

# THE CULTURAL MIND



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# INTRODUCTION



A number of decades ago, when the Reformed world in North America was far less fragmented than it is now, I was asked to become a contributor to *Tabletalk*, a publication of Ligonier Ministries. That relationship was a happy one, and I contributed for a few years. This book is a collection of those columns, dusted off and presented anew to a rising generation.

Because of the nature of the cultural commentary found in those columns, they seem to me to have aged surprisingly well. If you try to think in terms of principles (as opposed to methods), it usually pays dividends. C.S. Lewis once said that whatever is not eternal is eternally out of date. However successful that was is for others to judge, but I can at least say that this was the goal. Nothing ages

# COMMUNITY AND COVENANT



A philosopher once commented that a particular debate was really a scramble for the “good words.” *Community* is such a word, and everyone wants it. In the modern world we see the church community, the gay community, the farm community, and so on. But what does *community* mean?

Before a community is possible, something must be found which will tie individuals together. In the world, it is thought sufficient that the individuals simply have “something in common.” But without some kind of tie, there is no reason to consider any two individuals to be in any deeper relation to one another than to anyone else.

Without a legitimate bond, all attempts at community will be fragmented and atomistic. Because of our modern emphasis on individualism, this is a common problem. Our “communities” have lost their former molecular strength—we see families and communities that have the atomistic structural rigor of a sack full of BBs.

A study of Scripture reveals that this community “glue” really is the concept of *covenant*. When there is no covenant between individuals, there can be no community. When we attempt to create artificial covenants (separate from God’s Word), the results are a clear failure. The feminist movement is a sham because there is no scriptural covenant binding all women together into a sisterhood—any more than solidarity exists between people with the same birthdays, or eye color. Neither can covenants be created around a particular sin (because this is contrary to God’s Word). The gay community is most emphatically not a community for precisely this reason. It is an anti-community, for like charges repel. The only covenantal solidarity in sin which Scripture recognizes is the corporate identity of all men with and in Adam. “For if *by the one man’s offense many died*, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many” (Rom. 5:15, emphasis added). No covenantal bond connects one gambler to another, or one adulterer to another. Attempts to create a community around homosexual behavior are also bound to falter and fall.

So how does covenantal “glue” work? The foundational covenant for all larger communities is the covenant of marriage and family. “The LORD has been witness between you

# PASTORING MASCULINITY



A number of years ago, a visitor to our church commented on something which struck him as uncommon, or at least more rare than it should be. “The men *pray* . . .” he said. Too often the picture of men at church is that of the hapless drone, maneuvered through the doors by a pious wife. He is not exactly spiritual, but he is docile, and that is reckoned to be close enough.

In recent years the church has consequently placed a great deal of emphasis upon recovering the concept of masculinity within the church. Much of the discussion has been good and helpful, but an important element has still been lacking. We *do* need to talk about ministry to individual men, and encourage them to serve God as men, and so forth. We may be thankful that such teaching has sought to

# DEAD AND GONE



C. S. Lewis commented once that the present is, historically speaking, a “period.”<sup>1</sup> This may seem too obvious to point out, but there will come a time when what is currently happening will no longer be happening. Several centuries into the future, various schoolchildren will be sweating out the details of our century as they frantically try to sort things out before the test. “Which came first? The Vietnam War or the Spanish-American War?” Those controversies which roil our culture now will have gone the way of every controversy which has preceded us and which we have now forgotten.

This is not to say that such controversies are necessarily trivial or unimportant. We should still be grateful today

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (1936; Cambridge: CUP, 2013), x.

# LOVE AND THE STATE



“**B**uckle up. We care.” The sign seems so nice. But beneath such pleasant words along the highway, a worldview lurks. We have come to the point where we want the civil magistrate to love us and have a wonderful plan for our lives. The book of Proverbs warns that a fool sent on an errand will soon prove to be an irritation. “He who sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off his own feet and drinks violence” (Prov. 26:6). By the end of the day the message is mangled, and everybody is off doing the wrong thing.

We are indeed a foolish generation of servants. God has told the cook to do something, and the gardener is in the kitchen with his hedge-clippers trying to do it instead. God has established certain governments among men—family,

# SEXUAL WISDOM



**H**aving wisdom is not the same thing as being clever or smart. When the Bible speaks of the folly of fools, the reference is not to those who struggle with the higher forms of calculus. In Scripture, folly is a moral issue, and many very intelligent people exhibit the problem. In short, knowledge is not wisdom.

When personified Wisdom speaks at the end of the eighth chapter of Proverbs, she says that all who hate her “love death” (Prov. 8:36). Application of this truth to the particular case of sexual orientation reveals a great deal. All who hate sexual wisdom love sexual death. Our culture-wide rejection of sexual wisdom is the real problem. In short, the problem of homosexuality extends far beyond homosexuals.



## THE PEOPLE HAD A MIND TO WORK



One of the greatest blessings which was given to Nehemiah in the course of his life was the blessing of a people ready for work. “So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work” (Neh. 4:6). The gift of an honest work ethic is a very great blessing from God.

A reputation for hard work was once the legacy of the sons of Puritans and Huguenots. Although the memory is dim, we still refer today to “the Protestant work ethic.” This is like an impoverished man in the gutter recalling how wealthy his great-grandfather was. Like the prodigal son in our Lord’s story, we have been busy spending without

# CULTURAL BACKBONE



There is a saying, often attributed to Chesterton, that a man who does not believe something will fall for anything. The observation certainly holds for societies, and only a blind man could fail to miss that such a necessary gullibility is currently driving our culture. The gullibility is not created by various social pressures; rather, such pressures reveal the gullibility.

For example, one such set of pressures is the problem of immigration. Now the debate over immigration is a complicated one, and my purpose here is not to get involved in that debate. Rather, my point is to show why the debate (on all sides) can be so acrimonious or bitter. One of the central reasons is that our receiving culture no longer has a principle of assimilation, for the simple reason that it has

# APPENDIX

Articles by Nancy Wilson

*On a few occasions, the author's wife, Nancy, was also asked to contribute to Tabletalk when an article was wanted that addressed women. With her kind permission, these are included in this appendix.*

# WOMAN AS MOTHER

*Nancy Wilson*



Motherhood is in a muddle. Christian women in the nineties would be hard-pressed to find a pattern of godly motherhood to emulate in popular American culture. Although our modern world espouses several views of motherhood, each is, not surprisingly, seriously flawed.

One widely held notion is that motherhood is an inconvenience: it interrupts career plans, ruins the figure; it is a royal and expensive nuisance. Obviously the abortion mill is fueled in part by this attitude. But subtly Christian women are not invulnerable to this viewpoint; they have heard it so much that many agree with the world that children are “not for everyone”—at least “not right now.” Pursuit of career, financial independence, and leisure are