

VIRTUES/VALUES & "THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY & THE SECULAR MEDIA"

Couple days ago in these parts, Alan Dershowitz, the amoral criminal-defender, was asked what he'd like to come back as. His answer: "A human being. In this life, I'm a lawyer." Reminds me of an old joke: We are the missing link between the higher apes & human beings. In both instances, the expression "human being" is used elatively, to express an ideal cluster of **virtues** (inner dispositions to control emotions & appetites in the interest of a higher [in the sense of freer, more deliberate-decisional, spiritual] life) & **values** (outer enablers of the lower & the higher life for oneself & others). One's **duties** (toward God, oneself, others, society, humanity, the earth) are the rights/responsibilities bridges between the virtues & the values.

Our church's "Conversations of Consequence" committee asked me to do a Thinksheet toward the church's Oct.26 "C. of C." Oct.26 on the subject you see as this Think-sheet's title, & to include a small disquisition on what you see on the line about the title....We the committee needed data, which we gathered (through the church mailer & the Sunday bulletin) by this instrument:

1. We [our family] generally see TV & movies as...an asset to our family life...a negative influence...other.... 2. What do you like about TV or movies?.... 3. What shows do you watch as a family? (List as many as you like. Use extra sheet if needed.) 4. What are some of the reasons you like these shows?...healthy relationship between & within generations...healthy attitude toward gender issues...respectful handling of sexual issues...shows consequences of acts, especially in relation to violence & sex...does not demean parents or children...they are funny...exciting & suspenseful...other.... 5. What do you dislike about TV & movies? (Use extra sheet if needed.) 6. What TV shows or movies do you refuse to watch? (Use extra sheet if needed.) 7. Do you find that the recent TV guidance categories (ie, PG ratings) are helpful?...Yes/why...No/why.... 8. How do you handle TV & movies with your family?...restrict viewing to (...limited hours per day, ...certain shows)...watch a program or film as a family & discuss it...use independent rating system. 9. How could South Church help? 10. How many TVs are in your home?.... 11. If there are children in your family, give their ages..... 12. What channels do you watch most often?.... 13. Would you be willing to document one week of TV viewing (listing, by person[s] viewing, every program watched during the week)? 14. How do Christian values affect what you [your family] watch [my underlining]?

1 In ordinary speech/writing, virtues & values overlap; but let's follow the nuanced inner/outer definitions in the small print above. Now let's note the **Bible's** two primary pictures of the moral life, & relate them to virtues/values:

The **virtues** picture is walking (Heb. *halachah*, which came to include how to walk [authoritative rules/regulations/laws] in obedience to the LORD). Descriptively, behavior; as a study, ethics. Vis-a-vis this Thinksheet's subject, the Christian family is to discover & do God's will under the media barrage aimed to convert us into total consumers who let commercial interests consume our hours & dollars.

The **values** picture is fruit, the emphasis being less on values "out there by themselves" than on values "out there because products of virtues." The righteous are like trees "yielding fruit" (Ps.1.3). "Fruit" words occur 6x in Jn.15.1-8: "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener....I am the vine, you are the branches." Gal.5.22-23: "The fruit [singular] of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." 1P.1.3-8: To "become participants in the divine nature," "escape from the corruption that is in the world," & keep "from being ineffective and unfruitful," we are to "make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses the fruit metaphor extensively (Mt.7.15-20)....In the next chap. (Gal.6.7-8), Paul switches from fruit to grain, to the same point....I should note these additional NT virtue-lists (not to mention many vice-lists): Phil.4.8 (honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellence, worthy of praise) & Col.3.12-17 (compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgive, love, peace, wisdom, gratitude) & Eph.4.32 (kind, tender-hearted, forgiving). & the familiar 1Cor. 13 (faith, hope, love). Besides lists, we have a number of repetitive virtue/value passages, Heb.11 being the most quoted (faith-trust 26x!).

2 In a particular TV program or movie, how fare the **values** of truth, beauty,

goodness (the West's historic triad)? the *cardinal* (ancient Greek & Roman) **virtues** of justice, courage-fortitude, temperance, wisdom-prudence? the *theological* (Christian) **virtues** of faith-trust, hope, love (the triad appearing in 1Cor.13, 1Thes., Gal., Ro., Col.)? Early Christian thinkers brought together, conflated, all of these values/virtues--eg, The Sentences of Sextus (2nd century; pp139-168 of my SANCTIONS IN...POSTAPOSTOLIC-PRECATHOLIC CHRISTIAN LEADERS [Chicago/54], I show how he did it). Ethically as well as religiously, Christianity fulfilled not only Judaism but also both rustic & refined paganism. Reason is not enough: human beings need the grace of divine forgiveness & the gift-graces (charisms) of the Spirit.

3 Why don't I make it easy for you & just list values/virtues as we Christians see them in order of importance? That would give the false impression that these Christian qualities can be treated as character-building entities on a check-list for (1) measuring your righteousness & (2) judging others. Rather, in Christian light these values/virtues are fundamentally religious, not moral-ethical. They are so many ways of worshipping God & witnessing to the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord under the inspiration & guidance of the Holy Spirit. *BEWARE! Because this is so, you can't trust the dictionary definitions! The values/virtues are given distinctive Christian illumination by the fact that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...that the world might be saved through him" (Jn.3.16-17) Imagine that central Christian fact/conviction as a campfire around which the values & virtues form a circle, each value & virtue itself but illuminated by "the true Light" that illumines all (Jn.1.9).*

4 But I may say a few additional things that might be helpful in your **judging**, as a Christian, television & cinema productions. The first is that "the two cardinal virtues in the ethical teaching of the early church" (NT+) are **love & humility** (p415 of a magisterial technical [data in columns of NT Gk. texts] essay, 363-466, on how the earliest Christians were instructed, catechized, to believe & live--in THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER, Ed.G.Selwyn, Mac/47). The second thing is that while their pagan neighbors were aiming at **happiness** (eudemonia) for themselves, the Christians were praying/working for **holiness** ("Be holy, for I am holy" [4x in Lev.: 11.44-45; 19.2; 20.26]; see Heb.12.10-14: "be partakers of his holiness....without which no one will see the Lord").

5 How much TV on Princess Di's demise have you been watching? Has it been worth that much of your time? What values/virtues have the talking heads been touting? What entertainment "values" does the Di Event (death/mourning/burial) have?

A few days after Di's death, Mother Teresa died. In your own mind, & perhaps on paper, compare/contrast the media coverage of the two events. Who of public prominence went to each event? Through your Christian eyes, how do the two women look to you together (as compassionate) & as different? Were both happy (if so, compare their happinesses)? Were both holy (I heard an old London lady call Di "a saint")? What will each be remembered for? Was each beautiful (if so, describe the beauties)? Was each true? Was each good? Were they both role-models (if so, compare)? To what extent would it be fair to say that Di was a personal symbol of the happiness aim & Teresa of the holiness aim?

6 To the extent that we Christians aim at holiness rather than happiness, we are "strangers [aliens] in a strange land" which once, but no more, publicly honored holiness. In his 1979 analysis, Christopher Lasch said that America has been seduced into THE CULTURE OF NARCISSISM, hedonism, pleasure, "the pursuit of happiness." For ill more than for good, our entertainment media are Americanizing, & thus hedonizing, the world. A current ABC/TV show, "The Mystery of Happiness," is a straw in a new wind: it's like Jer.9.23-24 (not wisdom or strength or riches, but spirituality ["knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice, & righteousness on earth, for in these I delight"]). Mother Teresa was old, holy, & happy. Princess Di was young, holy? happy? Teresa was in love with the LORD, whom she saw in the eyes of the last & least sufferers. Di was said to be in love with her latest playboy & had announced retirement from her charitable activities. Is not what we make of these two women what God makes of us?

7 What gets your attention gets you. There, I said it again. It's worth it.