

# EDITOR'S ETC.

BY DEAN MERRILL



**W**ould you like to be President of the United States? You may have dreamed about it as a child, but you're less enamored with the idea now. You know that to lead this sprawling, diverse country and keep it from flying apart takes a special talent.

Early in the 1976 campaign, one columnist noted that all but one of the would-be candidates had grown up in medium-to-small towns: Gerald Ford in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Ronald Reagan in Dixon, Ill.; eventual winner Jimmy Carter in Plains, Ga.; and half a dozen others. The only city boy in the race was Jerry Brown from San Francisco.

The writer then ventured an explanation: Life in a small town gives you a sense that you can make a difference. Problems are not totally overwhelming; if you take them a section at a time and don't give up, you can prevail. So these men rode their I-can-handle-it attitude all the way to national prominence.

We city folk are perhaps more fainthearted, wondering, "Who could make a dent in all this confusion?"

But Christians—whether raised in the city or the country—have a different basis for hopefulness. They have not given up on life, because

they have heard God say, "I can handle it." In a negative world, Christians maintain this crazy idea that human beings can be changed. A man, a woman, a teenager does not have to stay the same for life.

Now obviously this is based upon belief in a God who is active. The

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story is told of Voltaire, the famous French skeptic who in 1778 lay dying a painful death of uremia. A Christian came to see him and spoke about how, despite all that had gone before, the philosopher could still receive forgiveness and peace on the basis of what God had done for him through the Cross. Voltaire rose up in his bed, summoned what strength he had left, and flared back, "God does nothing!"

If you believe in a God who basically sits on his hands, then you have little reason to be positive about the world. Christians, on the other hand, use their hope in an active God to stay positive in the midst

of dire circumstances and events.

People in trouble often say, "I don't want to get my hopes up." Yes! Get them up! Hope is not silliness. Hope is the quiet whisper inside the heart that says, *Well . . . it's possible.*

A speaker named Doug Wead, from whom I have learned much on this subject, occasionally teases his audiences by saying, "Do you know what my favorite verse in all of Scripture is? John 3:16? No. The Twenty-third Psalm? No. Romans 12:1-2? No.

"My all-time favorite is Ecclesiastes 9:4." People get puzzled looks on their faces and start paging through the Old Testament to find this text: "Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!"

Wead always draws a laugh, but his point is serious. More of us identify with dogs than with lions. We don't expect to be kings of the modern jungle. Yet even dogs can have hope.

And where there is hope, there is optimism. There is assurance that God has not run out of options yet, and neither have we.

*Dean Merrill*

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