

"MEANS AND ENDS"

INTRODUCTION there was who
Once upon a time a young man stood on the threshold of a life of unusual promise. He knew - and others knew - that He was called to greatness. He had just experienced a unique commissioning in which He glimpsed the magnitude both of his responsibilities and his resources. No person had ever been given such an assignment; no person had ever been entrusted with such tremendous power.

The name of this young man was Jesus. At the time of His baptism, He understood in clear terms that God had called him to a special relationship. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased". And in the wake of that investiture, Jesus had to decide how He would use his power and prestige. The period that followed we call the time of his temptation. For forty days, Jesus struggled with the question of the means that He would use to achieve the ends for which He had been called.

THE TEMPTATIONS You'll recall that there were three temptations in the wilderness. The temptation to turn stones into bread. The temptation to jump from the pinnacle of the temple. The temptation to gain instant power over the kingdoms of this world by compromising with the forces of evil. In one way or another, they all represent temptations to choose lesser means to gain important ends. But as a Bible commentary on the temptations puts it,

"Actually means and ends are joined, like a river flowing into a lake. If there is poison in the means, we arrive at a poisoned lake".

Jesus knew that, and so one by one He dismissed the unworthy means which were tempting Him, and as Matthew concludes the temptation story, "Then the devil left Him". This would seem to be one of the most important times in the life of Jesus, that desert stretch of forty days when He made some very basic and fundamental decisions about the consistency between the means and the ends.

DEVELOPMENT Now from that day down to this, every person has known his own version of the temptations, and every person is tested at the point of the means that he chooses to achieve his goals in life.

There is a veritable floodtide of evidence pouring in upon us daily that as a nation we have not met that test very well in recent years. The ends that persons have promulgated - peace with honor, national security, law and order - have sounded right and reasonable to our ears, but the means that persons have used are now being revealed to us as shady, sordid, corrupt and illegal. More concerned with results than with methods, "it is," as James Reston said in his column in the Times back in April,

"....the old problem of ends and means. If the President thinks his Vietnam policy is right, and the Democrats are opposing him, with the aid of a lot of radicals who might disrupt the Presidential election campaign, why not bug the Democratic headquarters, and even sabotage the Democratic Presidential candidates? All this must have seemed reasonable.."

And reasonable it apparently did seem to a number of people of better than average intelligence who occupied positions of power and great influence. But repugnant it

AND WRONG

now seems to a growing host of citizens who have watched the unfolding of a tangled pattern of deceit and dishonesty.

This is no purely partisan matter, and whatever our political preference may be, we need to be careful that we do not find ourselves defending or denouncing along partisan lines. Actually this kind of climate in government has been building and gathering for quite a stretch, and it seems to have been given momentum by the whole Vietnam tragedy. Late last Winter John Danley loaned me his copy of David Halberstam's "The Best and the Brightest" which Peggy had given him for Christmas. The title, as you know, refers to the galaxy of exceedingly bright and promising men recruited by the government during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. But integrity did not always match the intelligence, and especially with regard to Indochina, the author insists that truth was suppressed, manipulated, colored and twisted. He records one conversation in Saigon between a newspaper reporter named Jack Langguth and the public relations officer for the Pentagon, Arthur Sylvester.

"Sylvester said that although it was unfortunate, there were times when a government official had to lie, but that he, Sylvester, as a former newsman, had a genuine objection to lying. Langguth answered that if you had a real objection to lying, you should quit, and the failure to resign meant that you had a soft job where you could exercise power, and that your principles were secondary. Sylvester looked at him almost shocked, 'If you believe that, you're stupid and naive'"

So it would seem that for some time cleverness, compromise, concealment have been the name of the game that is government. To me one of the saddest comments to come out of these Watergate weeks was the statement of Hugh Sloan, the young man of conscience who left Washington, when he said,

"I learned one thing in politics. If you go into it for a career....I Mean as a matter of life's work and economics... then sooner or later you have to compromise. You either compromise or get out. It just, sooner or later, takes the edge off your values".

It would be more comfortable if we could confine this sermon to a statement of concern about the moral climate in Washington, or up in Albany, or down at City Hall, but it's not that simple or that isolated, for what we are talking about is a moral fog that hangs over so much of our contemporary life. The cheating scandal at West Point - the nefarious plots of some big labor, like the Teamsters - the misrepresentation of some advertising - the bombing of Cambodia for 14 months without the knowledge of the public, of Congress, of the civilian head of the Air Force - they're all part and parcel of the same tragedy that Hugh Sloan was describing - the loss of values. "It just....takes the edge off your values".

IN OUR OWN LIVES

Deeper and more painful still, we must look into our own individual lives, for some of the causes of this prevailing moral malaise. I am indebted to Eugene Laubach of Riverside Church for calling attention in a sermon last Spring to a newspaper article that appeared about the time that the cribbing scandals broke out at the Air Force Academy. The reporter asked, "How do young people get this way in the first place?" - and he went on to answer in this way,

"When he is six years old a youngster sees his father slip a

five dollar bill to a policeman to forget a speeding citation. When he is eight he hears his parents discussing ways to cut corners on their income tax and explaining that 'everybody's doing it'. When he is twelve, he breaks his glasses and hears his mother tell the insurance company that they were stolen, thus collecting the price of a new pair. When he's out for the high school football team, the coach shows him how to catch hold of an opponent's shirt while blocking or to swivel a surreptitious hip into a pass receiver. When he gets his first job in the supermarket, he learns to put the firm tomatoes on top of the box and the overripe ones underneath..."

"Perhaps" writes Father Theodore Hesburgh, "we are getting the government we deserve" Compromise - concealment - cleverness - materialism - selfishness - are not isolated phenomena that have suddenly sprung up in our government. They are too often the accepted patterns in business, in society, in private life. The Watergate hearings are not television entertainment in which we can watch others squirm; they are a mirror in which we see our own society and ourselves reflected.

NATHAN AND DAVID The Old Testament story of David's encounter with the prophet Nathan was never more relevant than it is now. After King David had taken Bathsheba, the wife of one of his generals, to be his own, the courageous prophet, Nathan, came to see David. He told him a simple parable about a rich farmer with large flocks of sheep who had selfishly seized the one lamb of a poor neighbor. At this account of such obvious and rank injustice, King David was outraged, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this shall surely die". Whereupon Nathan, the prophet, in one of those great moments of Old Testament history, looked King David in the eye and said, "Thou art the man".

Watergate could become a "watershed" in determining the moral stature of our nation if enough of us and our fellowmen have the honesty to confess that we are not isolated and uninvolved in this current moral flabbiness. "Never send to ask for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee".

TRANSITIONAL PARAGRAPH There is only one way that this sermon can move toward its conclusion, and that is to stand again with the person with whom we started - the man of Nazareth in whose light is both our judgement and our hope. When He emerged from that period of his own testing in the wilderness, He spoke and He lived in such fashion that He divided time, changed the world, and still stands as the supreme revelation of all that is right, true and good. There are different ways of recalling and retelling His truth, but in this present crisis, come at it in two ways.

FIRST WAY First, He made it clear that man does live under God. In so many, many ways, He kept reminding people that He and they lived beneath the judgement and the mercy of a power - a supreme power - that He called Father. He was constantly aware that His life had an origin, a purpose, a destination, and that the name for all of these was God. What He knew for Himself, He insisted was true for all men. He reminded people that there are laws of sowing and reaping, laws of cause and effect, and that no one is ever immune. At the heart of His teaching was the assurance that there is a divine judgement which no man can evade; and a divine love that no man can escape.

We are being reminded in sometimes very painful ways how right He is. This phrase "under God" is not just a recent, polite addition to the Pledge of Allegiance. It is the oldest statement of reality about this or any other nation. How can

anyone live through these days and their disturbing disclosures and consider himself an atheist? There is a moral order at work, as surely as sunrise and sunset; seedtime and harvest. In all of this, I think we are being reminded of Jesus' insistence that as persons and as nations, we do live "under God".

SECOND WAY Second, Jesus made it clear that a person reveals honesty and goodness, not so much by striving to live up to a legalistic code, as simply by living in response to God's love in Christ. It's something of the truth that Augustine was driving at when he said, "Love God - and do as you please". In other words, our chief goal in life is to grasp and to be grasped by God's love as it comes to us in the person of Christ, and so to enter into a relationship where integrity and steadiness are what a person naturally "pleases" for his own life. "Love God - and do as you please".

The finest Christians we have known are people in whom this spirit of the living Christ dwells, and as a result they radiate a certain quality of life - a goodness, a beauty, an honesty. They are not rigid, legalistic, struggling desperately to live up to a code of behavior and conduct. None of us would set himself up as a model in this respect, but a lot of us, I believe, know enough of what we're talking about here to affirm that when our commitment to Christ remains strong and warm, we are far less enamored of the world's goals of success and the shabby means that people sometimes employ to reach those goals, and when our commitment grows lax and cold, then we are far more susceptible to the prevailing winds of compromise and confirmity that touch us all.

The problem and the answer, I believe, are basically religious. It just could be that Watergate might prove to be a blessing.....if enough of us and our friends here and elsewhere are shaen, shocked, and saddened enough and distressed enough to search our own souls - to repent - to strengthen our own Christian commitment - to keep close to the fires of faith - to those resources of spiritual renewal - to take to hear a word of God that comes to us today out of the past, just as it came centuries ago to Dauid's son, King Solomon:

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land."

"Amen" - which being interpreted, means - "So may it be".

anyone live through these days and their disturbing disclosures and consider himself at atheist? There is a moral order at work, as surely as sunrise and sunset; seedtime and harvest. | One of the most telling comments that I have heard in these weeks was a commentary one night by Eric Sevareid. I do not have his exact words, but in effect he said,

"We have seen the collapse of some of the most powerful men in government. At one time, they wielded immense power, and they could push buttons and destroy nations. But now confronted with truth, they have become powerless. For truth is not finally defeated".

His statement was almost as much an affirmation of faith as those words that we repeat here on a Sunday morning. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty"...."and in the ultimate triumph of righteousness...." I think we are seeing some new confirmation of Jesus' insistence that as persons and as nations, we do live "under God".

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