

When Governor Mel Carnahan commuted the sentence of a prisoner on death row last month he explained that he was moved by Pope John Paul II, who personally appealed to the governor for mercy on the occasion of the pope's visit to the state of Missouri. The governor's decision prompted praise and criticism, depending on which wisdom you believe. If you believe that all human life is sacred, you will apply that belief to the death penalty in general, not just to this one case. If you believe that the state should preserve the right to exterminate its worst criminal offenders, you would criticize the governor for circumventing the very law he was elected to uphold. Pope John Paul II has made his opposition to the death penalty plain; the bishops of Missouri have followed his lead with a joint statement.

The impeachment of President Clinton polarized opinions as well. If you believe that a good leader has to be a person of moral integrity because you cannot separate personal behavior from successful governance, you most likely wanted the man removed from office. If you believe that a good leader is one who will produce economic benefit, you would tolerate his personal offenses because they have not interfered with prosperity. Politics is a debate about wisdom. It is an attempt to convince.

Marketers face the same challenge. They learn which wisdom will sell products: People buy whatever is newer, faster, cheaper, or comes with a celebrity endorsement. If a laundry detergent offers a new formula, we'll go for it, even if it doesn't clean any better. If a meal can be microwaved in less time than it takes to cook, we'll buy it, even if it's more expensive. If we can save money with a coupon, we'll make the purchase, even for a product we don't want. You'd think people would drink milk because of its nutritional benefits, but dairy producers have enlisted some of the most famous upper lips in American society to convince us by means of the moustache. Sometimes we follow the wisdom of marketing even when it makes no sense to do so. A faster product may not be cheaper. A newer product may not be better. It still amazes me that people buy instant oatmeal when it's hard to imagine anything more instant than making oatmeal.

St. Paul knew that the Corinthians were hearing lots of different wisdom. He had to crack through the teachings of some of the best philosophers of his day, and he did it with remarkable success, preaching what he called "the wisdom of God." He says God's wisdom is secret and hidden, and God decreed it before the ages for our glory. It's as if God already wrote into the fabric of creation the wisdom we need to follow, the wisdom of life and death, of love, sacrifice, and wonder. If we meditate on that simple wisdom of creation, the wisdom of love, we will come to believe in the glory that God has prepared for us, a glory that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, a glory that God prepares for those who love him.

We will hear differing political philosophies; we'll hear the lure of advertising, but we can probably hear the wisdom of God first in the things which God has made, the clouds of the sky, the blossoms of spring, the love of one's valentine, and the birth of a child. It is there where God

has hidden the true wisdom which teaches us how to live and which promises our glory.