

opinion wore them down. So now they think homosexual behavior is fine."

My husband, in his evening Bible studies with the children, has been focusing on people who decided to make an exception for themselves in obeying certain rules, either because they didn't understand why God made such a rule, or simply because his law conflicted with their desires. He has not been pounding away at homosexuality in particular; we'd just as soon our kids forget it exists for now.

INNOCENCE GRIEVED

They can't, of course. Our older son, blushing, said at supper one night, uneasily, "I like Aaron. I really, really like Aaron. . . ." Aaron is three years older, and has a pellet gun. Of course he likes Aaron. But he's worried about it now—at nine years old, he's confused about male friendships, about what he feels, about what people might think.

We tried to reassure him, mostly by shrugging it off. "And anyway, you don't want to hug and kiss him," our daughter pointed out.

"Yeah, but I don't want to hug and kiss girls, either."

"One day you will," my husband said. "But there's no rush about that. In the meantime, don't worry about it. Boys like to hang out with boys. It's fine."

It was with relief that we saw him, a few days later, do as he has always done, raking his brother's hand as they ran across the field to the playground.

So some of his innocence has been preserved, though a good bit of it has gone for good. I grieve for that. And I grieve for the girl who brought this unwelcome knowledge into his life, for "what chance," as a Christian friend of mine said, "does she have?" She's not bright, nor is she pretty; she's from a broken home, is living with lesbians, is discontented, and "specializing," as she herself puts it, "in being bored." She has a lot of strikes against her and, making matters worse, is willing to embrace the role of victim.

I do the only thing I know to do: I pray. I ask God to guide my children's thoughts and attitudes. I ask him to guide the new girl's life. He is strong enough to work a miracle there, though it may be a slow miracle, one I may never see.

I have, however, been allowed to see one small step. Recently a new family moved in down the street, and the girl with the lesbian mom suggested that my children go with her to meet them.

"You never know," she said hopefully. "They might be Christians, too."

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Amanda Witt discusses Christianity, culture, and life as a homeschooling mother at the weblog WritingShore (www.writingshore.blogspot.com). She lives with her husband and three children in Park Orchard, Washington.



Nuclear Centers

ERIC MILLER on *Finding Thick Community in the Receding West*

TWENTY-TWO YEARS AGO, a boy I know well went off to college. It was the age of argyle knee socks and skinny ties, of spikey mullets and tidy perms—a time, in other words, when college students were trying to figure out how to be hip without being hippies. Sting and *Thriller* filled the air, Cosby and MTV the screen. And the genial pep of Ronald Reagan, contagious in its way, was already making the poor guy the Democrats sent up into a sacrificial lamb, though the election was still two months away.

All of this was the stuff of mystery to this boy. He had been overseas for several years, and had just returned home that summer. John Travolta, flowers, and transistor radios had given way to Boy George, plaid, and boomboxes. It was all unsettling, in an exciting sort of way, and he was eager to jump in. And he was scared to jump in.

How does one safely enter something as powerful and vast as a culture? From the protection of the family room? Behind the wheel of a car? Inside a mall perhaps, wandering from shop to shop?

A TRUE COLLEGE

He had ventured into a small Christian college in a semi-suburban, still largely rural part of southeastern Pennsylvania, living on something called a "campus." This was his primary entry point into that bewildering, indeed, ominous-sounding world of America, 1984. The college was a safe place. His father's alma mater, it was a beloved place. It was probably just the sort of place that he, at this delicate and critical moment of re-entry, needed.

But unfortunately for him and for the other members of the community, it was also a college that was struggling to map a course for itself in that strange world, a world

ether and practice, continued to lose their shaping power, and the search was on to fill the vacuum they left.

By the mid-twentieth century, the West was in the final stages of the long and slow process of shifting, for whatever cohesion it still required, to another center, to what we might call, simply, a self-center. This was not a polity founded upon a broad (if unstable) consensus about a deity who creates and commands, but instead a polity devoted most fundamentally to a self that deserves and demands.

Put differently, we Americans, and others in the West, have chosen, or perhaps defaulted, not to one transcendent center but rather to millions of human centers, each self a law unto himself or herself. Once our old binding agent lets us hold, we let it apart. And apart we remain.

And so it is that we have found ourselves in a new world, all of us, and that we have found ourselves in a new world, all of us, and that we have found ourselves in a new world, all of us.

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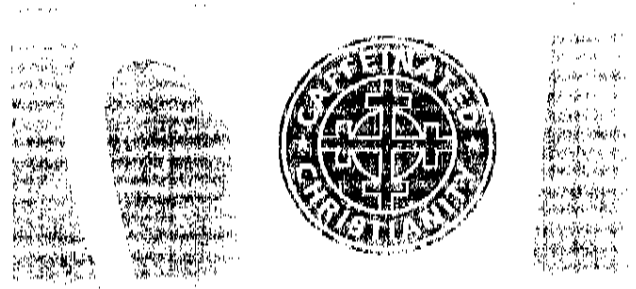
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