

I'm about to do something, as requested, at one of our UCC state annual conferences, on "The Content & Substance of Our Faith." As I was thinking about this, I noticed this here letter in today's Cape Cod daily newspaper. It's a sermon on "God's redeeming grace" preached (1) from an unexpected angle (2) in an unexpected pulpit. The gospel is God's best surprise, & we ought to try to communicate it in kind, by sneaking up on folks.

1. It ain't necessarily no compliment to me that on Cape Cod I'm better known for my letters to the editors of our daily & weeklies than for anything else I do: maybe everything else is feeble. Anyway, the Cape-- & for all I know the rest of the country--is brimful of avid readers of the letters-to-the-editor department of periodicals. Not a pulpit you'd want to miss stepping into if you've something to preach.

## Three attacks on alcoholism

Against the Supreme Court decision, your lead editorial April 29 sides with "accepted medical evidence," then admits "there is no absolute proof that alcoholism is a disease." In seeing a moral dimension, rather than an exclusively medical one, the court's "thinking could set alcohol treatment back half a century." In this you exhibit another disease, namely, our therapy-minded society's determination to let the medical model dominate in interpreting what's wrong with humanity private and public.

Contrast the broad-minded, three-pronged attack on alcoholism. In use in many holistic centers (in contrast to medical centers), this approach does not try to capture the counselee for any one profession. To consider alcoholism a disease provides, for the public, a comforting illusion and, for physicians, a comfortable income. But the human cost of that diagnostic constriction is that the two other analytic modes are left out -- and it's what you leave out that wrecks you.

What does the medical model leave out? The moral and the metaphysical. Easy to remember if you think of three M's and six S's:

1. Currently our society is using, almost exclusively, the medical model. The medical specialist is happy to have us see the alcoholic as sick, for the simple reason that a spider would rather have a fly in its web than anywhere else. Physicians can't make a living off of stupid, sinful people unless they can get them to view themselves as sick.

2. Don't know how the "closet" got to be a familiar public metaphor lately, though do know it's most common reference: homos & lesbians blowing their own covers, stepping forth & announcing themselves as "gay & proud of it" (as their posters say). How about a Christian parade with banners reading "Christian & proud of it"? No, that won't quite do; but you get the idea: this Thinksheet is AGAINST timidity in bespeaking your faith in public & FOR imaginative verbal interventions for Jesus (playful, too, where appropriate). DON'T LEAVE IT TO THE FUNDAMENTALISTS & CULTS & then complain about them! Go public yourself! And if you use some imagination about doing it, you'll find many blessings dripping upon you for your efforts. Like spiritual vitality. Like fun. Like a general deepening in your style of relating to people. Like

a thinning out of the number of your friends, of whom you have too many (or an increase of friends, if you have too few).

3. As a pastor, I found far more effective saying something to the town board than saying the same thing in the pulpit. Our Lord tells us to ENTER our closet to pray ("in secret"), then EXIT the closet to live what you prayed (including the closet of comfortable religious associations & institutions)... The Schlesingers, Max Lerner, & a host of other secular influentials in American public life witness that a Christian theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, was the thinker they most looked up to for intellectual leadership in public affairs. RN was effective in the Church, spectacular in the world.

2. In suggesting "willful misconduct" as the operant way of seeing those two veterans, the Supreme Court was activating the moral model. This model is the province of the sage, who uses the sapiential sanction as primary: human behavior seen as stupid or wise, given to folly or wisdom. Wisdom expands, enriches, frees: folly shrinks life, imprisoning its victims. Getting drunk, drinking too much, is folly even when in the military fools can plead what you call "severe emotional stresses." Right/wrong, good/evil are other terms the sage uses. It's wrong and evil to soak your brains in any poison, howsoever pleasant.

3. Our secular society is even more allergic to the metaphysical model than it is to the moral. The saint sees alcoholism as sinful, an abuse of a good creature of God and thus an offense against God, calling for repentance and trust in God's redeeming grace.

Three attacks on alcoholism, not one.

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