Teaching Moments: "Clintongate"

(In American English, the suffix "-gate" means a mess made by politicians.)

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A MORAL HURRICANE HAS BLOWN ALL OUR ROOFS OFF!

That's the main analogy I've made in talking with various inquiring media about Clintongate (Sexgate). God could always see down into roofless houses, now we (satellites, the net, etc.) can, too. Jesus was right (L.12.2-3): "Nothing is secret that will not become known."

Purpose *of this Thinksheet: In preparation for leading a "Conversation of Consequence" on the subject after worship this coming Sunday, I'm presenting here some questions some of which I may introduce* after *listening to the folk. Less probably, I'll bespeak some of the answers here (but copies of this Thinksheet will be available* after *the conversation).*

1 "Is it ever permissible to lie?" was a newspaper reporter's opening question to me. My answer: "Yes, & to murder. Some people give themselves permission to murder, some to lie." She was shocked. I: "Do you mean does God ever give us permission to lie?" She was shocked again. I: "If we get permission, somebody gave it. Who? Why?"

2 What about a white (others-serving) lie? I: Yes, if with conscience-discomfort. Let's stay with color: (1) A gray lie is a little bad one, as C.'s (Clinton's) about a single (one-married-partner) adultery; (2) A black one is a big bad one, as Henry Hyde's double (both-partners-married) adultery (H.H. was a family wrecker whose cuckolded husband, losing both wife & chn., rightly calls him a "hypocrite"). Right now, the big liar is sitting in judgment (as chair of the House Judiciary Committee) on the little liar.

3 "Once a liar, always a liar?" Nonsense. One lie may so fill you with chagrin as to innoculate you against further lying. "Lie in one part of your life, you'll lie in all?" Nonsense again. Millions cover-lie about illicit sex, an existential compartment sealed off from the rest of life, with almost no leakage. "Can C. ever be trusted again?" He can't be trusted, but he can be trusted to do as good a job as he can in his presidency. Or maybe his repentance is so genuine & so deep that he's become more trustworthy in all senses. "How can anybody so humiliated be a good president?" Arrogance blinds, humility (a fruit of humiliation) opens one's eyes. The religious & ethical wisdom of the world through the ages--& esp. the Christian doctrine of grace--says that C.'s now in better shape to be a good president.

4 "Shouldn't he be punished?" Of course! Some actions have reflexive consequences (like touching a hot stove); some have social (interpersonal & societal) consequences; some have intrapsychic consequences (how C.'s been suffering within!); & some must have juridical (society-imposed) consequences (eg, I think C. should be fined $4.4 million, the est. cost of his eight months of stonewalling about his doings with M. [Monica]). "What about God-imposed consequences?" God judges through & beyond all the above punishing processes, + "final judgment."

5 "Not all adulterers lie about it, do they?" All except those (infinitesimal in number) who "out" themselves immediately. Adultery is itself a lie against one's marital commitment, & lying about it merely continues the lie--continues it till, like a runaway train passing red signal-lights, one crashes into a wall (C.'s wall being his DNA).

6 "Isn't C. worse than Hyde in that H. didn't lie to a grant jury?" We can't say: we don't know whether Hyde, under a millions-of-dollars prosecutorial assault, would have lied to a grand jury. Lying to a grand jury about illicit sex one shouldn't have been "out"ed about has no moral (though it has legal) significance.

7 "Wasn't contradicting M. unfair to her?" No, it was keeping their agreement that they'd not blab on each other (as she did on him). "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned": he broke off the relationship,* & she took vengeance on him (the grand jury confronting 11 persons she blabbed to). *A good deed for which he suffered.

8 "Didn't C. seduce Monica?" That's a sexist question, as though men are

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powerful (always having the sexual initiative) & women are powerless (& thus inherently victims). Before the relationship, M. told friends of her intention to seduce C., then lifted her skirt so he could see her thong panties. After seeing Rose's seducing (stripping naked*, leading her target into the back seat of a car), M. pressed C. for something he was reluctant about, & apparently submitted to only once, viz. genital intercourse. (See my Thinksheets titled "Men have authority, women have power." And remember Proverbs, which teaches boys that women are dangerous & fun, in that order [an order C. disastrously reversed].)

*This is how that scheming woman (as seen in her later behavior) Bathsheba seduced David.

9 "But wasn't C. the primary cause of all this mess?" No, Monica was at both ends: at the beginning, in seducing; at the end, in blabbing. C. was victimized going & coming. Of course he couldn't have been victimed if he'd had his sexual guard up (whatever words one may use to describe that weakness of his).

10 "But wasn't this an instance of a powerful person illicitly relating sexually to a less powerful person?" No, the reverse: in the "power" pertinent, C. was weak & M. strong. "But wasn't this an employer taking advantage of an employee?" Twice no: (1) He was taken advantage of, not the reverse; (2) M. was not an employee: interns work without pay. "But didn't he pollute the Oval Office?" It was polluted before him, one president there impregnating a woman whose subsequent child he contributed to the upbringing of. Besides, the Oval Office recovers rapidly: it's a place of power, & power produces awe, which passes for purity. C. disgraced himself, but the notion that he disgraced the office (both senses) is only political rhetoric.

11 "But will other heads of state trust him from now on?" No problem. After his world-economics speech Monday, 20 heads of state phoned to congratulate him. Heads of state in general have what used to be called "a way with the ladies," & laugh that we Americans take adultery so seriously--& feel sorry for poor C., at the same time (many of them) admiring his virility & boldness. (Two days ago at the press conference with C., the morally great Vaclav Havel brushed off as irrelevant a question about C.'s fitness to continue as president: "I don't understand you Americans.")

12 "How can C. be a model for our children? He's broken 2/5ths of the Ten Commandments!" In saying he can be a model of true repentance, C. is following the Apostle Paul, the "chief" (lit., "foremost"--1Tim.1.15) of sinners, saved by "grace" (God's undeserved acceptance through the Cross, God's own sacrifice for our sin[s]). The control Commandment is the 1st: love God, & who's forgiven much loves more (L.7.47)--so C., whose repentance is (I believe) true, now loves God more, which puts in him a greater desire to please God by obeying all the other Commandments. Again, he may now be a better president than he could be before. Thus is grace subversive of moralism & legalism, both of which have been erupting like volcanos in Congress, the press, & some of the clergy (sexual McCarthyism).

13 "Shouldn't we Christians be outraged by the president's behavior?" Saddened, not outraged: we should be outraged by the devil's success in diverting dollars (millions of them!) & hours (billions of them!) from domestic & foreign crises to which government & populace should be giving attention.

14 "Does lying about sex, even to a grand jury, warrant driving a president from office?" No, it's not a "high crime," it's only a low one, a very low one.

15 "Does C. have a moral core?" Not that I've noticed, but he has good will toward the people--which is the best sub for a moral core if a chaotic childhood made moral-core development unlikely. (Just look at the present-day Americans! Do they deserve--would they vote for--a president with a moral core?) (Grandiosity, excessive self-esteem, signaled C.'s absence of a moral core.)

16 "Doesn't Rev.21.8 say liars are doomed?" Impenitent ones: C. is penitent.

17 "How do we know if C.'s repentance is real?" Jesus says, watch him (Mt.7.16, 20; cp.3.8).

18 "Can any good come out of all this mess?" Of course! Some good already: In our narcissistic culture with its relativistic ethics, right/wrong is making a come-back.