Unlimited LOVE enforces LIMITS

If you were a social worker day after day trying to "help resolve family conflict and develop family strengths," to "provide holistic treatment for your family while recognizing the needs of individual family members" (as a 4.14.05 CCTimes ad said, with photo of a member of our congregation), how would you go about using your resources (knowledge, skills, personal experience, & vision [including your Christian commitment])? Last Sunday we had a "Conversation of Consequence" with this Christian-in-the-workworld. As church members, our ministry to one another should address the question "How can we listen/teach/learn/grow, in our gathered life (this congregation as a school of Christ) for our scattered lives (in our "worlds")?

This Thinksheet, which is some reflections on its opening question, without particular reference to last Sunday's "Conversation."

1 "When they [your chn.] start coming, what & who is coming?" I can still hear Fritz Kunkel, eminent Christian psychiatrist, ask this (52 years ago). Are the creatures coming through you good, evil, or both? (Both, say the two biblical religions: we're born with two "yetzers" (tendencies), one to "tov" [good] & one to "ra'[evil].)

As for who they are, "The Archangel [i.e., God] gives you just the ones you need, not the ones you would choose."

2 In excluding the yetzer ra' (the tendency to evil) from anthropology (the basic picture of the human being), every modern pedagogy (style of child-rearing) is anti-biblical. In the Enlightenment tradition of Rousseau's EMILE, our secular schools for training teachers, social workers, & therapists assume that the child is constituted good or (clean-slate ["tabula rasa"]) neutral. So trained, all child-workers see themselves as aids to an unpunctuated developmental process of multi-stage "happiness" (Epicurean eudemonia: right actions produce happiness, & [Aristotle] reason is the guide to right actions). Introjecting this motivational ("pursuit of happiness") system, the child becomes an autonomous individual, relations with others being incidental. Contrast the biblical pedagogical project, which is to lead the child beyond the yetzers (good/evil) into holiness, a theonomous (God-ruled) condition of inner/outer life in which others are essentially involved & which is punctuated by renunciations of (repentances from) evil/self-will/sin.

3 Since the "happiness" goal aims at independence, children are to control their own bodies without passive (restraint) or active (pain-infliction) from any other body: adults' superior musculature does not, pedagogically, exist: the mouth is the adult's only physical teaching-organ. Contrast the "holiness" goal, which allows muscle-&-mouth "holistic" teaching. (The philosophical base of the difference is that while the Bible sees the human being as heartbody (levbasar), the Enlightenment was body/mind dualistic.) The "happiness" child-workers have a word for heartbody child-rearing: "child abuse." To which the "holiness" child-workers respond that mouth-only child-rearing is, by neglect of the body, child-abuse.

While the two disagree on **means**, they agree on "love" (with its rich Bible-derived meanings) as **motive**.

4 All child-workers are against child-abuse (however defined), & I'm against Bible-abuse by child-workers. Wrongly, the Bible is oft-hung with "Spare the rod and spoil the child." The earliest reference near that is in Jn.Skelton (d.1529): "There is nothing that more dyspleaseth God, / Than from their children to spare the rod." Next, Ralph Venning, 1649: "They spare the rod, and spoyle the child." Next, Sam. Butler (d.1680): "Love is a boy by poets styled; / Then spare the rod and spoil the child." As in Scripture, the contexts for such saying is love: child-neglect (as in absentee-father cases) is, by failure of discipline, child-abuse.

5 Now let's look at the Bible's "rod"-discipline passages, all of them in Proverbs. Wrongly, some child-workers' literature reads Proverbs through Solomon as father--not realizing that "Solomon" is the personal symbol of the Bible's wisdom literature

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(though most of it he didn't write--as in the cases of "Moses"[meaning the Pentateuch] & "David" [meaning the Psalms]). (Of the four Hebrew words translated "rod," none were permitted injury: the motive was correction, not damage.) (My story is intermediate: as a father, little physical correction, no use of anything in the hand--though my own father frequently struck me--mainly on the legs--with a razor strop [an Eng. tradition].) Proverbs is a Jewish filtered collection of Near Eastern wisdom sayings, some from Egypt (where Osiris's final judgmental authority was represented by a shepherd's crook on one shoulder & a lash on the other [roughly parallel to the two implements in Ps.23.4]--as Sextus is a Christian filtered collection of Hellenistic wisdom sayings. Unsurprisingly, the gospel requires further filtering of Proverbs--indeed, of the whole OT.) (The Bible is abused by those who abuse its authority to justify abusing children.)

Now for Proverbs' discipline sayings. The basic chapter, the 1st, says only that life itself punishes folly (the reflexive sanction). More than 1/2 century ago, T.S.Eliot said "Half the harm that is done in the world is due to people who [mean no harm but] want to feel important....absorbed in [the folly of] the endless struggle to think well of themselves." Against the folly of teaching "self-esteem," 1.7 TEV says "To have knowledge [...wisdom], you must first have reverence for the LORD." (Grow up from infantile egocentricity to theocentricity! "Happiness" arrests development toward "holiness.") Now comes the "rod" as sign of authority & tool for guidance & correction. 13.24: to neglect it shows not love but hate, & (19.3) let's them "ruin themselves by their own stupid actions and then blame the LORD" (cp.vs.18: "destroy themselves"). 22.15: "Children just naturally do silly, careless things, but a good spanking will teach them how to behave"--I add, if followed by a good hug (as the Talmud puts it: "A child should be pushed aside with the left hand, and drawn closer with the right hand."). (As a father, I hugged much, spanked little--& never beat--but am pained at the memory of having spanked at all, though I believe that it would have been wrong never to have done so.) 23.13f:"a good spanking....may save" the child's "life." 29.15 KJV: "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but (TEV) "<u>If a child has his own way</u>, he will make his mother ashamed of him." ("Rod" is in all the above Proverbs sayings, though not in all the TEV renderings.)

6 The underlining two lines above is the nub of difference. The "<u>happiness</u>" folk teach a continuity from the child's inclination (which is to be noticed & encouraged) to will to action to happiness: the "<u>holiness</u>" folk teach both that continuity & the discontinuity between the child's evil inclinations & the divine & parental obedience-demands (radically put in Deut.21.18-21: the community stones a "stubborn and rebellious" son--doubtless a shock-threat only). This Thinksheet's title points to **passive** forced obedience: love sets & (en)forces limits. (In his [1998] LOVE AND LIMITS, Ron Huxley describes four discipline-orientations: [1] rejecting/neglecting [low love, low limits]; [2] authoritarian [low love, high limits]; [3] permissive [high love, low limits]; [4] democratic or balanced [high love, high limits].)

The disciplinarian's superior musculature may be indicated for **active** forced obedience (as restraint or minor pain-infliction).

7 In his I AM CHARLOTTE SIMMONS, Tom Wolfe presents the worst-case scenario of American college frosh bereft of love & free from limits (colleges no longer serving "in loco parentis"). (Good review: Wm.Willimon's "Abandoned at College," 4.19.05 CHRISTIAN CENTURY.) The West's long adolescent flight (beginning with A.S.Neill's SUMMERHILL, 1921) from what was judged the tyranny of <u>obedience</u> has created what C.S. experienced, in her college, as the tyranny of anomie-anarchy, the open sea of giving shape to one's life & making sense of whatever happens (Epicurus' Garden redivivus, godless because all "happiness" seekers are their own deities). In the heyday of the human-potential movement ('60s-'70s) I met many theorist-promoters of this frozen adolescence, & new ones continue to appear--e.g., Norm Lee (PARENTING WITHOUT PUNISHING [2002], aiming "to achieve happiness and avoid suffering"). In chap.15, he says "Jesus taught us...to leave punishment up to God," but (1) Jesus, no parent, can't serve as parenting model, & (2) Lee's eudemonistic philosophy leaves no room for God (so, in his list of "Things to Do" in child-rearing, nothing religious appears). K-12 is now on the Internet, so "public schooling [is] obsolete." Not surprisingly, (Epicurean) Jos.Campbell is highly praised.