

Opinions

'Things That Matter'

by Lucien Coleman

Fireworks crackled and auto horns sounded as church bells pealed in the new year. Here and there a rocket burst against the moonlit sky. I walked toward the bus stop exchanging greetings with passersby, caught up in the magic of the moment, feeling good about having spent the waning hours of the old year in church, looking forward to what the coming year might bring.

But, of course, that was back in the olden days. About 1947, I believe. Things were different then. The Second World War had ended. Thousands of sons and lovers had come home from distant places like Salerno, Bagdad, and Iwo Jima.

The world was at peace, at least temporarily. The nation's economy looked good. People were filled with a mood of optimism about the future.

Most important, television hadn't yet caught on. That's why I was out on the streets, I guess, instead of sitting at home watching Guy Lombardo's orchestra play "Auld Lang Syne" at some New York hotel.

Television has turned millions of Americans into second-hand revellers. People used to get into New Year's festivities with gusto.

Back in the days when early Dutch settlers lived in New York, New Year's Eve was a time for

visiting friends and neighbors. Every house was open. Cakes, ale, and other refreshments were on hand to serve drop-in guests. The people went from house to house, renewing friendships, settling personal differences, and having a hearty good time with one another.

Religious services have always played an important part in New Year's celebrations. Earlier in this century, it was customary for great crowds to gather in the streets to listen while church bells and chimes rang in the new year. Some churches still conduct "watch services" at midnight on New Year's Eve.

Those who were not inclined toward churches gathered in places like New York's Times Square to carouse and shout the new year in.

But television has changed all that. A few people gathered in churches and in Times Square on New Year's Eve, but countless Americans stayed at home watching the Times Square merry-makers on TV, listening to the raving of some frenetic master of ceremonies in a hotel ballroom half a continent away.

It's a little frightening, when you realize how the boob tube has cultivated such an enormous preference for second-hand experience.

Instead of celebrating, we watch other people celebrate. Instead of

enjoying family life to the fullest, we watch make-believe families on television.

Instead of getting out and playing touch football with the kids, we give ourselves curvature of the spine slumping into easy chairs while the NFL pros have at one another.

One of the strangest sights in the world is to see a group of children lying on the shag rug in the family den watching kids on TV having a great time playing outdoors.

But it's not hard to figure out why they prefer to get their play experiences second-hand. They learned it from their parents.

Ross Completes Basic

Navy Seaman Timmy Ross, son of Rev. Theodore P. Whitted of Route 4, Box 214, Raeford, has completed recruit training at the Naval Training Center, Orlando, Fla.

During the eight-week training cycle, trainees studied general military subjects designed to prepare them for further academic and on-the-job training in one of the Navy's 85 basic occupational fields.

Personnel who complete this course of instruction are eligible for three hours of college credit in Physical Education and Hygiene.



Aliens Could Pose Problems

by John Sledge
N.C. Farm Bureau

For many years efforts have been underway in Washington to rewrite and reform the Immigration Act.

There is a growing feeling that the illegal alien problem has gotten out of hand, and that mass importations of refugees from Cuba, Southeast Asia and Haiti have raised a fear of being overwhelmed by foreigners.

Past efforts to solve the illegal alien problem have been limited to finding as many as possible and deporting them; but the Border Patrol has not had the resources to stem the tide.

Only a small percentage of those who enter or stay here illegally get caught; and many quickly return after a free trip home. When they claim to be political refugees, it's nearly impossible to deport them.

During the past two years, the Reagan administration and the Congress have cooperated in the development of legislation that makes it illegal for anyone to hire a so-called "undocumented worker," and would place civil and criminal penalties on employers who knowingly did so.

Some industries, like agriculture, which require large numbers of workers on a seasonal basis, have become highly dependent upon undocumented workers.

It's estimated that undocumented workers represent around 15% of the hired workforce in agriculture, but only constitute about 7 or 8% of such workers employed in the total economy.

Although legislation to reform the Immigration Act was not on the agenda during the recent "lame duck" session, it is expected to be taken up by the new Congress.

Among other things, any such legislation should include a workable procedure for bringing in temporary foreign workers on a timely basis when U.S. citizens cannot be recruited to do the necessary work on farms.

Sunday School Lesson

Background Scripture:
Luke 7:11-23; 10:25-37.

Devotional Reading:
Luke 6:6-11.

Lots of people I know like to talk about religion. They love to discuss and argue the fine points of religious ideas. In fact, for some people, the essence of religion seems to be doing battle with "wrong" religious thinking, combatting "unsound" religious concepts, and debating differing theological formulations.

Those same people, I've often observed, are considerably less enthusiastic when those abstract religious ideas are personalized. For example, it is one thing to discuss the nature of God and quite something else to begin to spell out what demands our belief in God makes upon the way we live our lives.

This was true in the encounter between Jesus and the lawyer who asked him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It was a perfectly good question to provoke a religious discussion. People often discussed the meaning and nature of "eternal life."

But, of course, Luke tells us that the lawyer's interest was not really in eternal life, but in putting Jesus "to the test." The lawyer wanted to see how Jesus would answer this question. Perhaps he would say something that could be held against him. Or maybe he would be embarrassed by not having a worthy answer.

At any rate, the lawyer probably figured he could hardly lose, for, if Jesus gave the traditional answer, the lawyer would be able to get some points with his perfect obedience to the pharisaic life under the law. And, at first, that's what appeared to be happening. Jesus asked him, "What is written in the law?" and this gave the lawyer a perfect opportunity to parade his own moral rectitude.

Flushed with success, the lawyer went one step too far. Not content with his victory, he pressed Jesus on still another debatable point: "And who is my neighbor?" The lawyer should have quit while he was ahead, for at this point Jesus got "personal" in a way the lawyer would have preferred to avoid. Instead of discussing the question in

theological or philosophical terms, Jesus told a parable that made the answer so clear to everyone as to place their behavior under judgement - especially that of the lawyer.

The lawyer began the conversation on a wave of religious pride, but when Jesus personalized it, the proud lawyer was humbled by the Master's answer. To inherit eternal life would make some requirements on the lawyer that he

was not to prepared to make.

So long as the preacher inveighs against sin in a general way, we may be led to express enthusiasm for his preaching. But if he should move from generalizations to specifics that touch our lives, we may be led to conclude that he has moved from preaching to meddling. In that sense, Jesus was more a meddler than a preacher, for the essence of the gospel, as he saw it, is in "getting personal."

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