The Challenge of Fidelity

By Lewis B. Smedes, Professor of Theology and Integration

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Dating. Marriage. Fidelity. Divorce. These words, put together, reflect the realities of our complicated lives, and our relationships to one another. But, this article is not about divorce. Divorce is not the most pressing issue for the Christian community today. It is a core question, but it is not the most crucial one just now.

Rather, I would like to say something about marriage and fidelity. We must distinguish between how people become married and what marriage is. Two people become married through the convergence of several factors: their own resolution, a public affirmation, the endorsement of their intent by law, perhaps the declaration of the church, and maybe others.

But, what is it that they become through these agencies? They become sexual partners in a life-union that embraces their total commitment. The single ingredient that stamps a sexual partnership as a marriage is fidelity. It is the nature of fidelity that the Christian community must reexamine, and it is fidelity that the Christian community must support and encourage. It is fidelity, as a mark of personal character, into which the church must help nurture people.

Besides sensitivity to the kind of character which persons bring into marriage, we need awareness of the kind of environment in which marriages must work these days. First, there is the isolation of the nuclear family from the larger clan. With only husband and wife under the roof, along with a couple of children, the partners turn inward on themselves to seek all the intimacy, trust, and companionship they need.

Second, the nuclear family exists as an island in a neighborhood of strangers. Fewer families than ever live within a supporting community of people who share their faith and who support the marriage even when its personal aspects have gone sour. Fewer marriages still exist in a community with the moral authority to speak compellingly about fidelity.

Marriage has become a closed shop, with a fragile relationship at its center and very weak support from the outside. Everything depends on what happens in the words, gestures, looks, silences, and sometimes blows, that communicate a blend of love and anger, concern and indifference, affection and hostility between the two weak people involved. One problem with marriage today is that we are forced to lay burdens on it that was not meant to bear by itself. It is breaking under the strain.

The struggle to outlaw divorce absolutely within the Christian community is over; we have lost that struggle. Divorce is going to increase. The times are against life-long marriages. For now, we must concentrate on the nurture of people toward fidelity...
Dear Church Lady:
How do you know if God is showing you your mate? I am friends with this guy that I really like. He’s handsome, Godly, respectful, and kind. And, he affirms me and my ministry and my desire to be a pastor. I have been praying about this issue for a while now and I really believe that God is saying that this person is to be my husband. Should I go ahead and tell him? By the way, should I also care that he is not the same denomination, race, or background that I’m from? I really believe that God had called us to be together and I want him to know it too....
Signed,
Going to the Chapel, Soon!

Dear Going Soon:
You may be going to the heartbreak hotel ALONE if you tell your friend what you think/know God has said to you. Let me deal with the easier issue first. I am glad that you have found someone to be compatible with. However, you need to think about the differences that separate you not as stumbling blocks, but as landmarks to your relationship. Is the fact that you are both from differing ethnic, denominational and family backgrounds a cause for strife or strength for you both? Is he comfortable with you in public with friends/family? Has he said anything about taking your relationship further than friends? Have you defined your relationship? If your answers are vague, or not a concern for you, then I think you have a problem. You can’t expect that a relationship can just jump from A to Z without some work in between. More importantly, don’t you think that if he’s such a Godly man, he’d hear from God too? Besides, God doesn’t need your help to make His will come to pass. He knows your desire, but don’t confuse desire with demand. If God will not go against your will, you can’t expect Him to railroad your friend into a marriage with you if that’s not what he wants. Wait awhile, and if things don’t progress, then relax and allow God to put other men in your path that can be just as good for you.☆

Write to the Church Lady! Forward your troubles to Box OSS, c/o the SEMI, or drop it in the SEMI letter slot on the 2nd floor of Kreyssler Hall.

Letters To The SEMI

I would like to thank the author of “Who Am I? A Testimony From A Struggling Christian,” as seen in the January 31 SEMI. You have provided a precious glimpse into a part of the Christian Community who is often misunderstood and ignored. It has helped to hear from that community because I can now identify with their struggles and be more sensitive. Indeed, your daily battle for the truth parallels mine. This valuable understanding begins with communication, so thanks for opening the dialogue.

-Colm J. McCormack, SOT student.

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Fuller Theological Seminary

Richard J. Mouw, President,
the Board of Trustees, and Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary cordially invite you to the installation of
FREDERIC W. BUSH, Ph.D.
in the D. Wilson Moore Chair of Ancient Near Eastern Studies School of Theology

Monday, the fourteenth of February Nineteen hundred and ninety-four at ten o’clock in the morning First Congregational Church East Walnut Street and North Los Robles Avenue Pasadena, California

A reception will follow.

Reservations are not necessary.
For additional information contact the Office of the Dean, School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary 818-584-5302

WELCOME TO PLANET EARTH!
Congratulations to Rick and Huikyong Kim on the birth of their daughter, Karis Kim, who arrived on January 20, 1994.

Letters To The SEMI

I would like to thank the author of “Who Am I? A Testimony From A Struggling Christian,” as seen in the January 31 SEMI. You have provided a precious glimpse into a part of the Christian Community who is often misunderstood and ignored. It has helped to hear from that community because I can now identify with their struggles and be more sensitive. Indeed, your daily battle for the truth parallels mine. This valuable understanding begins with communication, so thanks for opening the dialogue.

-Colm J. McCormack, SOT student.
MISSED...

Two people, the same moment.
Don’t you think it odd -
that you’re “confronting in love”
and I feel loveless?

You speak in soft tones
gradually building in intensity.
You want me to “get the point”.
You need me to “get the point”.

There’s an urgency in your message,
you say you’re concerned...
but I feel judged, criticized and cornered.
Most of all, I feel missed.

Missed because you don’t know me.
Missed because your words of “truth and wisdom”
exclude me,
laugh at my faith,
and tell me I have no God.

Missed because you hold to your rules
with more passion than compassion.
Missed because your rules have become
more important to you than my pain.
and what makes me real.
Missed because I’m no longer real to you,
I am only sinful.
That is what you see.

Missed because you do not know my heartache,
you have not seen my tears.
Missed because you never broke stride to ask.

Missed because you don’t want to know me -
you want to know that I follow your rules.
You say you confront because you love me?
It seems to me that you love you.
You don’t even see my face before you,
how could I possibly let myself be known to you?
I can’t take the beating.

You smile, squeeze my hand and seem to feel vindicated.
You’ve said your part,
you’ve done your duty,
you’ve “confronted in love”.

And now you can walk away - and you do.
I say nothing.

Am I to thank you for your love?
I have no more than when you came.
I am still alone, alone with my suffering.
My suffering does not fit your rules,
I must go elsewhere to find
safety, security and love -
because I do not find it
in you.

-Luann N. Pedersen

Poets and Performers and Pundits!
The Spring Arts Festival wants to include all you expressive literary types—goatee optional! Read your own poetry or recite your favorite prose while sipping your favorite blend of fine coffee among your creative peers! Submissions for poetry, short prose or performance are being accepted immediately! Contact Garrett H. Omata at ext. 5430 or 5425, or submit written work at the SEMI office in Kreyssler Hall, above the Catalyst.

The Board of Trustees,
President Richard J. Mouw
and Faculty of
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
take pleasure in inviting you to
a special service of worship
celebrating the installation of
ROBERT K. JOHNSTON, Ph.D.
as
PROVOST

First Congregational Church
464 East Walnut Street
Pasadena, California

on
Monday, the seventh of March
Nineteen hundred and ninety-four
at ten o’clock

Reception immediately following in
The Garth, Fuller Theological Seminary
**Ministry Enrichment Opportunity**

Ministry Enrichment Seminar credit will be given to students attending, “Women Are From Venus, Men Are From Mars: Women and Men Working Together”, Thursday, February 17th, 5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. in Payton 101. A panel of pastors and psychologists will discuss the various facets of women and men working together. For more information contact the Office of Field Education, (818) 584-5577.

**Individual Psychotherapy Opportunity**

Low cost individual psychotherapy offered by SOP, beginning February 1994. Psychotherapy offered is appropriate for those experiencing anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, life change adjustment, and personal growth. Fifteen sessions: $75.00. Therapists are students enrolled in Ph.D. or Psy.D. program in clinical psychology (A.P.A. approved). Further information, contact FPFS at 818-584-5555.

**A RATIONALE FOR DOING ARMENIAN THEOLOGY**

You are invited to a lecture presented by Dr. Greg Haleblian, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Armenian Studies, and Pastor of Saint Nareg Armenian Church: “A RATIONALE FOR DOING ARMENIAN THEOLOGY”. Sponsored by SOT. Dean Dymess will respond. Time: 4:00 p.m., Sunday, March 6, 1994. Place: Travis Auditorium. Free, no reservation required. Open to the public.

**DEAN DYNESS, OPEN HOURS**

Bill Dymess, Dean of the School of Theology, has established “Open Hours” from 11 a.m. - 12 noon on Wednesdays and from 2 p.m. - 3 p.m. on Thursdays. His door will be “open” to anyone wanting to meet with him without an appointment on any subject of concern on a “first-come / first-serve” basis. While this time has been arranged with students in mind, staff and faculty are also welcome to take advantage of these open hours. The only exceptions to this rule will be:

- Wednesday, February 16
- Thursday, February 17
- and Thursday, March 10

Anyone interested should come during the above-mentioned hours to the Dean’s Office, Payton Hall, Room 216.

**REPENT! SPRING REGISTRATION IS NEAR!**

Registration for returning students is February 22-25. Don’t delay in making advising appointments with your SOT academic advisor located in Stephan Hall, for the following weeks:

- Last names beginning with A-G: Week 5 (Jan.31-Feb.4)
- H-M: Week 6 (Feb.7-11)
- N-Z: Week 7 (Feb.14-18)

To make appointments by phone, or if you have any problems, please contact our office at (818) 584-5425. Those who are unable to register in person may choose to use our Special Registration Packet as well as make a “phone-in” appointment with one of the advisors.

**A GROUP THERAPY EXPERIENCE FOR WOMEN**

The focus of this group will be on relationships, communication, self-esteem, self-perceptions, and family of origin issues. For more information contact Janiece at FPFS, 584-5555. The cost is $20/person.

**PC (USA)**

January 31 - Dr. Steve Marsh, Senior Pastor of La Crescenta Presbyterian Church, will be with us this morning. If you are thinking about intern opportunities, you will not want to miss this chance to hear him.

The Seminary Auxiliary regrets that the clothing room that provided free clothing for Fuller students has been closed. Arrangements have been made for Fuller students to obtain free clothing at Friendship Corner, 500 E. Villa (corner of Oakland) on Mondays between 10:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. Please call me if you have any questions, (818) 796-5617.

-Inez T. Smith, President, Fuller Seminary Auxiliary

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**Manager: Richard Shaw**  
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**Production Manager: Berry Alvis**  
**Designer: Garrett Ormata**  
**Director, OSS: Ruth Yuottt**
COPING WITH VIOLENCE

Psychologists, pastors, and the laity have witnessed an increase in violence and abuse among individuals, groups, and families. David W. Foy, Ph.D., author of *Treating PTSD: Cognitive Behavioral Strategies*., and Cordula Dick-Muehlke, Ph.D., Center for Aging Resources, will conduct the Family and Community Violence seminar on February 18. Presented by The Psychological Center and Continuing Education, the seminar will provide tools for treating mass violence, gang membership, abuse, and at-risk families, including a workshop on elder abuse. This seminar is an APA approved continuing education opportunity; pastors and other professionals qualify for CEUs. For information and registration fees call 818/584-5338.

ATTENTION GRAND CANYON HIKERS

Due to trail closures, those interested in doing the Grand Canyon trip during Spring Break were unable to make the hike up to Mt. Wilson on Saturday, January 22. We are still planning the overnight hike on Saturday and Sunday, February 19 and 20. Please contact Dr. Malony in the Psych School if you are still interested. Reservations have been made to go down the Grand Canyon on March 18 to 21. Fuller extension 5528, home number 584-0843.

Chapel news

INSTALLATION SERVICE – MONDAY, FEB. 14, FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 10:00 – 11:00 A.M.

This service will honor Frederic W Bush as he is installed in the D. Wilson Moore Chair of Ancient and Near Eastern Studies. Dr. Bush, who received his Ph.D. from Brandis University, has been a faculty member in Fuller's School of Theology since 1963 and is the author of numerous publications. There will be a reception at the church after the service. Please join our community as we extend congratulations to Dr. Bush.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 16, FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH - 10:00-10:50 A.M.

Our guest preacher for Chapel, February 16, is Dr. William Pannell, Professor of Preaching and Practical Theology and Dean of Chapel. Dr. Pannell is a gifted preacher who will lead us into a time of worship which will be meaningful and relevant. Come join us for this special time of community worship.

CHAPEL - THURSDAY, FEB. 17, TRAVIS AUDITORIUM - 11:35 - 12:15 P.M.

The guest speaker for Chapel, February 17, will be Dr. Tuisem Shishak. Dr. Shishak is the President of Patpakai Christian College in Nagaland, India. He will be speaking to us about “The Challenge of Multiplying Christian Leadership.” Join us for this important and timely message.

FINANCES AND FULLER BUDGETS

President Mouw has encouraged inclusion of students in discussions regarding Fuller’s finances and budgeting. Lee Merritt met with ASC members on November 12, 1993, to present numerous charts and graphs describing Fuller’s financial resources. Much of this same data was shared with students on February 8. Many may not have been able to attend that week’s meeting, so a review of the most important data is presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational &amp; General Budget 1993-94 (Excluding Bookstore, Housing, Psychological Center)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revenue</strong> (millions')</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuition</td>
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<td>Gifts</td>
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<th><strong>Expenses</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instruction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>General &amp; Institutional</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>101%</td>
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</tbody>
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*Excludes Grant-in-Aid amounting to $1,811,895

**Per Student**

| Theology | $1,646 |
| Psychology | $2,498 |
| World Mission | $1,558 |
| Marriage and Family | $850 |
| CATS | $3,136 |

Next week's edition of the SEMI will include more information on expenses and responses to questions raised by students at the February 8 meeting. Please forward your questions and comments to Lee Merritt or to Rob Gallagher, for either personal or published response.
DENOMINATIONAL
The following denominations will be meeting on Monday mornings through the Winter Quarter, except for holidays, during final week, and unless otherwise noted, at 10:00 am.

American Baptist
Psych Bldg, 116

Assemblies of God
Psych Bldg, 311

Chinese & Asian Prayer Group
Glasser Hall 206

Christian & Missionary Alliance
Library 203

Episcopal/Anglican
Travis Auditorium

Foursquare
PsyCh Bldg, 325

Friends
Stephen Hall 207

Korean Fellowship
Payton Hall 303

Messianic Jews
Glasser Hall 317

Non-Denominational
Payton Hall 303

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Library 205

Reformed Church in Am./CRC
Payton Hall 305

Seventh Day Adventist
Psych Bldg, 314

United Methodist Church
PsyCh Bldg, 120

Nazarene
Payton Hall 304

Chinese & Asian Prayer Group
PsyCh Bldg, 130

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
PsyCh Bldg, 130

Asian students prayer time, Monday, 10:00 am, weekly, Room 206, Glasser Hall.

MORNING PRAYERS
Daily Orthodox morning prayers, Monday-Friday, 7:30-7:55 am in the Chapel, above the Library, led by Scott Watson and Fr. Sam Gantt. Everyone is welcome.

Get The Lent Out Of Your Pocket!
I was sitting with a couple of friends at the Garth the other day and we were engaged in your basic, "it's-winter-quarter-and-I'm-tired-and-it-haves-all-these-major-things-going-on-and-I've-got-insecurities-about-stuff" talk. One of my friends said, "I've just got to last until spring break, when I'll be able to put this quarter behind me. Now it's just a matter of hanging on until then."

Are you in that mode - just "hanging on" to ride out the rest of this quarter until you get a break next month? Join the club. But I have a suggestion for us this week, and for the rest of this quarter: observe the season of Lent. In case you haven't penciled it into your calendar in big bold letters, Lent begins this Wednesday, February 16. For the majority of us at Fuller, from relatively non-liturgical backgrounds, Lent can seem like somewhat of a mystery. We tend to think that it's that time when you're supposed to give up your favorite food and you're not exactly sure why, but since your favorite food is highly caloric you decide to go for it, because swimsuit season is just around the corner. When I was in grade school I knew that Easter was only a month or so away when my Catholic friends showed up on Wednesday morning with funny smudges on their foreheads (Mom tried to explain Ash Wednesday, but I didn't get it).

Unfortunately, our general lack of understanding about Lent often causes us to miss out on one of the most potentially renewing times of our year. For us Lent is too often a precious but unwrapped gift.

Lent is the time when we focus our lives and energies on participating in the life of Christ. The sacrificing of something - whether it be food or something else - is the way in which we intentionally join in the sacrificial living - and suffering and dying - of Jesus on our behalf. This is no mere symbolic exercise of willpower, however, for through the giving up and the missing and the desire of Lent we are made tangibly aware of our deepest needs and desires for our Lord. And then we are often surprised to discover our Lord in new and deeper ways. What a perfect way to prepare ourselves for Easter! For this Lenten season the OCC is publishing a special booklet series of devotional reflections from various members of the Fuller community. They are free and will be made available to all students, staff and faculty. This devotional series is our invitation for all of us at Fuller to remember and celebrate the important and renewing season of Lent together. Lenten blessings!

- Ellen Barbour

HIV AWARENESS SEMINAR
Friday, February 11, 10:00am - 1:00pm, Payton 101, $3.00 for lunch. Respected consultant and Fuller grad Nancy Breuer will lead us the Fuller community in understanding and responding to AIDS. Reservations requested to 584-5322.

TYRANNY OF TIME
Saturday, February 19, 9am-4pm
Plan to join Rob & Julie Banks for this transforming day of redeeming our attitude toward time. It will be held at the Manresa Retreat Center, Azusa. There will be a $60.00 fee that includes lunch. For reservations and information, contact Ellen at 584-5322.

WINTER MARRIAGE RETREAT
Friday and Saturday, February 25 & 26, Ventura
Dr. Gary Brainerd will facilitate this retreat on "The Healing Marriage" based on the popular work of Dr. Harvel Hendricks. Early Bird Registration (deadline February 4) is $50.00. Regular Registration (deadline February 18) is $60.00. Send registration forms to the Office of Christian Community.

SPiritual FormAtion Breakfast
Tuesday, March 8, 6:45 - 7:30am
Steve Hayner, Fuller Trustee and IVCF President will share his personal faith journey. Breakfast is provided free. Reservations requested. For details, call Ellen at 584-5322.

Couple's Garden
Saturday, March 5, and May 14
Begins at 6:00 pm in Payton 101, the cost is $6.00/neght. Join this popular guided date night to enhance your marriage. Reservations requested.
Fidelity

(Continued from page 1)

to all the original dreams of the other. As time goes on, both partners change in the needs, desires, vitality, interests, and in many other ways. But, looming from the past is the unchangeable reality of a vow once made.

A vow is a serious promise, made in an august setting, publicly declared, that commits a person to life in a personal partnership. To make a vow is to accept one’s humanity about vows. So vow-making has lost much of its power to trust themselves in the face of what they might be in the future. And self-trust is one component in the intentional line from the present; now the future seems disconnected with the present. This is so, not simply because the future as such is unpredictable; it is so because people sense that they are unpredictable. They do not have the psychic or spiritual power to trust themselves in the face of what they might be in the future. And self-trust is one component in the intentional life of a person. Besides one’s individual weakness, his community does not support vow-keeping; there are few authoritative voices today that speak compellingly to people about vows. So vow-making has lost much of its power to sustain a marriage.

But fidelity includes more than a stubborn loyalty to a promise once made. A disillusioned wife might grit her teeth in moral heroism and plow along in a marriage filled with conflict and hate; and all she would accomplish is the per-

(Continued on page 9)
LET'S USE IT OR WE’LL LOSE IT

In fall last year, campus community times (Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:30-1:00 pm) were introduced. In principle, I think it’s a great idea but in practice it’s proving quite a challenge. Unfortunately, it seems to have been dumped from above. I’m still meeting students who know nothing about it and some professors who are frustrated in having to squeeze a two hour lecture into an hour and a half. And the Thursday mission chapel is half the attendance of previous years which doesn’t make the hard working

worship team, happy campers.

There needs to be some ownership. The concept needs promotion and programming, otherwise we are going to lose this wonderful opportunity for community building. Coming up with a concept is one thing; the embracing of that idea by our community is another.

So let’s all own it and give the community times a fair go before we lose them. Faculty and teaching assistants, why not have lunch occasionally with your students at these times and get to know one another outside the class room? Students, why don’t we show some initiative and organize a lunch gathering with our professors so that all they have to do is show up?

Then, there’s the possibility of having activities on the mall during the common break. What about volleyball, table tennis or badminton games between staff, students and faculty? Another idea is to have an inexpensive lunch on the mall once a quarter for the whole campus. Perhaps, singers and other types of entertainment could be arranged in order to bring people together. What do you think? Or are we just so busy we don’t have time to think or care about the community? It’s survival mode and that’s all there is to it.

Do you have any other thoughts as to how we may use the community times that we have? Let’s have some feedback on what you think about the whole idea. Is it possible we can use this time together for building our community or is it not worth the effort?

Warm regards in Christ,
Rob Gallagher.

ASC STUDENT OFFICES
Have you ever considered running for a Student Government Office? If you think this is something you would be interested in, inquire in the ASC office (1st floor of the Catalyst) about the different positions any time after Feb. 14.

MUSEUM OF TOLERANCE
The Peace and Justice Concerns Committee and the Multi-Cultural Concerns Committee are co-sponsoring a trip to the Museum of Tolerance on Sunday, April 10. We will be selling tickets in the garth during the month of February. Tickets are $5.00 to cover entrance to the museum and transportation. We will leave the Fuller psychology lot at 2:00 pm and will return at approximately 6:30 pm. Please call 584-5454 for more information.

FULLER FOLLIES, FULLER FOLLIES, FULLER FOLLIES...
It’s coming up! We want to put on a show that includes acts representing all facets of the Fuller community. We want to see students, faculty and staff from all schools, all departments, of all ethnic groups, genders, and political preferences! Call or come see Ana Gan in the Catalyst (ASC) office at x5452.

WOMEN’S ISSUES IN PSYCHOLOGY: EATING DISORDERS
Dr. Tammy Anderson will present a seminar on diagnosis and treatment of eating disorders. Dr. Anderson, a Fuller graduate, is currently an adjunct professor, a therapist in private practice, and the coordinator of the Crime Prevention Program For Older Adults through the Center for Aging Resources. Come Wednesday, February 15 at 6:00 pm. Light refreshments will be provided. Sponsored by PGU Women’s Concerns.

DISCOUNT TICKETS AVAILABLE
Ambassador Performing Arts is offering reduced ticket prices for the upcoming Manhattan Tap with guest artists “Buster” Brown and Dianne Walker. This event will take place at Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena on Saturday, Feb. 19 at 8:30 pm and Sunday, Feb. 20 at 2:00 pm. Usual ticket prices are $22.50-$19.50, but they are offering them to students and teachers for $10.00. For tickets and information call 1-800-CONCERT. Limit: 2 tickets per I.D.

GET INVOLVED IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CONCERNS
ISCC is inviting representatives from different ethnic groups to join their committee. Please call Marita Viloria at (818) 797-8950 or Johnny Chan at (818) 683-9638. It’s a very rewarding experience. Possible representatives from Europe, the Middle East, and Australia are especially welcome!

FREE CHIROPRACTIC CARE
Dr. Deanna Dickson of Dickson Chiropractic is offering one month trial chiropractic care to families free of charge. If you are interested, call Dr. Dickson at (818) 795-0564.

SPECIAL THANKS
Thank you to Dr. Arch Hart, Dr. Nancy Stehler-Thurston, Dr. John Court and Dr. Phil Pannell for their helpful presentation to help students, faculty and staff cope through the aftermath of the earthquake. We also want to thank the Psychology staff for providing counseling services to those who were especially traumatized by the quake.
Fidelity
(Continued from page 7)

petuation of an empty shell that still bears the label of marriage. Fidelity to a vow needs to become fidelity to a person.

At its core, fidelity in partnership is commitment to an ongoing, changing, sometimes painful, sometimes joyous facing-off of two people bent on the total well-being of each other. Fidelity is loyalty to the needs of the other person. It is a form of self-giving that complements and qualifies the need to receive. It includes a will to support the other person’s freedom to be an independent person with will, with rights, with a vocation, with an ego to assert. This sort of person-centered fidelity is, I think, what Paul had in mind when he said that husbands and wives should be “subject to one another.”

Fidelity is also commitment to the relationship between a person and their spouse. The heart of marriage, within the institutional frame, is a delicate, fragile, potentially joyful, but often very destructive, always changing relationship of a very special kind. To be faithful means that we are loyal to the task of cultivating the communication that creates a marital relationship. Fidelity, in this sense, is an ideal that always judges our fragmentary accomplishments. It is not achieved by dutiful compliance with moral rules; it is only approximated by a daily renewal of the lines of communications.

Fidelity, further, is ongoing commitment to the vocation of marriage. We tend these days—devoted as we are to the cult of self-fulfillment—to think of marriage purely in terms of its potential for the happiness and growth of the partners. A Christian ethic cannot settle for that. We may have become aware that marriage is not simply for creating families. We may have rightly latched on to the promise marriage offers the partners for their own development in mutuality. But we short-change marriage a calling into partnership for the benefit of others outside the marriage if we concentrate only on the benefits it offers the partners. The marriage status is a community-directed vocation. A marriage has doors open to the world. For some, the world may be limited to one’s church, one’s neighborhood, but for many the world is even wider. As Bonhoeffer once wrote to a couple being married: “In your love you see only the heaven of your happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind.” Fidelity is loyalty to the vocation marriage has to our worlds.

This article is a condensed version of its original, which was published in The Reformed Journal in October 1976. We would like to thank Professor Smedes for allowing us to edit and reprint it in the SEMI.
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