

## HOW IMPORTANT IS TRUTH?

Today, the House impeached the President for perjury & obstruction of justice.

1 Clinton is a good liar--I mean not that he lies well, skillfully, which he does, but that he's a good man who (unfortunately) lies: he can't be trusted, but he can be trusted to be a good man (with good will & compassion) & to do a good job (as an able & hard-working President, effective as a national & world leader).

2 But some Americans consider **truth** the *sine qua non* in our civilization's values-quadrilateral. Since in Christianity it's **love**, not truth, that is the "without which nothing," I've been shocked at those Christian thinkers/leaders who in the Clinton Event have elevated truth above love, beauty, & goodness. This Thinksheet puzzles about this aberration.

3 To the classical triad of truth/beauty/goodness, Christianity added the evangelic triad of faith/hope/love ("and the greatest of these is love," the final clause of 1Cor.13). I believe that love is the greatest of the six, not just of the three; & I see a close correlation of the third in each triad: active love is good will in action, & good will is the predisposition & prerequisite of loving. St.Jn. of the Cross was Christian & in line with his biblical namesake (Jn., 1-3 Jn.): "When the evening of life comes, we shall be judged on love."

4 Christian "character" roots in God's kind of love as visible supremely in the Cross. It's never found in pure form in any one of us. Even Mother Teresa's love of others ( $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$  *agape*) was not entirely disinterested: "doing her thing" was her way of loving herself as well as the last-least-lost. And Clinton's much-laughed-at "I feel your pain" is not entirely self-serving--indeed, is so much in action for the good of the poor (to whom the gospel is "good news") that African-Americans call him "our first black President."

5 Since in the way Clinton thinks of & acts toward God & neighbor he's a person of Christian character, what do critics mean when they say he's a character but "not a man of character"? This we know: for them, the character of "a man of character" roots in something other than love & is therefore unChristian. In the heritages of West & East are many images of "the gentlemen" (see #2934 for a shocking clash of images in a pastor's head). Deconstruct the oxymoronic phrase "judged on love" & you see the gospel's radicality: as truth is the objective base of judgment, righteousness is its subjective base: as the judge then, love is both truthful (absorbing truth) & righteous (displaying righteousness): truth & righteousness are not love's judge but the other way around.

6 Against moralists & legalists, Jesus makes a sophisticated distinction between mouth-liars (eg, Clinton) & life-liars. A certain man had two liar-sons (Mt.21.28-32)--the 2nd said he'd do the father's will but didn't: the 1st said he wouldn't but, "changing his mind [& thus giving the lie to his refusal]," did "the will of his father." A moral: By what people say, you can't tell what they'll do. People are liars. More about sex than about anything else, so sexual McCarthyism (with unlimited time & money & permission) could destroy almost everybody....

7 ....by entrapment in "perjury" & "obstruction of justice." Which brings us to an additional moral-ethical-legal dimension, viz, the **size** of a lie-situation in the perspective of oath-taking: a little lie (eg, Clinton's) sworn to is bigger than big lies (eg, Bush's & Reagan's) not sworn to--a legal perspective that so trivializes ethics as to amount to fraud. I believe at least 34 senators (the number required to keep Clinton in office) will have enough sense of *proportion* (a solid ethical principle) to see through this fraud.

8 HUSTLER mag.'s Larry Flynt, offering \$1 million to anyone who could prove adultery against any member of Congress, succeeded (as had Ken. Starr) in sexual-history **character assassination**: this morning, the newly delegated Speaker of the House, Bob Livingston, resigned at the apex of his career, saying he will leave the House in six months. Sleazy snoops such as Flynt & Starr are terrorists to elected

After writing this Thinksheet, I read a subsequently published book on the Clinton Event, viz, JUDGMENT DAY AT THE WHITE HOUSE, ed. by Gabriel Fackre (Eerdmans/99). Then I reread this Thinksheet: I would, now, make no changes in it.

officials. Exercising unelected power over the duly elected, they corrupt good government not only by destroying those who *in the past* let their genitals wander but also by dissuading many able prospective servants of the people from letting the genital snoops, official & unofficial, loose on them. (I said "sexual-history" & "past": Livingston had previously given up his extra women [admittedly plural], & Clinton had previously given up Monica)....In the House this afternoon, Judiciary Committee Chair Henry Hyde (a sexual house-wrecker, which nobody has accused Clinton of being) got a both-sides standing ovation when he decried the public examination of private sex. Hyde & Clinton agreed that Starr's (painfully explicit) intrusive inquiries into "Monica" was none of the inquirer's business. But hypocritically, or at least morally ambiguously, Hyde voted to impeach the sex-entrapped President: two wrongs make a right? Again, the Senate (I pray) will see through the slime. The principle on which Clinton committed perjury (if he did) was the principle of **privacy**, a value increasingly difficult to defend in the Information Age. The idea that Clinton is not a man of principle is ignorant or malicious. ("A man of principle" is as much a code-slippery phrase as is "a man of character.")

9 The **inquisitorial** mentality reduces "truth" to "facts" & is oblivious both to values & to contexts (including motivations as well as life-situations). This narrow-mindedness commits a further reduction, viz, facts to words (thus Clinton's extreme care in word-use: the Supreme Court says that the baseline in perjury cases is the witness's meanings of the words he/she uses, the prosecution's burden being to prove intent to lie--so a partially true statement is a strong defense).

9 The Clinton Event is both litmus test & Rorschach on (1) your native disposition & (2) your personal history. As to the latter, I'll allude to only one factor: have you ever been fired? As to the former, here's wisdom from Coleridge (via Wm. Ralph Inge, **CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM**, Scrib/1899/1933, 36): Everybody's born either a **mystic** (Plato, illumination, prophet) or a **legalist** (Aristotle, tradition, priest). For the **legalist**, God is "the righteous Judge dispensing rewards and punishments," with "duty" as "categorical imperative." (That mentality was in full cry in the House attackers of Clinton these past two days.) For the **mystic**, "God is love" (1Jn.4.8, 16: light-love-life is the mystic vision & living experience of the NT's John [Johannine] literature [Jn. 1-3 Jn.]). Me? More mystic-born than legalist-born.

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