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FOREWORD

In this Faculty Bulletin Pat Graham's study of Chronicles reminds us of God's concern for congruence between faith and life--integrity. Rick Marrs tells us that Christian integrity expresses itself not merely in religious exercises but in just and merciful conduct. David Worley and James Thompson explore the relation between faith and specific areas of life. Worley looks at the relationship between Christianity and the marketplace within the frame of Pauline thought. Thompson recalls Tertullian's pointed question (What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?) with particular reference to the arts--specifically, literature and theater. The concluding article reminds us that character and conduct are formed by our communities. It raises the issue of the impact of modernity upon the Christian community.

A word of appreciation is due my colleagues on the faculty the Institute for Christian Studies for their cooperation in presenting these essays. Special thanks are due to Mrs. Nancy Tindel, faculty secretary, for her help in preparing this issue of the Faculty Bulletin.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

THE CHRONICLER AND ETHICS: THE ISSUE OF INTEGRITY

By Pat Graham

If ethics may be defined as “rules of conduct” or “moral code,” then there are several places in the Old Testament that one could turn to study the topic. In the Pentateuch one finds the largest single concentration of ancient Israelite legal literature in the Bible. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, in particular, include a variety of legal codes (e.g., the decalog in Ex. 20:1-17, the Covenant Code in Ex. 20:22--23:33, and the Holiness Code in Lev. 17-26). A second body of Old Testament ethical material emerges in the wisdom corpus. While the Book of Proverbs maintains an optimistic spirit and presents the reader with pragmatic rules for securing the good life, Job and Ecclesiastes seem to have a bit less confidence in the rational operation of the universe and so speak from different perspectives on life and human conduct. The ethical admonitions of Israel’s prophetic literature offer a third source for the study of Old Testament ethics. While these three bodies

of literature may come to mind quickly when the subject of Old Testament ethics is broached, they do not exhaust the Old Testament's offering in this regard.

A fourth resource for the study of Old Testament ethics, although not as obvious as the other three, is the Old Testament historical literature. Apparently, it was also through historical narrative that some in ancient Israel set out to instruct the people in the norms of conduct. Among these writings, the Books of Chronicles are probably among the latest chronologically, and none of the books has received worse press with regard to the theological system that informs the author's presentation. As the Deuteronomistic history (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1, 2 Samuel, 1, 2 Kings) has been characterized as the writing of Israel's history according to the laws of Deuteronomy, the Chronicler's history (1, 2 Chronicles) has been described as the writing of Israel's history according to the Priestly Code (the laws found primarily in Ex. 25-31; 35-40; Lev.; and Num. 1-10). Consequently, the Chronicler (=CHR) has been charged with the legalism of popularly conceived post-exilic Judaism.

The purpose of this paper will be to suggest that integrity--in the sense of consistency and wholeness--plays an important role in the CHR's ethic. In addition, three related points will be suggested. First, it will be shown that the CHR saw in the Mosaic law the standard for his evaluation of Israel's history. Consequently, he

was neither an innovator nor a pragmatist who observed life and deduced the rules of human conduct from his observations. Secondly, since the CHR chose historical narrative as the genre for his work, his ethical guidance is presented in a largely indirect manner, viz., the reader is to learn proper conduct by the good and bad examples that the history of his people provides. Finally, the CHR's perspective cannot be adequately characterized as a harsh and arid legalism. He argues for the integrity of person and nation that combines whole-hearted trust in God with proper cultic observance.

The Source of Ethics

A recent investigation of 1, 2 Chronicles has concluded that the CHR drew on the legal materials in each of the pentateuchal sources J, D, and P, as well as on Israelite legislation not included in the present form of the Pentateuch. This may indicate that the final form of the Pentateuch had not yet been fixed at the time that the CHR composed his work.¹ The CHR's use of these laws is often indicated by his explicit references to Mosaic legislation. In the examples that follow, the CHR's allusions to the law of Moses find no parallel in the deuteronomistic history. It is stated, for example, that when David had the ark moved from the house of Obededom to Jerusalem, the Levites carried it on poles "just as Moses had commanded according to the word of Yahweh" (1 Chr. 15:15). This is apparently a reference to Exodus 25:13-15. Later, when the young king Joash set

out to gather funds to repair the temple in Jerusalem, the CHR declares that he reinstated “the tax of Moses” which had been levied on Israel in the wilderness (2 Chr. 24:6, 9). This is a reference to the half-shekal tax of Exodus 30:11-16 and 38:25-26. Finally, the CHR notes that Uzziah’s leprosy was the punishment of God on this king who assumed for himself the priestly prerogative of offering incense to God (2 Chr. 26:16-21). This act by the king of Judah violated the principle of Numbers 16:40, which held that only the descendants of Aaron were allowed to burn incense to God.

These examples, which could be multiplied, show that the CHR believed that his people’s ethical norm was to be found in the law of Moses, a code that came from ancient times and was divine in origin. In this sense, therefore, the CHR was a traditionalist rather than an innovator, and characteristically, his aim was to show how obedience or disobedience to the Mosaic code impinged on the history of his people.²

Ethical Concerns and Their Expression

Historical narrative, as a genre, does not lend itself to ethical instruction in the same ways that law, wisdom saying, and prophecy do. It must proceed indirectly and hope that the attentive reader will draw the appropriate conclusions.³ In this section, attention will be given first of all to some of the CHR’s most obvious ethical concerns, and then the discussion will turn to some of the characteristic ways that he went about expressing approval or disapproval for the various kings of Judah.

One of the CHR's most prominent ethical concerns involves the way that kings acted toward God. His account of Asa's reign is particularly useful in this regard, since it demonstrates several aspects of the issue. The CHR arranged Asa's reign as follows: 1) the king inaugurates religious reforms and is granted peace and a stronger kingdom (2 Chr. 14:1-8); 2) he relies on God when attacked by a larger Ethiopian army and is given victory (14:9-15); 3) he is commended by Azariah the prophet and leads his people to swear allegiance to Yahweh (15:1-19); 4) he is threatened by the armies of North Israel and relies on the Syrians for deliverance (16:1-6); and 5) he rejects the word of Hanani the prophet who rebuked him and consequently Asa falls ill and dies (16:7-14).

It is clear that while the initial segment of Asa's reign was characterized by faithfulness to God, the last part represented a rejection of Him. At first, Asa acted decisively to eradicate idolatry in Judah. His ethic did not require him to allow his subjects the freedom to choose their deity. As king, Asa saw it as his prerogative and even as his responsibility to make this choice for them and to compel obedience to his decision on pain of death (2 Chr. 15:13). He demanded absolute faithfulness to Yahweh and His law. The CHR describes this as entering "into a covenant to seek Yahweh the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul" and as "swearing to Yahweh with a loud voice" and "rejoicing over the

oath,” having “sworn with all their heart” and having “sought him with their whole desire” (verses 12, 14, 15). The CHR’s pride in Asa’s actions at this point is clear. The king acted courageously and without reservation, because God required the exclusive devotion of his people and would not accept half-hearted allegiance or obedience. Such devotion involved the corporate act of the people under the king’s leadership. In this way, when God’s people resolutely determined to serve him alone, they found joy and peace (2 Chr. 14:6, 7; 15:15).

Militarily, Asa’s reign was threatened in this first period by an Ethiopian army of a million men. The king did not despair but turned to Yahweh and relied upon him for victory (2 Chr. 14:11, 12). Consequently, the forces of Asa defeated the Ethiopian army and gathered considerable spoil. This first response by Asa to a military threat assumes special significance in light of the king’s later actions, when he was threatened by Baasha with his smaller Israelite army. In the latter instance, Asa bribed the Syrians to attack Israel from the north. This skillful maneuver caused the forces of Baasha to withdraw from their positions against Judah and allowed Asa’s forces to dismantle the Israelite fortifications (2 Chr. 16:1-6). While Asa’s actions may be commendable in terms of shrewd politics, they were indefensible in terms of the CHR’s religious ethic. They displayed a lack of trust in God and constituted the entry by Judah into a new covenant

that competed with the earlier one that Asa and Judah had made with God. The integrity of Judah's devotion to God was compromised.

Finally, Asa's response to the prophetic word merits consideration. After Judah's victory over the Ethiopians, Azariah exhorted Asa to further obedience, and the king responded enthusiastically by leading the people to commit themselves completely to God (2 Chr. 15:1-15). This account serves as a contrast, however, to Asa's later actions, when he was rebuked by Hanani the seer for his alliance with Syria against Israel. The prophet called attention to Asa's earlier victory against the Ethiopian army and affirmed God's continual eagerness to aid those who were devoted to Him.

Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on Yahweh, he gave them into your hand. For the eyes of Yahweh run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him. (2 Chr. 16:8, 9)

Asa reacted angrily against the prophet. He imprisoned Hanani and vented his wrath further by cruelly afflicting others of his subjects (verse 10). The CHR moves quickly to the end of Asa's reign to note that within three years the king became ill, suffered for three years, and finally died. Even in his illness, however, the king failed to rely upon God, preferring instead to trust in his own physicians (verses 12, 13). The CHR's account of Asa's reign demonstrates clearly the author's conviction that one must never reject the prophetic word. When Asa received the words of Azariah with humility

and acted obediently, God rewarded him and his people with rest from their enemies. Later, however, when Asa arrogantly rejected the prophetic rebuke, disaster ensued. The same point is made time and again elsewhere by the CHR: the leader of God's people must always be responsive and obedient to the word of God and so maintain the integrity of that relationship with Him.

At times, one glimpses something of the CHR's ethics that concern interpersonal relationships. Since his aim was not primarily that of teaching people how to act toward one another, what he has to offer in the latter regard is admittedly slim. Nevertheless, there are two accounts that indicate two aspects of the CHR's values for human conduct. The first concerns Joash.⁵ This king of Judah had been hidden as an infant by the priest Jehoiada and his wife, when Queen Athaliah attempted to slay all the princes who might eventually pose a threat to her position as the sole ruler of Judah (2 Chr. 22:10-12). After six years, however, Jehoiada led a revolt against Athaliah and set Joash on the throne of Judah (2 Chr. 23:1-15, 20, 21). Joash's subsequent rule was guided by Jehoiada's counsel (2 Chr. 24:2, 14). After the priest died, however, Joash listened to a different group of advisers--the princes of Judah--and led his people into idolatry (2 Chr. 24:15-19). At this point, Jehoiada's son Zechariah was directed by the Spirit of God to rebuke Joash for his sin. The king failed to listen, though, or to treat him leniently out of

respect for his deceased father Jehoiada. Instead, Joash had Zechariah stoned to death (2 Chr. 24:20-22). The CHR draws attention to this fact by his remark, “Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada, Zechariah’s father, had shown him, but killed his son” (verse 22). When Joash is assassinated a bit later, the CHR makes it a point to link his death with his crime against Zechariah: “his (=Joash’s) servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed” (verse 25).

The ethical value that underpins the CHR’s account of Joash’s dealings with Zechariah is clear. One has the obligation to repay kindness with kindness. Jehoiada had been responsible for preserving Joash’s life, installing him as king over Judah, and faithfully guiding his rule as God’s representative. There was a kind of consistency or integrity that characterized Jehoiada’s treatment of Joash--the former always showed kindness and loyalty toward the young prince. Therefore, Joash’s decision to execute Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, was an unconscionable act of ingratitude and showed the king’s lack of integrity.

A second example of the CHR’s ethic for interpersonal relations is found in the account of Ahaz’s reign in 2 Chronicles 28. While 2 Kings 16 reports that Syria and Israel attacked Judah, there is little indication that they were successful.⁶ The CHR, though, offers a wealth of information about this conflict. It is reported that

Pekah led Israel to slaughter 120,000 of Judah's army in a single day and that Israel took 200,000 captives from Judah, intending to keep them as slaves. Although the CHR had little sympathy for the idolatrous Ahaz and Judah, he was scandalized at Israel's lack of compassion and sense of kinship. He reports that the Israelite army took the captives from "their own kinsfolk, women, sons, and daughters" (verse 8). The speech of the Israelite prophet Oded, as he rebuked the victorious Israelite army, underscores the CHR'S concern.

Behold, because Yahweh, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have slain them in a rage which has reached up to heaven. And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against Yahweh your God? (verses 9, 10)

The matter is resolved quickly, however, when the leading citizens of Israel refuse to allow the plunder from Judah to be brought into Samaria (verses 8, 12-14). At this point, the soldiers of Israel simply walked away from the captives and the spoil, leaving them at the gates of Samaria. The response of the leaders of Samaria was remarkable. They clothed, shod, fed, and anointed the newly released captives and then conducted them—"carrying the weak on asses"--back to their countrymen at Jericho (verses 14, 15). This incredible display of kindness to the enemy populace bears a striking resemblance in several ways to the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the New Testament (Lk. 10:29-37). The account affirms the CHR'S

horror at the idea of Israelites needlessly slaughtering large numbers of their own kinsmen and cruelly enslaving a multitude that included women and children. In spite of the antipathy that the CHR held for the people of Israel on account of their idolatry and rebellion against the descendants of David, he nevertheless maintained that Judah and Israel were kindred peoples and belonged together as one.⁷ The ties of kinship were important to the CHR, and the slaughter or enslavement of one's kinsmen deeply offended his ethical sensibilities. The acts of compassion by the leading citizens of Samaria, however, serve to reaffirm the integrity or unity of God's people and model the compassion that the CHR deemed appropriate for the unfortunate victims of war between kinsmen.

Finally, it is helpful at this point to call attention to several ways that the CHR went about indicating his approval or disapproval of the actions of the characters in his history. First of all, there is his short-term retribution dogma or conviction that each king of Judah was rewarded or punished during his own lifetime for his behavior.⁸ Faithfulness to God on the part of the king led to a successful reign militarily, economically, and personally.⁹ The CHR clearly indicates his approval for a king's good behavior by noting the magnificent size of the ruler's army, his great building projects, and his striking victories over his enemies. Frequently, the CHR will remark that God gave a king "rest" and so indicate that the king and his people enjoyed a peaceful relief from attack by

neighboring countries. This, in turn, often allowed the king to focus his efforts on the strengthening of his own nation. It is erroneous to conclude from this, however, that Judah's wicked kings never engaged in building projects or raised sizeable armies. Finally, the CHR indicates his approval of a king by means of the sweeping evaluations of the ruler's character and behavior, which regularly occur at the beginning of his account for each king.

Kings who disobeyed God, on the other hand, were punished swiftly and terribly. Sometimes punishment meant defeat for the ruler's army on the battlefield, but on other occasions the punishment came more directly and personally in the form of disease or assassination. Finally, the CHR usually avails himself of the burial notice at the end of his account for each king in order to give a final verdict on the ruler's conduct. If the king was faithful to God, his body was laid to rest in the royal tombs, but if the ruler had abandoned God, his remains were buried elsewhere.¹⁰

In all these examples of the CHR's ethical concerns the issue of integrity has been apparent. The CHR praises the king, whose reign is characterized by consistency. Such a king neither worships foreign gods nor relies on alliances with foreign political powers. The praiseworthy kings of Judah show integrity: their commitment to Yahweh is complete and exclusive. Moreover, their integrity becomes evident in their dealings with other people. They recognize the bonds forged by kinship and acts of kindness, and so behave in a way that is consistent

with those relationships. What emerges in the lives of such kings is a consistency and congruence of life--integrity in the whole person and in all his actions.

The Tenor of the Chronicler's Work

The following quotation illustrates the view of the CHR's history that has been held by a number of scholars in the past:

The religious value of Chronicles lies in the emphasis given to the institutional forms of religion. Forms, ceremonies, institutions of one sort or another, are necessary for the maintenance of religious life. The Chronicler, it is true, overemphasized their importance and his teachings are vitiated by a false doctrine of divine interference without human endeavour, and a false notion of righteousness consisting largely in the observance of legal forms and ceremonies However narrow the Chronicler's teachings may be considered and however artificial their products, without the shell of the Judaistic legalism and ecclesiasticism it is difficult to see how the precious truths of divine revelation in Hebrew prophecy could have been preserved. Otherwise amid the encroaching forces of the Persian, Greek, and Roman civilisations they would have been dissipated and no place would have been prepared for the appearance of Christ and the growth of Christianity.¹¹

This quotation from just after the turn of the century suggests several points at which the CHR's thinking needs correction: 1) overemphasis on the importance of religious institutions and their rituals, 2) the mistaken idea that righteousness consists in the performance of religious ritual, 3) a narrow perspective on life or religion, and 4) Judaistic legalism and ecclesiasticism. The value of the CHR's work, however, from the perspective of religion is to be found in its assertion that religious institution and ritual are important and in its preservation of the valuable truths of divine revelation in Hebrew

prophecy. Consequently, the CHR may be credited with helping prepare a people or setting for the appearance of Christ and the growth of Christianity.

Some of these criticisms of the CHR appear warranted. One must, for example, acknowledge that the CHR is indeed concerned with the cult and religious ritual, and that he does, in fact, describe Israel's history with an eye toward observance of God's law, taking pains to note the punishments and rewards received by each king. It does not seem reasonable, however, to dismiss so quickly the CHR's religious perspective as legalistic, narrow, and mistaken. Such treatment of the CHR ignores several quite important and positive aspects of his presentation.

First of all, the CHR stresses faith in God just as other biblical writers, and never does he subordinate it to the performance of religious ritual. When foreign armies threaten the people of God, it is not military strategy that wins the day or gains divine approval, but it is trust in God (e.g., Asa and the Ethiopians in 2 Chr. 14 and Jehoshaphat against Ammon, Moab, and the men of Mt. Seir in 2 Chr. 20). Similarly, when the matter of worship arises, it is complete dedication or fidelity to God that is most important (e.g., the covenants of Asa [2 Chr. 15:8-19], Hezekiah [2 Chr. 29:3-11], and Josiah [2 Chr. 34:29-33]).

Secondly, it is by no means the case that the CHR is legalistic in the way that legalism is popularly characterized, viz., that one views law as a list of minimum

requirements to be met and as a means of indebting God to oneself. On the contrary, the CHR viewed law as the expression of the divine will and as something to be obeyed with joy and gratitude. The building of the temple under David and Solomon--a matter of great concern for the CHR--was not accomplished by a minimal obedience to law, but by the joyous and willing response of king and people to their God. Neither did the CHR portray their gifts to build the temple as a means of indebting God to Israel or as a reason for human pride in accomplishment. On the contrary, the CHR portrayed David and his people as giving credit to God for their gifts.

Then the people rejoiced because these had given 'willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord; David the king also rejoiced greatly. . . . But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee. . . . all this abundance that we have provided for building thee a house for thy holy name comes from thy hand and is all thy own. (1 Chr. 29:9, 14, 16)

Moreover, the CHR apparently maintained the same perspective toward the temple cult itself. Worship there is not presented as barren or burdensome, but as the source for joy, celebration and life--a place of prayer and access to God.¹²

Finally, the CHR is far from being content with the performance of external religious rites. He stresses the importance of personal integrity and congruence between heart and deed. One regains divine favor not by the mere outward performance of certain religious rituals, but by a sincere change of heart. King and people recognize their sin and turn to God in humility and prayer to seek

deliverance. This, in fact, offers one a clue to help make sense of the CHR's attitude toward the cult. The CHR did not elevate cultic observance above faith in God. On the contrary, he maintained that both were important and advocated a kind of integrity in which trust in God found expression in the cult. The distinction between faith in God and cultic observance, which is so often made by modern authors, may well be quite alien to the way that people in ancient Israel thought about religion.

Conclusions

This paper has not set out to represent the CHR as the purveyor of a new ethical system that rises above all others in Scripture. The intent has been more modest: to argue for a reassessment of the CHR on the basis of a sympathetic reading of his history. It should be acknowledged that the CHR was driven by ethical concerns that in many ways were similar to those of his predecessors and contemporaries. His fault is probably less that of holding an inferior ethic or theology than that of adhering to a rigidly consistent system of history.

The CHR urged respect for and obedience to the ancient laws, because he believed that the destiny of God's people was at stake. Integrity must be found in Israel, the CHR maintained, since God required the sort of whole-hearted response that makes no allowances for divided loyalties or grudging obedience. In addition,

the CHR did not see the cult as a realm that was independent of or separate from the realm of faith. The two were intimately related for him. Consequently, the person of faith rigorously obeys the divine will that has found expression in the law of Moses.

This call for integrity and wholeness in one's dealing with God and other people may have something to offer the contemporary church. The Christian cannot afford to divide life into discreet compartments--faith here, worship there, and treatment of neighbor in a third place. Faith demands the submission of the entire person to the divine will. God must be trusted at all times--no matter what the danger--and one's worship must be offered to Him alone and in a way that is consistent with His nature and will. Finally, human beings must be attentive to the bonds that unite them and so treat one another with kindness and mercy. As was the case in the CHR's day, so also in our own the community of faith is called to consistency and wholeness--to integrity.

Notes

- ¹ J. R. Shaver, "Torah and the Chronicler's History Work: An Inquiry into the Chronicler's References to Laws, Festivals and Cultic Institutions in Relation to Pentateuchal Legislation," (University of Notre Dame Ph.D. dissertation, 1983) 183-7.
- ² Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 1:349-50; Robert North, "Theology of the Chronicler," JBL 82 (1963) 372-3.
- ³ On occasion, however, one suspects that some speeches have been directed over the heads of the immediate audience to the CHR's readers. On the CHR's speeches, see Gerhard von Rad, "The Levitical Sermon in I and II Chronicles," in The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 267-80.
- ⁴ The theological basis behind the CHR's arrangement of Asa's reign is treated by Wilhelm Rudolph ("Der Aufbau der Asa-Geschichte (2 CHR. XIV-XVI)," VT 2 [1952] 367-71) and Raymond Dillard ("The Reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 14-16): An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method," JETS 23 [1980] 207-18).
- ⁵ My understanding of the CHR's treatment of Joash's reign is offered in "The Composition of 2 Chronicles 24," in Christian Teaching: Studies in Honor of LeMoine G. Lewis, ed. by Everett Ferguson (Abilene: ACU, 1981) 138-155.
- ⁶ The relationship of 2 Chronicles 28 to the other accounts of Ahaz's reign is treated in some detail by Peter R. Ackroyd in Historians and Prophets," SEA 33 (1968) 22-37. For a presentation of the most widely held reconstruction of the Syro-Ephraimitic War, see John Bright, A History of Israel, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 273-5. An alternative interpretation has been proposed by Bustenay Oded, "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered," CBQ 34 (1972) 153-65.

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