

Promise Keepers; Rattlesnakes, Mustangs, & Mules

Fleming, Thomas. "Shame and Science." *Chronicles*, Oct. 1996, p. 9:

Even the concepts of chastity and virginity are problematic in America. They are too untechnical, too absolute. Chastity implies a cleanliness of habits patiently practiced for years; one does not, in the ordinary course of a life, suddenly see the light and discover chastity at a tent revival; it cannot be sold in prescription form or patented as a device or acquired through therapy. Only by practicing and thinking chastity, can we become, bit by bit, more chaste.

The Promise Keepers are ... the brainchild of Colorado University football coach Bill McCartney. Promise Keepers bring together thousands of epicene sports fans in stadiums all over the country and commit them to keeping seven promises, some of them perfectly innocuous on the surface and others that put the Promise Keepers squarely in the sublimely loony tradition of American cults. In fact, some conservative Protestants ... have dissected the various heresies promoted by the Promise Keepers, pointing out that several of the group's leaders, including McCartney himself, claim to have received direct revelations from Jesus Christ.

On the surface, Promise Keepers might appear to be just one more Evangelical self-help group, asking its members to commit themselves to "*honoring Jesus Christ*," and to "*practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity*." If these promises sound all too much like the confessional statement of a new religion, some Evangelical critics have suspected exactly that, wondering why a new organization is needed to tell men what their pastors are already saying from the pulpit.

If several of the new commandments are boilerplate stuff, others are more original. For example, a Promise Keeper is "*committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men*." If this means only that a Promise Keeper should be a loyal friend, the commandment would be harmless enough, but, no, the promise Keeper can't just be a friend, he has to be a sensitivity counselor who meets with a small group of men several times a month in a self-criticism session at which each of the members "*willingly grants the others the right to inquire about his relationship to God, his commitment to his family, his sexuality, and his financial dealings*."

Most men I know would punch out anyone who presumed to make such inquiries, and any married man who talks about his "*sexuality*" (presumably his relations with his wife) ought to be horsewhipped and branded with a scarlet "A" for the part of the anatomy he cannot distinguish from a hole in the ground.

The problem here is chastity. The trouble is that we have come to see chastity almost exclusively as a "*thou shalt not*," a conscious refusal to give into temptation rather than a positive virtue that infuses the soul with radiance. Chastity is not reducible to virginity; it can occur in different forms. As St. Ambrose observed, "*There are three forms of the virtue of chastity: the first is that of spouses, the second that of widows, and the third that of virgins*," none of which is to be praised to the exclusion of others. It is not enough not to cheat on our wives; chastity requires us to avoid pornography, ... but more than an avoidance of evil, chastity compels a married man to cultivate the good, a sentiment approaching reverence for his wife, a desire to protect her from contamination.

Gregg, Josiah. *Commerce of the Prairies*. Edited by Max L. Moorhead. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954, page 43ff.

We had lately been visited by frequent showers of rain, and upon observing the Arkansas River, it was found to be rising, which seemed portentous of the troubles which the 'June freshet' might occasion us in crossing it; and, as it was already the 11th of the month, this annual occurrence was now hourly expected. The 'June freshets,' however, are seldom of long duration; and, during the greatest portion of the year, the

channel is very shallow. Still the bed of the river being in many places filled with quicksand, it is requisite to examine and mark out the best ford with stakes, before one undertakes to cross.

The wagons are then driven over usually by double teams, which should never be permitted to stop, else animals and wagons are apt to founder, and the loading is liable to be damaged. I have witnessed a whole team down at once, rendering it necessary to unharness and drag each mule out separately: in fact, more than common exertion is sometimes required to prevent these dumpish animals from drowning in their fright and struggles through the water, though the current be but shallow at the place.

We recently learned that the mule is the best animal for making the trek all the way down the trail to Santa Fé. In the pioneer days the only means of transportation was by means of animal power, a fact emphasized by the term “horsepower” which is used to classify the work capacity of automobile engines.

No matter how dumb the dumpish mule acts, the pioneer traveler must do all to preserve his life. Without the ignorant mule or ox, the pioneer cannot survive. They are his logistics from point A to point B.

In our day we depend on cars for transportation and various forms of high-tech machinery to perform our jobs. These become the Lord's provision to us that enables us to make a living and acquire our logistics for survival. Never abuse your equipment and always thank God for it.

Proverbs 12:10 - A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast, but the compassion of the wicked is cruel.

Gregg, Josiah. Commerce of the Prairies. Edited by Max L. Moorhead. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954, page 46.

Rattlesnakes are proverbially abundant upon all these prairies, and as there is seldom to be found either stick or stone with which to kill them, one hears almost a constant popping of rifles or pistols among the vanguard, to clear the route of these disagreeable occupants, lest they should bite our animals. As we were toiling up through the sandy hillocks which border the southern banks of the Arkansas, the day being exceedingly warm, we came upon a perfect den of these reptiles. I will not say 'thousands,' though this perhaps were nearer the truth--but hundreds at least were coiled or crawling in every direction. They were no sooner discovered than we were upon them with guns and pistols, determined to let none of them escape.

In the midst of this amusing scramble among the snakes, a wild mustang colt, which had somehow or other, become separated from its dam [mother], came bolting among our relay of loose stock to add to the confusion. One of our mules, evidently impressed with the impertinence of the intruder, sprang forward and attacked it, with the apparent intention of executing summary chastisement; while another mule, with more denignity [gentleness] of temper than its irascible compeer, engaged most lustily in defence of the unfortunate little mustang.

As the contest was carried on among the wagons, the teamsters soon became very uproarious; so that the whole, with the snake fracas, made up a capital scene of confusion. When the mule skirmish would have ended, if no one had interfered, is a question which remained undetermined; for some of our company, in view of the consequences which might result from the contest, rather inhumanly took sides with the assailing mule.

Soon after they entered the lists, a rifle ball relieved the poor colt from its earthly embarrassments, and the company from further domestic disturbance. Peace was once more restored.

The wagoners were briefly entertained by the chaos brought about by the animal kingdom, however prudence required that they quickly restore order. Vanguard riders were shooting snakes, a wild mustang enters the periphery of the train, and dumb mules take up a fight both with the colt and each other.

There is danger that one of the mules will seriously wound the other, that one might get accidentally shot, or both bitten by snakes. Order had to be restored. Discernment dictated that the intruder be the one eliminated.

When chaos occurs in our lives, we must learn to discern what the cause of the problem is. If self, then the recovery is rebound. If an outside exigency, then elimination of the problem is the immediate objective.

James 3:16 - Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

Whether animals or humans, those who permit their limbic systems to rule their lives create an environment of confusion, disorder, and chaos. Elimination of the unruly animal is by rifle ball while of the emotional human, by the wisdom of discernment.