

## The Fire in the Thornbush Dialogue

### One Must Avoid Presuming

By Terry L.S. Werth  
Poet and Author

"Is the choice to work at home at the loving service of husband and children a demeaning, unenlightened one? Is the choice to pursue a career selfish or somehow suspect and dangerous?" (4)

Choice. It is a lovely word. The freedom to choose is at the heart of our democracy and our Christian faith. And yet, as I watch and listen to women around me, I detect that somewhere in the struggle for equality, our genuine freedom of choice has been sabotaged.

Women today are not free to be or do anything they choose without being judged or stereotyped, often by other women. This phenomenon is, I think, largely the result of "the impact of societal changes on family life," to which Bishop Clark refers in his letter.

Before we heap all the blame on men for the guilt and discrimination imposed upon women, we need to look at our attitudes toward each other. We admit the

obvious sin of judging others. Still, our human nature prevails. We justify our own choices by criticizing and degrading women whose values are different from ours.

A woman may work because she must. Her preference may be, in fact, not to leave her child at a day-care center, but the economy has necessitated it. Or perhaps she made the deliberate choice to have her career outside the home, while pursuing her roles as mother and/or wife.

The woman at home may have her choice dictated by circumstances, as well: children with special needs, her ability to compete or cope with the current job market, her own physical limitations. She may have a deep-rooted belief that, in spite of her career ability and potential, what is most important to her is to be in her home for this period of her life.

Her choice may have been the most compelling one, but it was not necessarily her most attractive or most desirable option.

Too often today, the world fails to recognize the joy and pain that women face who have made the choice to stay at home. Too often today, these women

are being unfairly labeled and judged. And they, in turn, perhaps in their frustration, unfairly judge and label women who have chosen a career in tandem with their other roles.

As a woman who has chosen to make my career, at this time of my life, wife and mother, I recognize this problem. I have felt both the judgment and the guilt and have lashed out in frustration. I have watched women from both "camps" do emotional battle on the Donahue Show. I have heard friends unfairly criticized for their suspected priorities. I have known women who shirk from labels of "feminist" or "liberated" because of the perceived negative implications. I have been automatically labeled "Ms." I prefer "Mrs." and expect my choice to be respected.

In our quest for unity and equality, women have become divided. We have weakened our effectiveness and impeded our own progress toward the real freedom we seek. It takes courage today to be the woman we choose to be. We risk being harshly judged because someone thinks we ought to be doing more for ourselves or more for our families.

God calls women to significant tasks, some of which are uniquely ours. But God never said, "That's ALL you ought to be." We must prepare ourselves for the reality that our role as mother and nurturer does change and eventually end as our children become adults. "Mother" becomes the name of a relationship to

our children, instead of a role lived for them.

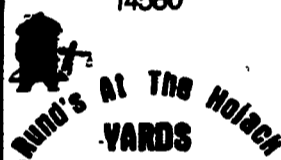
Today I am a busy and dedicated mother. Some day I will find myself with time and energy for new interests. That is why, in the years spent at home, I need to dream, to have a vision of myself as an individual with untapped potential. While I may not put my personal fulfillment first today, I need to have hope and keep alive that very private part of myself. I need to nourish that hope, even in small ways, in preparation for a stage of my life that today seems light-years away.

I ask only for respect for being the woman God has called me to be and for understanding of how I have chosen to live out my womanhood. More urgently, those women for whom choice has been dictated by society, circumstance or conscience need our support and our prayers, that they may find challenge, success, joy, peace and hope.

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## OF RUNNERS & RUNAWAYS

This is a letter about millstones. The kind that Jesus spoke about.

Jimmy is a really great kid. Average bright, nice looking. He smiles a lot and has winning, helpful ways. He's the

kind of kid grandmothers like to feed cookies to.

Jimmy is a runner. A runner is a kid who works for a pimp as a negotiator. You see, if a john (a customer) wants to buy a kid, he won't talk directly to the pimp himself (he just might be an undercover cop), so pimps employ kids to act as negotiators: to discuss the time, place, price, and the nature of the sexual contact. Jimmy is really good at that; business-like, respectful, non-threatening. "You have to make the johns think they're doing an O.K. thing," Jimmy says.

Jimmy, however, will never make it as a pimp—he's too small and won't grow very much anymore. But an enterprising runner like Mark, anxious to get ahead in the "trade," performs a multitude of other important duties for a pimp. He keeps track of the pimp's stable of girls and exactly how many johns they put up a night. Her tally had better square with what Mark turns over to the pimp. You see, the pimp makes a big thing out of honesty, integrity, and trust. Besides, he has to pay off once a week to the organized crime goons who will beat him up with iron pipes and then waste him if he's late with his franchise payment.

Runners are especially useful at recruiting more kids for the industry. Runaways pour into our cities by the dozens every day. They're almost always smart enough to be suspicious of the friendly, smooth-talking adult who offers an obviously lost and confused kid a place to stay for a few days.

Jimmy is great at winning their confidence. Kids let their guard down more easily with other kids, especially with eager, softspoken gee-whiz, helpful Jimmy.

I used to be a runaway myself, he confides, to an unsuspecting victim. I got this great job and a place of my

own; if you want we can go over to my place and cook some hamburgers, watch some tube. You can stay with me for a few days. Until you get a job and your own place. I can help you, says Jimmy. The kids do exactly that. Jimmy does have a nice place and the TV is color and there's all the kinds of food a kid would like, and maybe some beer and maybe a little grass, and maybe just a little porn lying around.

*"You have to make the johns think they're doing an O.K. thing."*

The runaway spends a nice couple of days. Everything is really cool. Jimmy has money and is generous—and he has generous friends—who after a couple of "investment days" offer the kid a lot of money for some very easy sex—and the kid doesn't have to do anything. The next night it's the same. Only the tip is bigger and maybe some pictures are taken. And it wasn't so bad. After a week, the kid is doing things he never thought he could ever do—and the invitation to pay back the "loans" is demanding and brutal.

Jimmy has scored again. Now another kid works the street or gets marketed to a call boy service, or as a dancer in a strip joint, or even to a wealthy john into kids. Jimmy knows all about it. You see, that's what happened to him.

Jesus said some very strong things about giving scandal, that is, leading, inducing, seducing, forcing people into sin, especially kids. Woe betide them, He said. Jesus didn't have a vindictive bone in His body. He taught us what real forgiveness means. Yet He speaks of millstones around the necks of people who give scandal to kids. Winsome and winning Jimmy has been scandalized and corrupted and the corrupted young has become the corruptor.

*"Yet Jesus speaks of millstones around the necks of people who give scandal to kids."*

Because some very evil and greedy men want to make money by pandering to our sick lusts.

It is sometimes convenient to argue that prostitution, as the world's oldest profession, isn't worth the time and money and effort to try to stamp it out, or at least diminish

it. A lot of people, when they think of prostitution, think of streetwalkers and brothels and kind of no-nonsense, straightforward sex: the commercial, recreational transaction between somebody who wants to buy something and somebody who wants to sell. They don't think of that whole bizarre and vicious and extensive range of commercialized sex that destroys kids like Jimmy and Mark.

Millstones! Jesus said of people like that: it would be better if they had never been born; if they tied a millstone around their neck and cast themselves into the sea.

Our UNDER 21 Centers were bulging with over 400 kids last night. We really need your help, please. I know how tough it is to keep the monthly checks coming—you have your own ever-increasing food bills and school bills for your own kids and your consistent 5, 10, or 20 dollars a month keeps us here for our kids.

(A very firm-voiced lady called me the other day and said: you keep calling them "my kids." They're our kids, she said.) And they are, yours and mine.

Thank you for loving them and caring about them. Pray for us, please. We always, every day, pray for you.

I really care what happens to kids like Jimmy and Mark. Enclosed is my contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ please print:

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