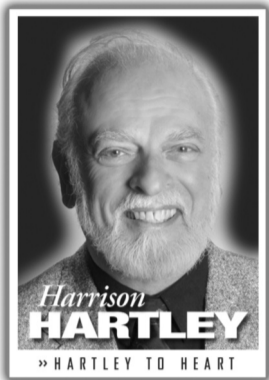


# Bird Dog

OR: A Cautionary Anecdote for Christmas and the New Year. BUT FIRST: a brief explanation. In "the old days," that is, the Nineteenth Century and before, it was customary to "set up" a book or essay with a subtitle - usually introduced by "OR" - that helped clarify the author's reason for writing. It was also customary to publish "cautionary tales" which functioned in the popular press much as sermons and homilies do in church: to try and gain the attention of otherwise occupied bunches of ordinary citizens and get them to think about something important. Heaven knows, in the USA today we are "otherwise occupied," and heaven knows, it's hard to get large numbers of us to think about important things. We love sound bytes; we love flashes of visual imagery, but we don't much like to THINK about things; especially not complicated things that may have more than one "side" and may take more than a few minutes to digest. We want fast; we want easy, and that's what we frequently get: fast, easy things of little lasting value. In the marketplace of material "stuff," that means bad craftsmanship, poor



design, cheap materials, and fleeting integrity. In the marketplace of ideas (politics, religion, science, and the arts), it means glib yammer instead of logic, emotional acrobatics instead of argument; lies, half-lies, and gross distortions instead of facts, and no integrity whatsoever. And the worst part of this is that it is largely true; but the worst part of that is that it is not ABSOLUTELY true, and the worst part of THAT is that we tend to think it IS absolutely true! WE think: all politicians are liars and crooks (except the ones WE voted for); WE think: all preachers are liars and crooks (except the one in OUR church); WE think: all conservatives are Fascist, Nazi, Capitalist, wife-beating swine, and WE think all liberals are weak-kneed, Commie-Pinko, 'Merica-hatin' sissy snobs... and so on. In other words, WE all too often don't think at all. Our mental sponges absorb sound-bytes and we assume we have listened; our eyes focus dimly on the TV and we assume we have seen, and in the interim possibilities for real reform - yes, real reform in politics, religion, science, and the arts - and chances to practice charity, decency, and wisdom all drown

in a sea of cynicism. They don't have to, but as Pogo Possum observed, "We have met the enemy and he is us." The enemy is the "liberal" who can't see any improvement in any half measure; no, sir! For some fine idealists, only perfection will do! If we can't have the whole loaf, we should starve! (Try telling that to somebody who really has known hunger and the idealism will swiftly fade in the face of the brutal fact that half a loaf is, indeed, infinitely better than none.) Or the enemy is the "conservative" whose primary interest, once the rhetoric is stripped away, turns out to be conserving the status quo and making no changes whatsoever (particularly in regard to certain well-established perquisites and privileges... and the chance to continue making a LOT of money!) Or, again, the enemy is that face in the mirror; the face that belongs to "the good citizen" who didn't vote (because all politicians are crooks), who can't be bothered (because "good citizens" mind their own business"), who scoffs at reform (because one person can't feed the globe; clean up the ocean and the air; make a difference); a face drowned in sloth and cynicism. (And now: the Bird Dog.) Once there was a hunter who had a miraculous dog; a golden retriever unlike any before. The hunter raised

him, and when the dog matured, he discovered how remarkable the creature was; so remarkable he felt he couldn't trust his own senses. "I've got to show this dog to somebody," he thought, so he invited an old friend on a duck hunt. Things went well on the day of the great revelation, and the men pulled their boat out into a lagoon with the marvelous dog aboard. Soon, a flight of mallards came over and the hunter shot one that fell into the water some distance away. "Now," the hunter said, "watch this! Fetch, boy!" and the noble dog stepped out of the boat with dignity, walked across the surface of the pond, picked up the duck, returned, and lay the bird at his master's feet. "What do you think?" said the hunter. "Don't believe it," said his friend with an incredulous frown. "Do it again." Delighted, the hunter repeated the shot, the command, and all went as before. "Nope," said the friend still shaking his head, "once more." Again the miraculous dog performed, and the hunter demanded: "Okay, what do you think now?" "Well, sir," replied his friend still frowning and shaking his head, "I don't know 'bout you, but I wouldn't own a dog that can't swim." They that have ears, let them hear; and may we all enjoy a very merry Christmas, and a happy, prosperous, and much less cynical New Year.

# King Herod and The Wise Men

**Dr. Don Kuehle | Guest Columnist**  
UNITED METHODIST, RETIRED

The "Drama Of Christmas" continues. We watch in wonder as God once again presents His story. During a brief interlude, we hurry backstage to meet some of the characters in this real-life drama. Look! There's King Herod, and the Wise men!

WISE MEN ARE ALWAYS SEARCHING! We don't know what started them on their journey, or what held them to their search. We do know that when the question was asked: "Is this all there is to life?", each one answered, "No! There's more to life than we have experienced so far. We have seen God's sign in the sky; we must go in search of a life richer and more abundant!" KING HEROD was not a searcher. He knew what he wanted out of life: power, fame, riches, and he was bound to get it. Herod had built his power-base in Jerusalem, and no one was going to stand in his way, not even the Babe in Bethlehem!

WISE MEN ARE ALWAYS ASKING QUESTIONS! People who ask question are considered dangerous people. They upset the status quo. Thus, they are suspect, people to be carefully watched. The Wise men were asking questions around Jerusalem: "Where is the King, the One who has real authority?"; "Where might we find God's

Promised One?" KING HEROD, hearing these questions, was troubled! People in authority do not like to be questioned. They are too unsure of themselves, and of their position of power. They are too set in their ways, and do not like to be upset. People in power do not like outsiders coming in and causing a disturbance.

WISE MEN ALWAYS FIND AN ANSWER! King Herod was too busy with the demands of governing, and with his dreams of power, to seek further for answers. Since he had the power and authority, he supplied people with answers. So why worry about what went on out in the sticks, in small-town Bethlehem. The Religious Leaders were not seeking answers; they already had all the answers they needed. When people ask the proper questions, you give them the proper answers. That way, everybody knows where they stand and everybody feels safe and secure. Some questions had no answers, and so were dismissed as irrelevant to life. The Wise Men, however, would not be content with easy answers to life's hard questions! They went to Bethlehem, seeking the Source of both questions and answers. Their journey was long and hard, filled with question marks. They came to Bethlehem and there in a manger they found God's Answer to all life's questions. The Answer was not what they expected!

WISE MEN ARE NEVER CON-

TENT! The Wise Men persisted! They never gave up; they followed the Star all the way to Bethlehem! People who are content with life as it is will never journey to Bethlehem. People who are satisfied with life, and feel that they have all the answers they need, have no earthly reason to go to Bethlehem.

Every year, God lights his Star. Every year, God sends an angel choir to sing a song of peace on earth. Every year, Spirit becomes flesh in a manger in Bethlehem. Every year, God reaffirms his Answer to all life's questions. Only the wise follow the Star wherever it leads. Only the wise leave the status quo to seek what God has for their future. Only the wise are restless enough to find the Answer.

Dr. Don Kuehle  
United Methodist, Retired  
Jackson, Missouri

# Merry Christmas

This week I've added a special column from Rev. Don Kuehle in recognition of Christmas.

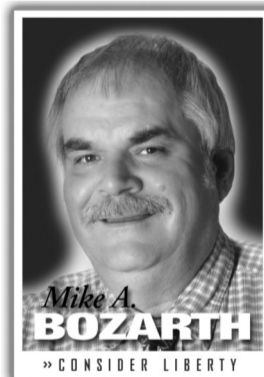
You will see several Christmas articles and stories this week. Until we are threatened with jail, I will continue to honor the life of Jesus who was born to bear the burden of our sins so that we can have eternal life. That's the reason Christmas is.

As a philosophical libertarian, I have nothing but respect for those of other faiths, as well as those who claim none. I believe one's faith is a personal matter, between them and their God.

I have friends who are Jewish, Buddhist, agnostic and atheist. I respect Hanaukka and other holidays observed by Jews. The same with other beliefs.

I enjoy Santa Claus and the spirit of giving and the tradition of a big Christmas meal as much as anyone. I will not apologize for wishing you a very Merry Christmas!

And may the Peace, Love, and Joy that comes from that message flow your way throughout the New Year!



## » VERSE of the WEEK

John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

- LUKE 3:3