she were dead, so a woman who is distressed over a pregnancy is crying out for help when she tells others she is considering abortion.

Both are in a state of despair. Both are lonely. Both feel faced by insurmountable odds.

Some "right-to-die" groups argue that we should legalize suicide and even create suicide clinics where facilitators would ease people through their suicide decisions. If we did so, there would be no shortage of desperate people willing to exercise their "freedom to choose." Promised a "quick, easy and painless" solution to their problems, suicide rates would skyrocket just as abortion rates did in the 1970's.

Like the suicide clinics described above, abortion clinics also exploit desperate people. They promise to release clients from the darkness of their despair. They appeal to our consumer society's demand for instant solutions to all our problems. They pose as places of compassion, but they are actually reaping huge profits through the harvest of the lonely, frightened, and confused people who are "unwanted" by society. In place of life, they offer the "compassion" of death.

Granting the wish for suicide or abortion is not an aid to desperate people. It is abandonment. It is a false compassion that protects us from getting entangled in the "personal problems" of others. It is "cheap love."

To those who look deeply, and care deeply, it is clear that people who express a desire for suicide or abortion are really crying out for help. They are crying out for the support and encouragement to choose life, cherish life, and rejoice in life. They are crying out for an infusion of hope.

When desperate women tell others, "I want to die," or "I have to have an abortion," their words are a way of reaching out. They are a way of asking, "Does any one truly care what happens to me? Will anyone truly help me?"

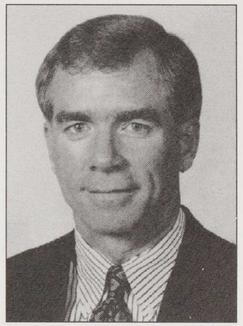
In both cases, despairing women need and deserve an answer which exalts the value of their lives, as well as their children's. They need to see the value of their lives reflected in the love of those who would help them preserve and enough their lives. They need to hear that they are strong enough to triumph in the life that is theirs, and that whenever they grow weak, we will be there to strengthen them and even carry them.

This requires us to engage in "costly love," a love that demands a real sacrifice of time, energy, and resources. Anything less, they will interpret as "You don't really care." Anything less, and they will be right. ■

1. Hilgers, et al, **New Perspectives on Human Abortion** (Fredrick, Md.: University Press of America, 1981) 156.
2. Garfinkel, et al., **Stress, Depression and Suicide: A Study of Adolescents in Minnesota** (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1986).
3. Reardon, **A Survey of Psychological Reactions,** (Springfield, IL: Elliot Institute, 1987).

Sacred Skirmishing

by Gregg Cunningham



Gregg Cunningham

Irresolute pastoral leadership is an obvious cofactor in the dissipation of American Catholicism but priests who have lost their way also have their counterparts in the evangelical Protestant denominations.

A few weeks ago, while worshipping at one of the largest and best known evangelical churches in America, I heard a message describing the Old Testament practice of sacrificing children to idols. In a subsequent letter I politely suggested that it might have been helpful to have made mention of abortion. The pastor replied rather testily that he saw no connection and could not therefore have linked the two without "manipulating the text" and thereby sacrificing his "integrity." I'm still trying to decide which is more bizarre: his inability to see the linkage or his definition of "integrity." Among the one thousand present that evening, I agonize over the number of pregnant women who have since killed their babies. How many whose pregnancies have not yet been conceived will eventually do likewise? Perhaps just one word of leadership could have made the difference in at least some of those lives.

While I am grateful for this pastor's willingness to confront wide-spread sin in other controversial areas, tragically, most clergy who won't preach against the sin of abortion won't preach against any sin; certainly not with the specificity necessary to change people's behavior. Keeping discussions of sin abstract enough to protect sensibilities also inhibits spiritual growth (most of all, my own).

A few Sundays ago I worshipped at another evangelical church whose pastor explained a Scriptural text from which he extrapolated a principle. He then applied this maxim to daily living: but only generally. Instead of using illustrations as pointed as were common to Christ's own preaching, the pastor eased carefully back to the shelter of vague diplomacy; stopping well short of the detail which makes the remorseful truly repentant.

The next week he cited Bosnia and Somalia as examples of "a world gone mad" without, of course, mentioning an immeasurably more horrific example of barbarity somewhat closer home. Those were fairly safe illustrations given the relatively few Serbian militiamen and Somali warlords present but church members with some problematic abortion history were probably rather better represented.

Clergy shouldn't become obsessed with abortion or any other sin, but each squandered, wasted, ignored opportunity to provide leadership in this area is paid for in human suffering for which pastors will be made to account.

Oh, how we hate to butt heads!

This willingness to betray duty in the interest of harmony extends to the Vatican. *Newsweek's* August 23, 1993 issue quotes a nervous faction among the pope's advisors in the Roman Curia as urging the pontiff to "limit his arguments to abstract principles" as he drafts his forthcoming encyclical on morality.

Ironically, the safety-conscious evangelical pastor mentioned earlier was preaching from I Samuel 15 in which Saul defends his failure to provide faithful leadership by explaining that he feared public opinion. It was therefore "grief" to God that He had made Saul a leader (verse 35) and He anointed another.

Legions of today's unfaithful pastors have made themselves virtual eunuchs, but not for the sake of the "kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12). They have emasculated themselves because they too fear the people. They affect bovine docility for the sake of kingdoms they build here on earth. Such treachery must surely cause God "grief" for the same reason Christ felt "pity" in Mark 6:34 as the spiritual leaders of His day abandoned their charges like "sheep without a shepherd."

Feel-good preaching signals a deeper desire to be comfortable rather than faithful. Being faithful means serving God, which often invites discomfort. So in both our preaching and music, we praise God instead of serving Him. But God says the best way to praise Him is to serve Him (John 14: 15). Serving Him means confronting evil. Confronting evil provokes controversy; cowering and concession help avoid it. Hence the growing popularity of one of the most misused passages in Scripture: "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with every one." (Rom. 12: 18)

What could this admonition mean when, as we have seen, it comes through the writings of an apostle who enraged opponents with a message so confrontational that they conspired to kill him in Damascus, forced him to flee Jerusalem, ran him out of Antioch, threatened his life in Iconima, stoned him and left him for dead in Lystra, attacked and beat him in Macedonia, stormed his residence in Thessalonica, drove him from Berea, abused him in Corinth, assaulted and arrested him in Crispus, silenced him with mob violence in Ephesus, and incited two riots in which he was almost killed in Jerusalem, the city in which the Book of Acts ends with a plot to assassinate him?

What kind of "peace" is that? Obviously not the kind that's devoid of conflict; not the naive Utopian "peace" craved by spiritual draft-dodgers who twist the meaning of Rom. 12:18 to unilaterally disarm the Body of Christ. Their "peace" is an obscene parody of the "peace" Paul describes. It's a dishonest "peace" which paralyzes the church of Christ in the face of evil whose name dare not even be whispered by craven clergy.

This is "peace" at any price, on terms dictated by the enemy; for the comfort of risk-averse pastors and self-absorbed congregations; and paid for in the currency of dead babies and wounded mothers. It leads to the confusion reflected in an August *CNN/USA Today* survey which found 51% of U.S. Catholics believe a woman can have an abortion and still be a "good Catholic." The August 16, 1993 issue of *Newsweek* published its own the church was too conservative and 9% had no opinion. How could a Catholic have no opinion on abortion? These figures mirror a dreadful Catholic voter preference for pro-abortion candidates in last November's elections and are consistent with the levels of confusion found