagan surroundings just as in the days of the ancient false prophets. That's the difference between the preaching we can trust and what we must distrust. As a biblical scholar says: "If we find what God is saying to us easy to live with, purely comforting and reassuring, then we ought to be asking ourselves whether this is really God speaking to us, the God of the prophets, the God whose love led to a cross, or merely a god we want." He asserts that "a honey-tongued prophet whose message is comfortingly reassuring and totally devoid of challenge, cannot be trusted." [Davidson] The true prophet speaks for a God who will both "frighten and puzzle" his own people, speaks for "the God who made the tiger *and* the lamb, the avalanche *and* the rose," in the words of C. S. Lewis. Says Lewis: "The most striking thing about Our Lord is the union of great ferocity with extreme tenderness."

The false preaching was what Israel wanted to hear. It's what we all tend to want to hear. It was "Peace! Peace!" But Jeremiah thundered: "Peace? Peace? What Peace?" Fundamentalist preachers mouth meaningless clichés like "Ex-gay! Ex-gay! Read all about it!" But we need to cry out, "What ex-gay?" False preaching says we're just fine the way we are: "I'm O.K. and so are you!" But thankfully, the invigorating word of the Lord says No!, and that biblically bracing

reality check can save us from a lot of disappointment in ourselves and in others and fend off defensive distrust and anger that such disappointment devises.

False preaching can share supposedly self-validating "stories" of self-serving "truths" that can sound quite good. But "no particular type of experience, whether it is a dream or a highly emotional conversion experience, can in itself guarantee that the experience truly comes from God." [Davidson] This is a basic truth that sails right past the comprehension of many people today. What they're quick to buy into is the promotion of an uncritical trust in personal experience as told in such "stories," the self-serving interpretations of which are, of course, self-seductive. And they insist that nobody dare try to rob them of their "stories." After all, these "stories" are their own and therefore true. The story-tellers as well as their enabling listeners are thus boxed into a frame of reference that's no wider and no freer than their own self-interpreted experience. It's the constricted and constricting view of "the I of the beholder," as the *Times Literary Supplement* recently headlined what Gertrude Himmelfarb criticizes as the mode of thought in which today's cultural elite (psychologists, literary critics, historians, philosophers, anthropologists, theologians, and others) have for the most part "consciously brought their own personae into their work— not peripherally, as an occasional autobiographical aside, but insistently and pervasively, as the very theme of their studies." She refers to a French historian's dubbing this *ego histoire*, an American critic's calling it the "Nouveau Solipsism" and another's saying that nowadays, "The I's have it." Sadly, these postmodern intellectuals have had a significant impact on much of the society.

Gay religionists, under such influence, hold self-validating retreats on what they call "Intimacy with God: Drinking Deeply from Our Own Wells." Christian spiritual directors promise to "empower women through a transformational journey deep within herself to discover her soul, her unique feminine qualities, her innate goodness and beauty— thus bringing to harmony her inner and outer worlds." Psychologist Eugene Kennedy says: "These are not the words of eternal life. This configuration, right out of the New Age movement, is nothing but McSpirituality, junk food for the soul." Letty Russell expounds a "theologizing from women's experience" that Mary McClintock Fulkerson sees as just another example of the subjectivizing tendencies of Western liberalism. Writer E. Annie Proulx calls this narrow focus on one's own personal experience "the worst piece of advice ever given." She urges that "this very unpleasant trend" be overtaken by some "questioning [and] a little research." So much of what is heard in lesbian/gay circles today pushes this notion that truth is to be found within ourselves, in *our* "stories" which we write— no matter how distorted, selective or self-serving they may be. No matter how distorted, selective or self-serving they most certainly will be. Novelist Mary Gordon criticizes what she calls "a populist/communitarian model that assumes that the best way to understand people is to listen to their 'stories.'" She warns that, of course we "choose the people and the stories" and then go ahead and use *these* stories "as a basis for argument." Notice how we use *our* "stories" in the same self-serving way that the backers of the "ex-gay" claims use *their* "stories." But they don't use ours and we don't use theirs. What else can be expected when we're urged by Thomas

Moore, for example, to create "a theology that is individual and unique, conforming to [our own] vision and tastes." But this has unintended negative consequences. Evelyn Underhill reasons that "If our practical life is centered on our own interests, cluttered up by possessions, distracted by ambitions, passions, wants, and worries, beset by a sense of our own rights and importance, or anxieties about our own future, or longing for our own success, we need not expect that our spiritual life will be a contrast to all this." These individual "stories" are frequently projected onto one's "own" group in such a way that a person begins to believe that nobody outside "my" group would possibly understand anything of what it's like to be one of "us." Identity mentality says: "It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand," "It's a woman thing, you wouldn't understand," "It's a gay thing, you wouldn't understand." Even those on the outside begin to take this idea for granted. The angry and distrustful self-validation posturing solidifies intragroup isolation at the expense of intergroup and even interpersonal community and thus fulfills its prophesy.

In a book of such "stories" of former Catholic seminarians, psychiatrist Robert Coles finds what he describes as "the stuff of self-help books and talk shows ... [and] a murky and overwrought psychological and sociological theory that is invested with the aura of the sacred." He observes that these "very contemporary and culturally powerful mental maneuvers" are "missing ... any sense of humor, any modesty or any willingness to confess that our social science vocabulary and mode of thought may reveal smugness and presumption." Theologian David Tracy observes that "It's clear that spirituality without the tough reflection that philosophy and theology at their best provide is always in danger of becoming sentimental or weak. Or— in our psychological culture— merely psychological." Says Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann: "Our mistake is to pursue *autonomous* freedom. [We're] seduce[d] into believing there are securities apart from the reality of God," resolutions to anxiety that are merely psychological, economic, cosmetic. S. Mark Helm, in referring to the theological principle of progressive revelation, "Reformed and ever reforming", writes: "My assumption is that tradition regularly needs to be reformed and that our personal and cultural presumptions require reformation from the tradition's sources even more regularly." And even a self-described "believing unbeliever" like Alfred Kazin writes that he knows "There is a world outside human consciousness ... [and the] self, self, self." Late in his journals he writes: "I pray to get beyond myself, to indicate to this believing unbeliever that there is a territory beyond this bundle tied up so angrily in the night. I pray to be relieved of so much 'self,' I ask to be extended." He concludes: "I know for sure that the disorder in my soul is not altogether covered by [what] I hear about three times a week" in the psychotherapist's office. But there is sad evidence that a self-centered postmodern sensibility is not lessening its hold. A journalist reports in *Generation X Goes to College* that today's students are distrustful of all values not generated by themselves. In contrast to self-confident preaching on behalf of our own views and self-confident preaching against the views of others, "to know the word of God, was for Jeremiah to walk along an exposed road, vulnerable to misunderstanding, open to self-doubt .... The word came, and comes, to those prepared to wait

and to wrestle with God, rather than to those who speak with easy assurance and untroubled certainty." [Davidson]

Unfortunately, not many of today's more conservative or liberal churchy spirits nor many of today's secular spirits prepare us for the frustrations and woundings of such waiting and wrestling.

Even those who go so far as to enroll in theological seminaries— whether conservative or liberal— tend to be poorly prepared for the vulnerabilities that attend honest efforts to know the word of God. None of us is as humble as he or she needs to be in this regard.

Remember those professors' observations on their students which we looked at under discussion of trusting ourselves? The professor from Fuller Seminary goes on to ask: "How does one teach students who are deeply committed to the Christian way of life, have read a good deal of the Bible and know some of the tradition but are locked into misusing the Bible and tradition as ready-made blueprints for ordinary life?" He points out that such "students need to distance themselves from [a too-familiar reading of] the text of the Bible [and] ... to see both that God is bigger than the text and that the text ... is also a culturally situated message addressed by one human being to another." He cautions his students also "to distance both themselves and God from their own subcultures ... rather than unsuspectingly reading both the Bible and the world through the lenses of those subcultures." He says that he tries to "teach students ... not to distort [the otherness of the Christian tradition] by squeezing it into their own cognitive frameworks and by pressing it into their predetermined life projects like some missing piece of a puzzle ... [so that they're not] incarcerated within the circle of their own familiarity, incapable of hearing anything but echoes of their own voice." [Miroslav Volf] These are the concerns about humility for learning to wait and wrestle with God as expressed by an evangelical professor at an evangelical seminary. Now hear how another evangelical, teaching at a more liberal institution, expresses his concerns for humility.

The Duke University professor goes on to lament the celebration of so-called "diversity" at liberal schools like his own, the pretended "'openness' and 'freedom' while rigidly policing ourselves for deviation from the conventional norms as we anxiously await the world to tell us which 'issues of the day' we may address in our 'variety of ways.'" He observes that "in so doing we mirror rather than transform the students." Speaking of the popular "hermeneutics of suspicion" so-called, he warns that such is practiced "with a naive faith in our ability to think for ourselves" and he confesses that "too many of us theologians have left our students to wallow in their own subjectivity rather than challenging them with a perspective not of their own devising." He avers: "What the church needs from its leaders today requires more than merely experientially based theology." [William Willimon]

No less a left-winger than Gore Vidal criticizes experience-based subjectivism in what he says are the "new horrors" of what's called "gay sensibility." Camille Paglia attacks the "gay studies"

mentality that distorts history, literature and art with what she terms "anachronistic contemporary agendas [with]— elitist, labyrinthine, jargon-infested poststructuralist theory to suppress or deny scientific facts." She says: "If gays do not stand for truth," by which she means objective truth "informed by rigorous traditional standards of historiography and criticism, ... they stand for nothing." Louise Antony has made the same point about what she calls the "intellectual gulag" of much that passes for "women's studies." Mary Lefkowitz has made a brilliant case against the radical Afrocentrism that is unquestioned on many college campuses these days. Sadly, these late 20th century "blasphemers" pay a high price for voicing criticism within the temples of political correctness.

There are lessons for EC in these warnings. We are vulnerable to an uncritical fundamentalism of both the right and the left, from our church backgrounds as well as from our lesbian and gay subcultures and the wider postmodernist secular society and special interest propaganda. We're also, of course, in danger of an uncritical reactionism against any of these many deforming influences.

All that this may mean in more specific terms for gay and lesbian sexual ethics remains for us all to work through and live out day in and day out. However, at the very least it means that all of us must guard against a proof-texting wrenched from the cultures of ancient society as well as guard against a sloganeering of today's subcultures of self-validating self-centered and shortsighted entitlement. For example, just because "we can hardly point with certainty to a single text (of the New Testament) in which polygamy is expressly forbidden and monogamy universally decreed," as Karl Barth wrote, and it goes without saying that there's plenty of non-monogamy in the inequalities of Old Testament society, it doesn't at all follow reasonably that we should push polygamy over monogamy today, given everything we now know in practical psychosocial terms about romantic relationship between peers. Just because antigay Christians are wrong about what they say is the "evil" of homosexuality doesn't mean that they're wrong about the evil of casual sex and porno. Just because most self-styled gurus of "gay sensibility" rationalize a reckless polygamy of so-called "open" relationships doesn't mean that the self-sacrificing lifestyle of Jesus should not still be the model for his followers— in everything including sexuality.

Yet another difficulty arises in the debate over the EC Laguna statement on sexual integrity. It centers on what's called, *judgmentally*, "Judgmentalism."

Moral judgments, of course, are expressed on all sides of the debate over the Laguna statement, but strangely, we hear the accusation of "judgmentalism" from only one side. This isn't at all unusual today. In much of society, especially in urban pop culture and in lesbian/gay subcultures in particular, there's a very selective aversion to judgments.

Fast-track New Yorkers who would be quick to decry judgmentalism" in any calls for a conservative sexual morality readily push themselves up against the velvet ropes of judgment outside the city's "with-it" nightclubs. In the words of a doorman at Chaos: "Of man's many

inhumanities to man, few are as galling as being cut dead by a nightclub doorman, often a wannabe actor or artist with a hipper-than-thou attitude. Armed with a 1,000-yard stare, doormen, earning about $100 a night, can make new Yorkers of genuine achievement and power believe their entire existence hinges on their cheekbones or their haircut."

A recent gay guide lists West Hollywood as the gayest city in America, where "status is established by the make of your car, the style of your hair, the cost of your clothing, the source of your mineral water, the shape of your nose ... the breed of your dog ... the influence of your agent and the tone of your body." Talk about judgments!

Have you seen the ads for Crunch gyms? They feature two big words plastered across the ads: "No Judgements." But an asterisk indicates a qualification to the blanket statement of "No Judgements." Each ad has a different footnoted exception to the rule, but they're all quite market-researched and fall along the lines of these two: "Except for anyone who wears a sheet when it's not Halloween" and "Except for people who put parking tickets on your car on Sundays." The seemingly sophisticated ring of "No Judgements" sounds appealing. But, of course, the really big appeal of a Crunch membership has to do with some pretty big but often rather petty judgments: "Hey slob, Your body isn't hard enough, your muscles aren't big enough, your abs aren't flat enough, etc., etc., etc. It's the fear of these very judgments that the ad campaign seeks to counter. Meanwhile, another gym just comes out and states the rule bluntly: "No pecs, no sex!"

Of course there's no possibility of any discernment, let alone critical thinking, without the rendering of value judgments. This is true in private as well as in public. You've been judging what I've been saying as you've been reading. In our personal lives, we exercise judgments every time we shop, go to a movie, work out, watch the news, vote, etc.

Yale law professor Stephen Carter notes that "nowadays you have a culture in which, if you simply talk about right and wrong, many people will say that you're being oppressive." But again, it depends on whether the judgment expressed is in-fashion or out-of-fashion. There is plenty of talk of right and wrong that is very much in-fashion these days. For example, Clark University philosophy professor Christina Sommers notes that in American college classes in ethics, there is now "an overemphasis on social policy questions, with little or no attention being paid to private morality." She calls for adding discussion of "private decency, honesty, personal responsibility, ... self-deception, cruelty, or selfishness" to discussion of matters such as "euthanasia, capital punishment, DNA research" and other social issues that are today's focus. "Social morality is only half of the moral life," she points out, "the other half is private morality." She says that colleagues don't like what she's saying. One of them told her that she was going to continue to teach on "women's oppression, corruption in big business, multinational corporations and their transgressions in the Third World," etc. She "made it clear that I was wasting time and even doing harm by promoting bourgeois morality and bourgeois virtues instead of awakening the social conscience of my students." But "at the end of the

semester," Sommers relates, "she came into my office carrying a stack of exams and looking very upset. 'What's wrong?' I asked. 'They cheated on their social justice take-home finals. They plagiarized!' More than half of the students in her ethics class had copied long passages from the secondary literature."

It's in issues of private morality that we hear the judgmental cries of "judgmentalism." And within the area of private morality, it's in matters of sexual morality that the cries are most shrill. Popular radio psychotherapist Laura Schlesinger hears these cries of insolent defensiveness all the time, from callers all across America. And she exclaims: "Frankly, it never ceases to amaze me how blind some people wish to be about their actions, as though their search for happiness and comfort precluded the right of judgment against them. Interestingly," she notes, "they don't seem to give up their judging of others." Selective judging indeed.

In a recent interview in *The Advocate*, gay icon Bob Paris says: "I'm a one-man man. That's how I function." But he is quick to add the obligatory PC disclaimer: "And it's absolutely no judgment whatsoever on people who structure their lives differently from that." In that one sentence, the ironic juxtaposition of "absolutely ... whatsoever" and "no judgment" is lost on most readers.

Somehow, it doesn't register to many such people that either *all* judgments as such are "judgmental" or *none* is. These days, it's very typical to hear that only the more conservative or traditional moral value judgment is "judgmental." The more liberal or trendy moral value judgment is not readily understood in the same terms.

As simple expressions of value judgment, none is really "judgmental." But in contemporary usage, "judgmental" implies too much of the *wrong* value, i.e., the traditional value, the politically incorrect value. ACT-UP is just as "judgmental" as Christian Coalition but the two groups are not equally charged with accusations of "judgmentalism." That's because ACT-UP is on the left and Christian Coalition is on the right and accusations of "judgmentalism" are usually made by the left against the right. What does the right substitute for the accusations of "judgmentalism?" Sometimes it's hell-fire preaching of "divine" judgment and Judgment Day. The left, though, tends to be no more impressed by the right's "divine" judgment than the right is impressed by accusations of "judgmentalism." After all, each side selects its own weapon and heresies.

Sadly, the offensive arsenals of Christians of both conservative and more liberal stripes are stocked with dangerously misloaded Bible verses. The conservatives are probably just as likely to misuse these verses as are the liberals, but they no doubt do so more often than liberals since they have bigger stockpiles. The more liberal Christians, however, try to get lots of mileage out of one verse in particular. That verse is "Judge not..." [Luke 6:37]

There is in this whole passage in Luke 6 what a New Testament scholar notes to be "an easy transition" from the admonition to engage in active good on behalf of enemies to the admonition

not to judge others. [John Nolland] Moving to the latter half, another Bible scholar notes that the term means "*condemn* not." He writes: "In their own day-to-day conduct the disciples are forbidden to usurp the place of God in judging and condemning other people. The context would suggest that it is the attitude which fails to show mercy to the guilty which is here being attacked. It is not the use of discernment and discrimination which is forbidden, but the attitude of censoriousness." [I. Howard Marshall] Says another, the saying "does not imply flabby indifference to the moral condition of others nor the blind renunciation of attempts at a true and serious appraisal of those with whom we have to live. What is unconditionally demanded is that such evaluations should be subject to the certainty that God's judgment falls also on those who judge, so that superiority, hardness and blindness to one's own faults are excluded, and a readiness to forgive and to intercede is safeguarded." [Buchsel] A commentator continues: "God prefers to act in mercy, but he who wants to put another on trial invites God to put him on trial; he who condemns another for his failings invites God to condemn him for his own failings .... The assumption is that none of us can survive God's scrutiny according to strict justice."

Expressed in positive form the call is for "the practice of forgiveness." [Nolland] He points out that to "judge not" is to practice forgiving. Forgiving obviously involves a negative assessment of something. But a follower of Jesus doesn't stop with the negative assessment of the misbehavior but moves on to the action of mercy toward the one who has misbehaved. "Forgiveness involves setting a person free from the past and the obligations of recompense that attach to his actions. But Jesus' demand [in Luke 6:37f] is yet more radical. One is not only to forgo the right to recompense but beyond that to extend openhanded generosity to the other person." [Nolland] Unfortunately, that is not generally the spirit of the one who is quick to scream "Judge not!" More often than not, "Judge not" is, itself, retaliative. But then, it's also true that the condemnation against which "Judge not" is used to retaliate is hardly ever uttered simply as a matter of love.

What is always totally unwarranted is a smugly self-righteous posturing of superiority, the useless but evil masking of the gift of self-awareness in the conscience of the condemning that shows them that they are just as guilty as those they would condemn. Indeed, they see— or project— others' misdeeds because they see such misdeeds in themselves. In the field of psychology we speak in terms of reaction formation, a common defense mechanism. But such self-awareness can be redeemed to prompt an embracing good will of kindred spirit instead of a distancing rejection that betrays unresolved guilt. As Christians, we're not called to give up our God-given intelligence. We're not called to relinquish our need to discern. We're called to examine the spirits of our age. Clearly, even the admonition to "judge not" is, itself, a judgment we're to adopt. What we are called to refrain from is the passing of a sentence of harsh condemnation. And if this applies to our relationships with even our enemies, as the text says, it surely applies to our relationships with those with whom we merely disagree.

There's another error that is similar to the one-sided accusation of "judgmentalism." It's the one-sided accusation of "legalism" and "rules." The fundamentalism out of which some EC folk

come and even mainstream evangelicalism are associated with legalism and the misusing of rules. People have been misused and even sacrificed on the altar of such legalism. Very conservative religionists have tended to trust irrationally that rules can do more than rules can do. But there's another fundamentalism, as we've said. There's the fundamentalism of the left. It's a particularly popular reaction against the fundamentalism of the right. It replaces right-wing rules with left-wing rules. But they're still rules. This should be readily discernible in the self-contradictory rule that, as someone has objected: "the [Laguna] statement ... must never become a 'rule.' We've all had enough of rules and think it's inappropriate for ECWR to set them." That was his proposed rule. Did he not see that? Do his supporters not get that? Some rules may sound restrictive and some rules can sound non-restrictive, but that all depends on the Zeitgeist, the particular spirit of the times that has captured this person's thinking or the particular spirit that's captured that person's thinking.' Will we trust the outlook and the priorities and values of this rule or that rule? It's always a matter of *which* rules, not whether or not we'll have rules. One may not wish to support a particular rule and one may wish to support a rule that excludes certain other rules, but one can't do this by saying that we've "all had enough of rules."

If rules are inevitable, they're inescapable. We all must live within some rules or others. If it's not a matter of rules or no rules but rather a matter of which rules, which rules will they be? Usually, those who get to rule with their rules are those who are in charge. If the right-wing rules, the rules are right-wing rules. If the left-wing rules, the rules are left-wing rules. Such is the rule in the game of power politics.

But biblical Christians should rise above the rules of both the right and the left. Power politics is not a game for biblical Christians. Our rule should be love. Love seeks no advantage but the welfare of the other— even of the enemy. Love seeks such advantage as intelligently and as caringly as possible.

Much is being made in the Laguna statement debate over ideas of inclusion and exclusion. If, in the past, Christians tended to trust too much in the idea of exclusion, with too many lines drawn too rigidly, perhaps today we tend to trust too much in the idea of inclusion, with too many lines being drawn too loosely. Having experienced painful exclusion, through no fault of our own, we're tempted to exclude any and all exclusion. So, understandably, some people voice concern that "there's a danger that [the Laguna statement] could be used to exclude." They ask: "How can we expand the statement ...[so that] nobody's ever excluded ... even if they reject it." Notice that such rejection itself is an exclusion. And, of course, if nobody's excluded, nobody's included. But such irrationality seems to escape the comprehension of those who practice a left-wing exclusionism. As with the accusations of legalism" and "judgmentalism" we see here again an unawareness that the matter of exclusion is two-sided. By definition, each side is exclusive of the other. Any moderate inclusion excludes and even total inclusion excludes. Every vote is a veto. If we adopt a statement favoring, say, committed loving relationships, expressed in the pragmatics of monogamy and mutual respect, those who don't want such a statement are excluded by their own opposition to the endorsement. If we reject such a statement, we exclude

those who favor its adoption. Contrary views cannot both be included without making nonsense of both. And taking no action, once the issue has been raised, trivializes all sides of the issue as though the issue is not important enough for a position statement when the fact that it is a lively debate shows that the issues are seen to be very important to persons on all sides.

But not every exclusion is equal. To exclude those who have really nowhere else to turn for lesbian/gay evangelical support is not the same as excluding those who have many other places to go. Those who reject the Laguna statement could go to practically any other gay or lesbian organization. Virtually all of these organizations would reject the Laguna statement out of hand. If ECWR adopts the Laguna statement, it would be the only major *gay/lesbian* organization to clearly and publicly support the goal of "a loving, committed, monogamous and lifelong relationship of mutual respect and integrity between two adults" of its majority constituency's sexual orientation. Virtually all other gay and lesbian organizations— including even the religious groups— have either disbanded efforts to frame a statement of sexual integrity or wouldn't dream of trying to endorse one, other than taking for granted that everyone should be free "to do his or her own thing." If ECWR rejects the Laguna statement, it would be the only *evangelical* Christian organization to refuse to support such committed relationship between two adults of its majority constituency's sexual orientation. Except for its inclusion of same-gender couples, the Laguna statement wouldn't have to be debated in any other evangelical group. It rightly would be taken for granted. When I founded Evangelicals Concerned over twenty years ago, I said that "Evangelicals" is our first name. We are, first of all, evangelical Christians. We're not cultic fundamentalists. We're not mushy postmodernists. By God's grace, we're committed to being faithful evangelical Christians in the best sense of the words. Our evangelical faith must inform our sexual lifestyle, not the other way around. If we back away from this perspective, we'll have very little if anything to offer our gay brothers and lesbian sisters who seriously struggle to integrate their evangelical Christian faith and sexuality.

Some who oppose adoption of the Laguna statement say that not only should no one be excluded, no one should even *feel* excluded. But how is it possible to prevent someone from the self-talk that leads to his or her feelings of exclusion? A group that tries to control the feelings of people is setting itself up for the frustration and resentment of an impossible task. This is especially so in an era in which people seem to be far more likely to exclude themselves and others by *taking* offense than by *giving* offense. The takers are the politically correct offenders. Says Meg Greenfield, these days "our sensitivity to insult has been fine-tuned. A political cartoon by Wiley in *The Washington Post* pictures a sulking man sitting yoga-style, staring at a TV screen and surrounded by a portable radio, a tape player, and piles of magazines and newspapers. He's mumbling three words over and over: " ... I am offended, I am offended, I am offended." The cartoon's caption is: "The Mantra of the Nineties." It's in this sad context of hypersensitivity that John M. Templeton rightly cautions: "You make yourself and others suffer just as much when you take offense as when you give offense." The unforgiving rule that we

must make sure that nobody feels offended is yet one more example of the ever-expanding and one-sided rulemaking of those who say they're against the imposing of rules.

Someone says: "I fear [the Laguna statement] will only perpetuate the dichotomy between sexuality and spirituality that we have lived most of our lives." It's true that gay and lesbian evangelical Christians have not been prepared to do anything but split their lives into the sexual on one side and the spiritual on the other. That's the way they've grown up in the evangelical subculture. But supporters of the Laguna statement say that it's purpose is to facilitate the serious integration of sexuality and spirituality, the very purpose for which EC was founded. The idea that one's sex life and one's spiritual life can be kept separate is a fiction. Spiritual and sexual health stands or fails together. Our spiritual life is lived out in our sex life— lovingly or not— just as our spiritual life is expressed in our work, our use of money, our relations with our neighbors, enemies, etc. Serious integration of spirituality and sexuality must do better than hand a trick a tract!

A practical integration of sexuality in one's truly alternative lifestyle as an evangelical Christian is what I would assume is the goal of anyone who gets seriously involved with EC. Why else would you be here? As I've said, there are plenty of other organizations in which one can be openly gay and lesbian and never have to debate sexual ethics at all.

So far as the realism of the Laguna statement is concerned, aside from its Christian references, everything in the endorsement supports what is healthiest for sexual relationship according to the very best evidence of sound psychological research and my own almost thirty years of clinical practice with mostly non-Christian gay men in New York City.

As weak and wounded egos, we're all tempted to try to counter a nagging sense of inferiority with all sorts of self-indulgence that results in unintended negative side-effects. Of course. How could we expect to solve our problems with self by indulging in self? How could we expect to overcome our misuse of our sense of self by further misuse of our sense of self?

We're all in need of refreshingly realistic support for effectively loving relationships that really can meet our very real needs for sexual intimacy. There's plenty of evidence to show that effectiveness in meeting sexual intimacy needs is dependent on a continuing mutual respect and the rigorous work of commitment to each other's real welfare, to constantly seek together what's in this for *us*, not what's in this for *me*. The agenda of casual sex is what's in it for me. The agenda of uncommitted sex is what's in it forme. If there's anything in it for you, that's your job. And it's not enough to depend on mere feelings or lust or even good intentions to meet sexual intimacy needs. Feelings fluctuate. Lust can't last. Merely good intentions can lack the skill to carry them out. But love as a disciplined act of will can lead to the meeting of deep sexual intimacy needs. Short cuts won't get there.

The duplicity inherent in "arrangements" other than monogamy are diminishing to all involved and are destructive of intimacy. Duplicity is the opposite of intimacy. This is true even of the

duplicity that's "agreed upon." That's why those who "agree" to such duplicity are so pained when faced with it.

Willed love must be added to the feelings of infatuation or being "in love" in order to reach the depths of the God-given sexual intimacy of which we're capable. That's what's so nonsensical about the "holy union" ceremonies of some gay religious groups that ask couples to promise to "commit" to each other for only "so long as love shall last." That's not love. That's lust— for which no pledge is necessary. A so-called love that is merely passive rather than pro-active won't last very long and won't go very deep.

Some people are saying that the Laguna statement excludes single members of EC. Well, that depends on what you mean by "excludes." I think it includes singles in the best way possible. Look: single people are, by definition, by the circumstance of singleness, excluded from meeting their needs for interpersonal sexual intimacy so long as they remain single. If you're alone, if you don't have a partner you know, with whom you share basic values, with whom you work together to willingly and skillfully build intimacy, how in the real world are you to meet the sexual intimacy needs that can be fulfilled only in those terms? It takes real partnership to do that. Mere masturbatory fantasies and genital nerve-ending stimulation with strangers won't do that, can't do that. The single person *is* alone. He or she *is* excluded from sexual intimacy so long as the aloneness lasts.

Genitalizing with strangers can't counter one's misuse of a poor sense of self for which one grabs for affirmation through promiscuity. After all, it's one's own sense of not measuring up that so distracts and disturbs one. No number of genitalizing experiences with others will change one's own experiential sense of one's unsexiness. Perceived sexiness has to do with a sense of otherness and one can't see self as other in a romantic sense. And no number of genitalizing experiences with others will get one to stop misusing one's sense of self to predict others' responses.

Promiscuity can't really address loneliness effectively, but it does produce unintended side-effects that seriously interfere with the meeting of sexual intimacy needs in an ongoing relationship, either in the present or in the future. Orgasms that are triggered in anonymous genitalizing are powerful behavioral reinforcers of the link between genital experience and erotic anonymity, erotic novelty, and a sense of distance and dirtiness, all of which, as "hot" because fleetingly novel, makes it more difficult to integrate a robust genital sex life with the familial experience of ongoing close relationship with a partner who is now a member of one's family.

Social psychological research shows that there are strong correlations between a high frequency of promiscuity on the one hand and, on the other, a retarded genital sexuality in ongoing relationship with a marriage partner. Such research shows as well that there's a strong correlation between, on the one hand, an absence of prior promiscuity and, on the other, robust genital sex in ongoing relationship in marriage. Much of my clinical work has been in assisting gay men to

overcome the devastating effects of an incest taboo that has been so aggravated by promiscuity and erotic fantasy that they now resent the lack of “hot” sex in their ongoing relationship or find it very difficult to present themselves in a genital way within their ongoing relationship. It seems to me that the priorities and values of the Laguna statement open up the very best possibilities for singles to go on to true partnerships of vital sexual intimacy.

In discussing the trusting of ideas, we’ve examined some ideas as they relate to sexuality. But no matter what the subject matter of an idea, in the end, trusting a particular idea is much like trusting a particular person. How well do we know the idea? Where are we coming from? Where is the idea coming from? Is our trust based on only a superficial look or do we more thoroughly understand the idea? What’s the idea fundamentally and over time? Has the basic idea stood the test of time or merely managed to pass a pop quiz on trends? What are the unseen or unspoken assumptions behind the idea? What are the unintended and unexpected consequences that follow from the idea? What are our motivations? Is the idea a figment of our wishful thinking or is it hard and inconvenient and a not particularly desired idea? Are we attracted to a particular idea for irrational reasons? Is the idea logical? Is it true?! How seriously does the idea follow the Truth who is Christ Jesus our Lord?