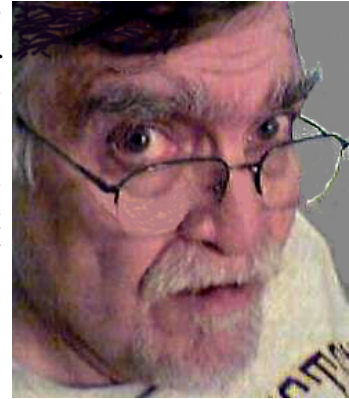


*Training Wheels for Jesus**

I was raised with as fundamental a fundamentalist Christian upbringing as was ever administered, I think. Both my parents had been homeless preachers of the gospel until at a certain point they fell victim to the sin of *falling* in love with someone other than Jesus and wanted a *family*. My mother evidently was so shy that having to preach was terrifying to her. There were intervals during which my father had had to leave the Lord's Work to help his ailing parents, discovering my mother during one of those intervals. I never had the impression that my parents felt that they had chosen wisely in giving up the honor of being celibate ministers of God, but that they did what they could to make up for it by always having an "open home" for the "Lord's Workers" that we fondly referred to as our aunts and uncles, and providing a home for regular worship services twice weekly as normal compliment to gospel services that we attended several additional nights a week. It was a good life with good people and many "friends". My parents didn't really care much about what or how much, if anything, we learned in school or if we did our homework, but they cared exceedingly about



by Fred Vaughan

how we comported ourselves. I had no problem with any of that and have no bitterness whatsoever, although as I have said elsewhere, I do wish they had cared a little more about knowledge beyond the leather boundaries.

I suppose that once my father was faced with making a living in a dog-eat-dog world, being a carpenter was a natural choice. My father was a Good man with a capital "G". He still is! He's 95 and a real pleasure to be around. Someone said that my father was the most Christ like man that he had ever met. I thought about that for quite a while before rejecting it. I have never heard my father curse at any time in my life. I am equally certain that he has never at any time imbibed alcohol or smoked. I am also positive that he has never lied, stolen, cheated on his wife, or committed any other of the "sins" that seem to so confound humanity. Nor was he a dullard. Seventy years after having graduated at 21 from a high school where he was employed as janitor, giving the valedictory address, he was asked to make the commencement address before an audience of nearly a thousand people and he made our family proud. And he has a very cute and subtle sense of humor. But he is not God-like in the sense of having bigger than life ideas, passions, or ambitions. In fact he has some prejudices that embarrass me, falls short of compassion for the poor, etc., whereas Jesus succored the less fortunate, going out on a limb for them so to speak!

At 12 I raised my hand in a gospel meeting as a profession of my willingness to follow Jesus wherever he wanted to take me. And despite growing doubts I remain-ed faithful to that choice on into the University, kneeling each night by my bed to pray even if a roommate happened to be present, although on those occasions I must admit that I probably engaged more in counting seconds than in actual prayer.

My junior year I began dating Kay, who would become my wife of 42 years and counting. Her great uncle had been a founder of the sect. She was among the faithful, and I was hanging on. But one evening before going into the midweek bible study we shared a kiss – we loved each other for Christ's sake! Well, let's leave Him out of it then! We just loved each other! Some gossipy goody-good neighbor lady happened to be peeking through her curtains at that moment and told the lady of the house where the study was being held of this major sacerdotal breach. She and others in the church then allowed as how we had set a bad example – we should avoid occasions of offense for "outsiders". It's amazing how little a thing as that can open a flood gate of what all else is wrong with something. I guess you could say that Kay and I began "bible study" in earnest at that point, and the fundamental sect and modern Christianity as a whole didn't fare too well in our findings.

* Sensing an old-fashioned revival atmosphere to the December (2004) issue of *Gift of Fire*, I've decided to add my testimony. As editor I feel duty bound to publish views of others no matter how outland-ish they happen to seem to me personally, knowing mine seem that way to others. My views are indeed quite different than any I've seen expressed here or elsewhere. I'd have one hell of a time acquiescing with *any* ecumenical movement or organization (including Prometheus by the way in case you haven't noticed!). That feeling is what being an "Outsider" is all about it seems to me, and therefore extreme tolerance would seem to be in order for us all. Anyway, here's my story.

My first serious doubt had come about much earlier in listening to a sermon by a prominent preacher of the sect. He spoke about the various virtues – “whatsoever things are lovely, if there be any virtue,” etc. He had indicated that for him *loyalty* was “the greatest of all virtues”. I thought about that for a long time, and I still think about it a lot. Considering virtues is a worthwhile exercise for anyone by the way; they are after all good qualities to possess, but one must prioritize. Sincerity *always* seems to get in the way of loyalty for me, for example, and I hope it always will! An honest person will not abide loyal adherence to what is shown to be counterfactual.

Well, anyway, Kay and I worked on this problem honestly rather than loyally, which probably means that we didn’t pray about it enough, and guess what?

I think it was chauvinism that gave me the bad rap, but blame doesn’t bother me a lot, although after 25 or 30 years of being the Antichrist it did get a bit tedious. One year at Christmas Kay’s little 4-year-old nephew was hyping about Santa Clause the night before Christmas when everyone else was in the kitchen watching the preparations, and so it was just he and I looking at red socks on a fireplace. To make conversation with the little fellow I asked him whether he believed in Santa Clause to which he defiantly responded, “YES!” So I countered with “Why?” upon which I was overwhelmed by a hell fire and damnation oration, the gist of which was that I could huff, and I could puff but I could *not* destroy his brick castle built on Loyalty Rock! I thought it rather hilarious, but I think he had it right about the implicit linkage between Santa Clause and all the other trappings of Christmas – they’re just training wheels for Jesus. And he was right that *no one* would ever shake *his* faith...but I don’t trust his or anyone else’s account of *what* or *why* they “believe”! There is every sign of insincerity despite tenacity – in fact, it’s the same insincerity that I sense in most who so vociferously proclaim their “faith”.

Lately I’ve had occasion to watch some kid movies with grandchildren and I’ve been appalled! Coming off a sham election in the United States where electioneering from pulpits has been the norm in maintaining a sickly religious administration, I’m a bit sensitized of course. But the indoctrination of children with explicit statements associating non-belief with sin – and yes, they *are* speaking of “belief” *per se* and *sin* in no less absurd a sense than my nephew had thirty some years ago – is insanity. Why not praise faith, hope, and charity – the greatest, of course, being charity?

Bah humbug! But Merry Xmas anyway.

