

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS VOLUME 5, NUMBER 5 AGGREGATE ISSUE 24 OCTOBER 1999

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Don Quixote

By Foy Valentine

Now and then, say every 500 years or so, some genius invents an immortal.

Homer did it with Ulysses.

Bunyan did it with Pilgrim.

Some pale Scandinavian did it with Beowulf.

Some quintessential Englishman did it with King Arthur.

And Cervantes—let the drums roll—did it with Don Quixote.

More real in fiction than most people are in real life, Don Quixote is known and embraced around the world. He is more popular at this approaching turn of the Century than when he first sprang onto the world stage 400 years ago.

For instance, on my own desk there stands a 12-inch high wood carving of this worthy Knight of the Rueful (Read Sad, Pitiable, Mournful, Squalid) Countenance. Astride his pitiful old nag (spavined, undernourished, rib cage exposed, abused, and dispirited), the man of La Mancha bears in his right hand his ludicrous overlong lance, disports his silly armor which he has scavenged, wears his absurd helmet which he and Sancho Panza have improvised from a hapless barber's abandoned wash basin, and gazes earnestly into space as he awaits his next outlandish new adventure.

If the famous artist in Mexico, none other than J. Pinal himself, who sold us this masterpiece could only have known what pleasure his handiwork would afford me, he could have got away with charging Mary Louise ten times as much as she paid for it. So be it. Let the seller beware.

On my study wall there hangs a really good oil painting, also from Mexico City and also by a famous artist, of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza on their mounts, Don Quixote on Rocinante and Sancho on the ass. They are making their way through deep woods. Sancho is clearly ready for a square meal and a good night's sleep and Don Quixote is clearly ready to do the noble work of a knight errant, rescuing some damsel in distress, avenging some injustice, or righting some dastardly wrong. Ethics at its best. [So there. You thought I'd never find a handle to justify all this meandering, didn't you? Ethics, I must remind you, is this journal's *raison d'être*.]

And hard by, in my work room, there hangs Picasso's striking rendition, in garish red, of—who else—Don Quixote.

Moreover a Broadway musical about the Man of La Mancha has recently been wildly popular.

And a song based on Don Quixote's life, "The Impossible Dream," has been sung by millions and has possibly inspired ten times that many sermons, many of them eminently sleep-worthy, to be sure.

Indeed, this Don Quixote is ubiquitous.

And well he should be.

Consider his credentials.

Cervantes, whose full and proper name was Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, was born in Alca de Henares, Spain in 1547 and died at age 69 in 1616. He began giving Don Quixote to the world and to the ages in 1604 and 1605. The second part of the book appeared toward the end of 1615. Written some ten years after the first part, the second part is considered better, more subtle, more stylistically excellent, more focused, more logical, more structured, and more mature than the earlier part. But from beginning to end, the book is stamped indelibly with Cervantes' genius. To read the English translation is to be absolutely astounded with Cervantes' imagination and seemingly inexhaustible vocabulary; and those whose mother tongue is Spanish assure me that when reading it in the Spanish which Cervantes employed, Don Quixote is even more astonishingly remarkable for its vocabulary and glowing realism, its sympathetic insight into the everyday lives of nobles, knights, priests, traders, shepherds, farmers, innkeepers, muleteers, convicts, kitchen workers, ladies, damsels, Moorish beauties, country girls, and kitchen wenches of easy virtue.

Don Quixote has always pleased the multitudes because of its fast pace, its uncomplicated comedy, its kindly pathos, its delicious absurdities, its generous humanity, its spontaneous gaiety, its ingenious wit, and its penetrating insight into real life.

Hardly any knowledgeable critic would hesitate to name Cervantes, on the basis of Don Quixote alone, one of history's greatest writers. A much used observation has been that children lovingly turn its pages, young people avidly read it, adults never tire of it, and old people continue to delight in it.

The character of Don Quixote himself is an inexhaustible mine for students and scholars, a treasure trove of psychological studies and theological insights, and a mother lode of plain common sense and authentic wisdom.

That Don Quixote himself is crazy as a loon only serves to make people identify with him all the more sympathetically.

He appeals to me, and in turn I commend him to you for several reasons.

(continued on page 18)

Editor: Foy Valentine

Publisher: The Center for Christian Ethics

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY is published spasmodically, as funding and energy permit, by the Center for Christian Ethics, Post Office Box 670784, Dallas, Texas 75367-0784. Phone (972) 404-0070 or (972) 404-0050. Produced in the United States of America. Third class postage paid at Dallas, Texas.

A Double Helping

By Hal Haralson

My Last Trip to See Tidenberg

[Hal Haralson practices law in Austin, Texas and is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

I headed north out of Austin at 5:00 a.m. My destination, Ft. Smith, Arkansas. I had reached the Dallas area by 10:00 a.m. and crossed the Red River about noon. Never having been to Ft. Smith, I had little feel for how far my destination was.

James Garland Tidenberg was in the hospital in Ft. Smith and wasn't expected to live much longer. He had been treated for cancer for 2 years. Early in the week, I told Judy I felt should go see Tidenberg and we agreed it was the right thing for me to do. The long drive gave me a chance to reflect on how "Tidler" and I first crossed paths.

In the fall of 1953, two freshmen from different areas of the American West came to Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas to study for the ministry.

James Tidenberg was over six feet tall, blond, and very much the son of German ancestry. He came from the wheat fields of Clovis, New Mexico. I was short (5'2"), black-headed and reflected some of my Indian ancestry. I had spent my early years on a West Texas farm near Loraine.

There were no dormitory rooms for men in 1953. The new men's dorm was under construction. Five students rented an old house near the campus and this was what brought Tidenberg and me together. For 3 1/2 years, we would be roommates. James, affectionately known as "Tidler," pastored two half-time churches (Guthrie and Dumont.) My preaching was mostly at youth revivals.

Tidler married Parilee Nelson in November 1956 and I married Judy Christian in December of the same year.

Tidenberg went to the seminary and spent 25 years as a missionary in Africa. I wound up in law school and spent 3 decades in Austin, Texas practicing law. Tidler and I didn't see each other very much over the next 30 years, but the bond that was formed during college remained very strong. When I heard he was to be at the M.D. Anderson facility in Houston for treatment for cancer, I went to Houston and spent the day with him and Parilee.

Now I was probably seeing him for the last time. I was apprehensive as I pulled into the hospital parking lot. I had arrived in Ft. Smith about 4:00 p.m.

He was lying in bed with tubes in his chest and throat, and oxygen going into his nose. His color was the pale yellow that is characteristic of advanced cancer.

His daughter, Pal, was in the room. Her brother, Jim, was there also. Their other son, Tim, was in Tanzania where he serves as a missionary in the area where he grew up.

"Tidler" was glad to see me. He was alert. We laughed and joked about our college experiences for the next 2 hours. Pal and Jim heard these stories for the first time.

Tidler had come in one night after a date with Parilee. He was sure this was the girl he was going to marry. Only one problem. "She's not a mission volunteer." I told Tidenberg I was preaching in a revival at Baird the next week. "I'm preaching on missions on Wednesday night. You bring Parilee and if she surrenders for missions, you buy me the biggest steak in Abilene."

She did. He did. That steak was so big I could eat only half of it. The rest lay around the room until we had to throw it out.

And, then there was the time we went to Foreign Mission Week at Glorieta, New Mexico. This was mecca then for our brand of Baptists. My friend, Lanny Curry, and I went together since we were both foreign mission volunteers. When we went through Clovis, New Mexico, we stopped at Tidenberg's family farm. He was driving a tractor out in the field. We finally talked him into going with us. He protested that he wasn't a mission volunteer and didn't really want to go. We won and he joined us. We were the only people in the lodge of First Baptist Church, Abilene, Texas. It was great fun. We sat up until all hours, playing cards, and laughing ourselves silly.

On the final day of the conference, an invitation was given for all who wanted to surrender for foreign mission service after an emotional appeal had been made by the speaker. Tidenberg went sauntering down the aisle. After the service was over, he came to the back where Lanny and I were standing. "You two S.O.B.'s see what you got me into." Tidenberg was now a mission volunteer.

He spent 25 years in Africa. Lanny has been in the insurance business and is now a Methodist minister. I've spent 28 years practicing law.

Tidenberg was getting tired and I could see that after 2 hours, it was time for me to go. I told him that I loved him. I wished him well and said good-bye.

He died 10 days later. I was thankful I had followed my inclination and made the trip when I did.

Friends are among life's greatest treasures. This friendship did not require frequency of contact or geographical closeness to remain strong for over 40 years. Now we're fixing to pick it all up on the other side. ■

One of the Least of These: Linnie Pierce 1906-1996

She was old (over 80), her clothes were dirty, her dress nearly drug the ground. Her back was so deformed she looked at her feet when she walked. She carried a cane and had an old bag over her shoulder.

She was a “bag lady.” She had a Styrofoam cup filled with water that she poured on plants that looked thirsty. She picked trash out of trash cans. This was all she knew after spending 42 years in a mental institution.

This was my first experience with Linnie Pierce.

She attended our first retreat for former mental patients at the Butt Foundation ranch near Leaky, Texas.

The Mental Health Association in Texas started support groups for former mental patients called FAIR (Families and Individuals in Reliance) in 1980. The first FAIR group was in Austin. Three years later, we had groups in 30 cities.

Dian Cox was the MHAT staff member in charge and I was the committee chairman.

Since I had been diagnosed manic-depressive after a suicide attempt and 3 months in the San Antonio State Hospital (including 13 shock treatments), I felt this was a way I could pay back some of those people who helped me.

I put 10 years in the ministry behind me and went to law school. 1980 found me with 10 years experience as an attorney.

Linnie Pierce and I became friends. We both attended the first nine of the FAIR retreats. She then moved from San Antonio to Kenedy, Texas where she lived in one room of an old house. I hired a lady to take her one meal a day and help her take her medicine.

Linnie sold her house in San Antonio. The buyer, a real estate broker, made payments to Linnie for 2 years and stopped. Linnie called and asked me to help.

I found that this man told Linnie all she needed was a deed conveying the house to him. There was no note or deed of trust.

I finally located the buyer. He had sold the house as if he owed nothing on it, pocketed the cash and quit paying Linnie.

The “buyer” was now a student in law school. I prepared a note and deed of trust and wrote to him, telling him that if he didn’t sign the instruments and return them to me, the only “Bar” he would practice in would be Maggie Maes in Austin.

He signed and never missed a payment after that.

Linnie asked me to handle all her business affairs and for the next 10 years I went to Kenedy once a month to check on her.

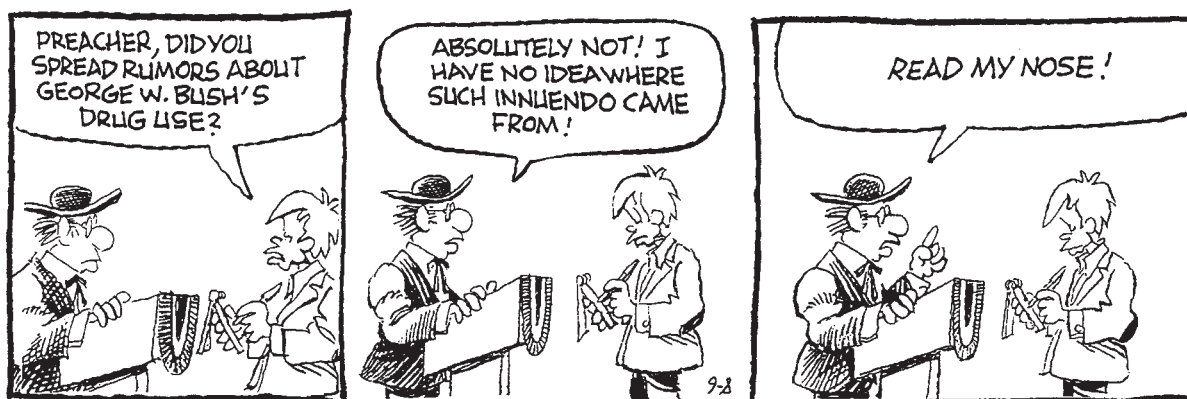
She had me do a will leaving her estate in trust for the benefit of the mentally ill, naming me as Trustee.

Linnie spent the last 2 years of her life in a nursing home in Kenedy. She died March 16, 1996, at the age of 90. I conducted the graveside service with 5 people in attendance.

I probated Linnie’s estate. There were stocks and bonds valued at \$75,000.00, savings of \$22,000.00, and her house, and 20 acres of land which sold for \$26,000.00.

Since she had no family, the entire estate went into the trust. Where did the money come from? I have no idea. She would not tell me.

The interest on her trust is used each year for the benefit of the mentally ill. One never knows what the result will be when we stop to help . . . “one of the least of these.” ■



Radical Soul Liberty: Our Fundamental Natural Right

By Charles Wellborn

[Dr. Charles Wellborn is Professor of Religion Emeritus, Florida State University and for 20 years was Dean of the Overseas Campus in London.]

(The following is a slightly expanded version of a statement made to the Conference on Religious Liberty convened in London, England in July, 1999. The conference was sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, and the Baptist Union of Great Britain).

The title of our session this afternoon is “Challenges to Mere Toleration.” The title is a pejorative one, chosen by someone with definite convictions about the meaning of religious liberty. The term “mere toleration” raises immediate questions about the adequacy of that concept.

Let me position myself. I am a practicing Christian and have been for more than half a century. My conversion to the Christian faith came when I was a World War 11 veteran, newly discharged from combat service, and my commitment to my faith is rooted in a deeply personal spiritual experience which I cannot with any integrity deny or compromise. Secondly, I am a Baptist Christian by tradition and conviction. A fundamental part of my Baptist stance is an adherence to the doctrines of the priesthood of the believer, the primacy of the authority of personal religious experience, the separation of church and state, and radical soul liberty. I identify with historical figures such as John Bunyan, Roger Williams, and John Leland, all of whom risked their lives in defense of religious freedom.

Against that background the concept of religious toleration satisfies neither my spiritual nor intellectual conscience. As a case in point, I use the British situation since we are meeting here in London. I am an expatriate American who has lived in Britain for more than twenty years, because of vocational commitments. I confess that never in that time have I experienced any practical limitation of my religious freedom, But I am a professional political ethicist and the theory of an established church with close links to the state disturbs me. I agree with the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich who this week in *The Times* wrote, “The church of God must be free ... The church must in conscience take responsibility for its own life, rather than having its constitution, faith, rules, and appointments in the grip of others.”

I would only add to the Bishop’s statement that not only his own church, the Church of England, much of which I admire and respect, but every other church, religious group, and, indeed, every single individual is entitled to that same freedom.

Toleration is an offensive word to me because it necessarily implies that one established group has the right and power to grant others the right to differ. If an authority has the right to grant toleration, it also has the power, at least in theory, to withdraw that toleration.

In actual practice, despite that underlying theory, British law often acts effectively to protect the religious rights of the individual. A recent minor incident vividly illustrates that point. A fundamentalist Christian preacher chose the front steps of an Anglican cathedral as his pulpit. There was no service being conducted in the church. The doors of the church were closed. The church authorities ordered him to leave. He refused. He was arrested for a breach of the peace. When he appeared before the local magistrate, he was immediately freed. The judge said in his statement, “Whatever an individual may say whether it is regarded by others as heretical, offensive, or even absurd, he/she has the right to say it, so long as he/she does not materially infringe upon the rights of others. To deny that right is to undermine seriously the whole concept of a democratic society.” To my mind that anonymous justice should be enshrined as a minor hero in the pantheon of religious liberty.

The concept of radical soul liberty, as I have chosen to call it, involves a drastically different approach from that of religious toleration. It holds to the conviction that every human being, as a creation of God, is of infinite value and therefore divinely imbued with the right-and the responsibility-to work out his or her own relationship with God in an individual and unfettered way. No earthly authority, whether governmental or ecclesiastical, can override that natural, inborn right. Indeed, any effort to impose by external means religious belief on individuals is doomed to failure. Conformity of behavior can be coerced, but the sanctuary of a person’s soul is invulnerable. Human beings will finally choose what they believe, regardless of the pressures brought to bear upon them.

The concept of radical soul liberty has complex dimensions, and I can only briefly summarize some of them here. To hold to the right of one’s own religious freedom is clearly to hold also to the equal right of every other person. Here the American Puritans failed to be consistent. Avidly jealous for their own freedom, they failed to extend that right to others, and at this point Roger Williams rightly departed from them, both theologically and geographically.

The problem of the Puritans was simple. They were irrevocably convinced that their interpretation of the Scriptures was absolutely correct, and they could brook no disagreement. Williams challenged them with a radically different interpreta-

tion, and they could not accept or tolerate it. Thus, religious freedom in New England was smothered under a majority religious imperialism, buttressed by legal and governmental authority.

No one has ever argued more persuasively for religious freedom than did the American Founding Father, James Madison, a primary moving force in the Bill of Rights. Setting himself against Patrick Henry's attempt to put in place a kind of religious establishment in Virginia, he contended that to violate the separation of church and state would infringe upon the natural liberties of citizens; unbalance the equality among them; make civil magistrates judges of religious truth, which they are not competent to judge; corrupt the churches themselves; and jeopardize the multiculturalism which is fundamental to the American Dream. Those somewhat bizarre individuals who seek to argue today that the authors of the American Constitution did not specifically intend to prescribe church-state separation need to reread their Madison—or indeed read it for the first time.

Radical soul liberty, however, requires more from the religious believer than a simple adherence to the concept of church-state separation. It demands a positive affirmation of the religious freedom of every individual; regardless of his or her beliefs—or non-beliefs. I am convinced that this affirmation carries with it the necessity—and this is a difficult area for many earnest Christians—to abandon the stance of religious imperialism: the unchallenged certainty that one is, religiously, totally and without any possibility of error in possession of truth.

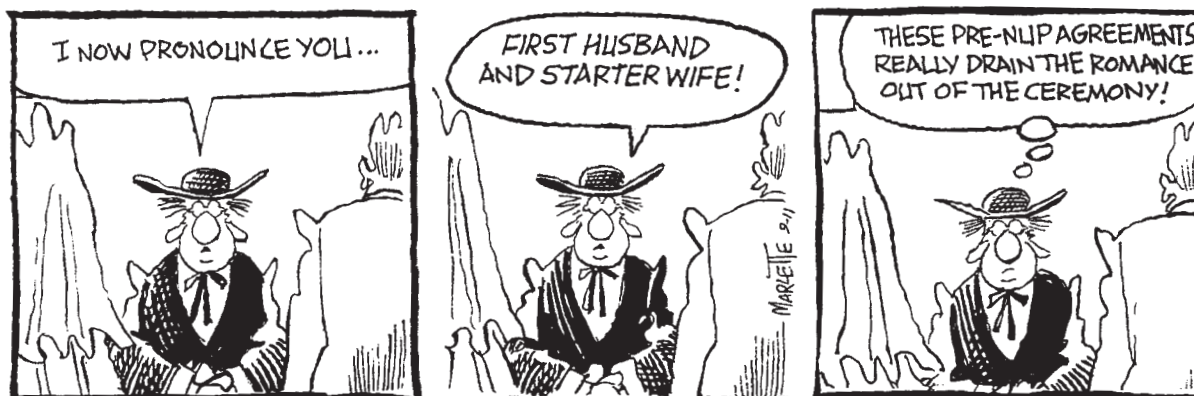
One of my spiritual heroes in the New Testament is the man who came to Jesus with the simple plea, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief." Every person's creed is a mixture of faith and doubt, certainty and uncertainty. One must live and act according to his certainties, but he must also live with his doubts. Our doubts remind us that, like the Apostle Paul, we see through a glass darkly. We must live by the truth that we believe we know, but a realistic awareness of our human situation—that we are limited in our space-time box and likewise limited by our own pervasive sinful natures—means that we cannot claim rightly total knowledge of ultimate truth. That

simply means that God, by definition, is bigger than any of us, and that we cannot confine Him in the narrow walls of our own confessions and catechisms. Radical soul liberty demands, therefore, the virtue of honest humility and a stance of openness to others who differ from us in spiritual understanding.

The abandonment of religious imperialism does not imply any form of wishy-washy religious compromise—a willingness to settle for the least common denominator in faith in order to achieve some sort of vaporous unity of all. That usually means a superficial mouthing of universal platitudes without substance. Every person is entitled to proclaim his faith, as he understands it, thereby submitting it to the reasoned and experiential response of others. And, equally, every individual is entitled to "convert," to use a Christian term; that is, to alter, even drastically, his religious convictions, if he or she so chooses. An American should not be foreordained, by culture and tradition, to be a Christian; neither should a Muslim or a Hindu, a Buddhist or a Jew, be so ordained. Radical soul liberty will settle for nothing less than free, informed, personal religious choice.

Radical soul liberty includes the right of every individual to witness freely to his or her faith. This is where, for Christians, the Great Commission is important. We are commanded to tell others, wherever they may be, that our personal encounter with the Christ has brought us forgiveness, justification, joy, and peace-salvation. Wherever and whenever another human being responds to our witness and experiences those same things, that is the fulfillment of our mission. But we also have the obligation to listen and to learn from others, even those who most violently disagree with us. A person's individual choice is made more meaningful and lasting the more he or she understands the differing approaches to spiritual truth.

It may be salutary at this point for Baptists to remember that some of our denominational ancestors believed so strongly in the importance of mature, meaningful religious decision that they practiced only "adult baptism." Modern Baptists have largely retreated from that position, but I venture to suggest that many thinking Baptists today are sometimes concerned about the loose application of the so-called "age of



accountability.” As for myself, I am willing to leave that decision to Christian pastors and congregations, but the principle remains intact.

The New Testament uses the Greek word “koinonia” to describe its fellowship of believers, living together in mutual respect and concern, bound by the underlying and supreme virtue of agapeic love—unselfish care for and concern for the other. “Koinonia” is a decisive term in the Christian community. Every person who has ever been a Christian pastor realizes that there is always a “church within the church—an inner group of those who have more fully understood and accepted the demands of their faith. The “koinonia” is always and everywhere the prime source of whatever spiritual power is generated by the Christian church.

I believe the meaning of “koinonia” can be expanded without diminishing its special significance for the Christian community. There is, I think, a kind of potential “koinonia” of God-fearing, God-loving, God-seeking people in the world. The basic needs of people transcend their differences. Their vocabularies are vastly different, and their struggle for spiritual understanding takes many forms, but the “void in their souls,” to use the words of St. Augustine, is identical. They want God and all which that implies. They seek Him. “Seeker,” incidentally, is a word which Roger Williams used to describe himself in his later days. Surely the loving God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ cares for all these human souls and reaches out toward them. I believe that, in their common humanity, God-lovers, God-fearers, and God-seekers have a possible ground on which to live together, love together, and learn together in the face of an increasingly secular world where all serious thought of God has been abandoned by many.

Writing in 1952 in *The Irony of American History*, Reinhold Niebuhr made the point that “the most effective force for community is religious humility. This includes the charitable realization that the vanities of the other group or person, from which we suffer, are not different in kind, though perhaps in degree, from similar vanities in our own life. It also includes a religious sense of the mystery and greatness of the other life, which we violate if we seek to comprehend it too simply from our standpoint.”

I venture to say that a recognition of this kind of “koinonia” could offer one of our best hopes in this tragically divided world. The challenge of secularism is rampant, and it offers no

*Every person's creed is
a mixture of faith
and doubt, certainty
and uncertainty. One
must live and act
according to his
certainties, but he
must also live with
his doubts.*

real solution to our problems—only more division, more hate, more violence. Unhappily it is clear that many American Christians have forgotten what “koinonia” means. I think particularly of the bitter conflict among Baptists over secondary doctrinal issues. Mutual respect and Christian love have too often been thrown overboard in a raw struggle for power. Emotive ethical issues such as abortion have generated more heat and hatred than love and reasonable discussion. Insult hostility, denigration, and violence are not the characteristics of a Christian community. The Body of Christ has been left beaten and bleeding.

Not just in America, but around the world, the situation is much the same. Northern Ireland is nominally a Christian community, but for many thousands of people in that unhappy province, any sense

of “koinonia” between Protestants and Catholics has disappeared. Too often, the religious zealots on both sides are those who carry the banners of conflict. Beyond the bounds of nominally Christian areas—places like Bosnia, Serbia, and the Near East—any sense of human kinship and a shared responsibility as children of God is clearly absent, even among those who claim in one way or another to be children of God.

I wish I knew some magic formula to institute a movement to revive and renew a sense of “koinonia,” first of all, among my fellow Christians, but also among that larger community who seek God and good in the world. Sadly, I do not. I am convinced that there cannot be that badly needed spiritual awakening in our society without it. I can hope, and I can pray. I know that sounds idealistic. To dream of a world in which God-lovers, God-fearers, and God-seekers live and love and learn together is Utopian, perhaps. But when in human history have we made any real progress without the persistent prodding of the idealists and the dreamers?

Let me close by emphasizing again my main points. Radical soul liberty is our basic human right. If we surrender that natural right, we will eventually lose all other freedoms. The American Declaration of Independence proclaims that every human being is entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Without radical soul liberty there can be no real life, no genuine liberty, no lasting happiness. But radical soul liberty is a universal right—one which cannot be sustained in our unhappy world without the development of a true sense of “koinonia.”

Religious freedom and “koinonia”—like love and marriage, horse and carriage-go together. ■

Three Poems by Kenneth Chafin

[Dr. Kenneth Chafin is alive and well having recently moved to Houston. Before retirement he had taught evangelism and preaching at Southwestern and then at Southern Baptist seminaries. He has been pastor of South Main Baptist Church in Houston and of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville.]

The Dragonfly

As she settles softly
on my knee
I feel chosen.

Most of her life,
like my own,
goes by unnoticed.

Hers, in creeks
and ponds—finding
food, shedding skins,
escaping predators.
Mine, the same,
just different arenas.

Her ancestors flew
millions of years
before birds dreamed
of wings or the gods
thought Orville or Wilbur.

Just look at her.
Three hundred sixty
degree vision, wings
operating independently,
technology the Pentagon
would shell out millions for.

I want her to fly away
and lay batches of eggs
before we drain the ponds or
pollute the streams with our progress.

Then, ages from now,
such an iridescent creature
may land on a child's
outstretched hand
and fill its heart
with wonder. ■

The Home Funeral

A single note signaled the beginning.
A mixed quartet sang softly, slowly.
*Tempted and tried we're oft made to wonder
Why it should be thus all the day long.*

A tiny hand-made casket rested
between kitchen chairs on the porch.
Fruit jars of flowers scented the air.
*While there are others living about us
never molested though in the wrong.*

The family sat behind the small casket,
others stood in the yard, ignoring the rain,
trying to make sense of a child slain by
a stray bullet while jumping rope in her yard.
*Farther along, we'll know all about it.
Farther along, we'll understand why.*

The preacher read a New Testament text
filled with comfort and the hope of heaven.
Then delivered an Old Testament message
in a holy whine, "This is God's good will."
*Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine
We'll understand it all by and by.*

The people shook their heads and
the mother sobbed softly at the thought
of leaving her child in the cold damp earth.
The father sat stone faced and hated God.
*Farther along, we'll know all about it,
Farther along, we'll understand why. ■*

Haying in North Austin County

The grasses in the meadow
were thigh-high—blue stem,
bermuda, and bahai.
Here and there black-eyed susans
tip-toed to see the sky.

The mowers came
when the dew was gone.
The hum of the blades
laid the grass down
like tired children
napping on the ground.

The noon day sun
sealed the sweet juices
for winter's chewing
The rake's fingers,
like the teeth of a comb, arranged the
grasses so the warm breezes
could finish the curing.

At last light, one surviving
black-eyed susan waved
in the evening breeze,
meadow larks gleaned,
random seeds, a lone hoot owl
watched for mice mending
their nests, and great round
bales of hay lay on the earth
like golden buffalo resting
from a long journey.

In the quiet of the night
as I pictured the nakedness
of the pasture, I could almost
hear the plants making plans
to send up green shoots
as a witness to new life.
I prayed for such hope. ■

Decalogue Desecration

By W.B. Tichenor

[W.B. (Bart) Tichenor is an attorney and ordained Baptist minister from Columbia, Missouri.]

The desecration did not occur in an act of anger. The act was not intended as a damning of the decalogue. It was not by the enemies and critics of the decalogue that the act was perpetrated. There was no hostility toward the decalogue on the part of those committing the sacrilege. Those who brought about this act would claim that they love and cherish the concepts contained in the Ten Commandments.

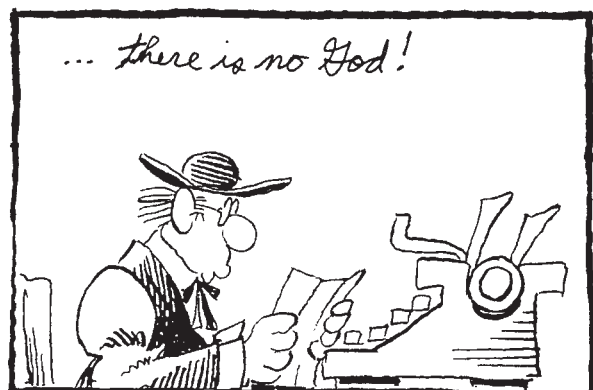
The taking away of the sacredness of the decalogue was accomplished in a simple act of adding an amendment to a piece of legislation in the House of Representatives. The profaning of God's Holy Word was performed with arguably good intentions by those who voted for the amendment. By this legislative act, states are to be permitted to post a copy of the decalogue in public buildings. The intent is to have a copy of the decalogue posted in every public school classroom in America. By this legislative act, the decalogue was relegated to the same position as the weekly bulletin and lunch menu of meat loaf and mashed potatoes in school class rooms. The decalogue can take its revered place on the wall of classrooms along with the "Just Say No To Drugs" posters and weekly announcements about the Senior Class play and the Junior-Senior dance.

How many of the members of the House of Representatives who voted in favor of this amendment are sufficiently conversant with the decalogue to be able to quote it from memory from either *Exodus 20:1-17* or *Deuteronomy 5:6-21*? I would guess that many, if not a majority, of these elected officials would have great difficulty in simply stating each of the commandments. Common sense and basic

integrity would seem to dictate that before a Congressman is going to act in such a trifling and trivial manner with verses of God's Holy Word they would want to be thoroughly versed in these verses. I have serious doubts as to how many of the supporters of this act of sacrilege are sufficiently conversant with the decalogue to lead a serious Bible study class on the subject.

The decalogue amendment was added to a piece of legislation supposedly to address the matter of school violence in our nation. Attempting to reduce crime, violence, and hatred are worthy goals, which would be endorsed by all people of faith. However, the implication appears to be that by posting the decalogue in school classrooms this will in some miraculous manner prevent or lessen the chances of other acts of violence in school. The decalogue is thereby transformed from a profound and righteous pronouncement of the Lord God who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, the house of bondage, into a simple talisman. Instead of being Holy Scripture, the decalogue takes on the trappings of an amulet, a mere charm, a neat rabbit's foot.

If there is any validity to the concept that attaching a copy of *Exodus 20:2-17* to classroom walls will prevent a person from taking a gun and killing fellow students and teachers, then many of the major problems of society must be subject to solution by use of this magic document. For example, there would no longer be any need for teachers to monitor students during tests to prevent cheating. If the decalogue on the wall is going to prevent violence, it would surely prevent cheating. No longer would there be any need to address matters of school children using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, because the decalogue on the wall would stop our children from corrupting their bodies. The problems of teen sex and abortions among young people would disappear, because the decalogue



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on the wall would cause all of our young people to be morally pure.

With such a powerful tool at our command, we would want to go beyond the school classroom to enjoy all the benefits and blessings that could be obtained by posting the decalogue. A copy of the decalogue could be displayed outside of banks, quick shops, liquor stores, and other businesses to insure that no robberies would occur. A posting of the decalogue along highways and streets with speed limit signs would eliminate accidents and road rage. A requirement that the decalogue be placed on all tobacco and alcohol products would eliminate the social and health problems related to the use and abuse of these substances. Placing the decalogue in each cell of every prison would magically rehabilitate criminals.

The only problem with this scenario is that it is not rational. It is obviously silly. It does not make any logical sense to conclude that posting of any document will make people act in a certain manner. If that were the case, there would be no need to have traffic police or highway patrolmen. The speed limit is posted. There is no question as to how fast one should go. However, millions of speeding tickets are issued throughout our nation year after year. Any thinking, reasonably intelligent person can conclude that posting of the decalogue in any public building will make no significant impact on human behavior. The only way in which such a posting could be effective would be if the decalogue were to be strictly enforced.

Such enforcement of the decalogue was commanded in Scripture. For example, the punishment for worshiping any god, other than the Lord God who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, was ordered to be death. The making of an engraved image was punishable by death. Bowing down to a statute was punishable by death. Violation of the Sabbath was punishable by death. Failing to honor one's father and mother was punishable by death. Murder was punishable by death. And adultery was punishable by death.

It is highly unlikely the same officials who voted to permit states to post the decalogue will now enact federal legislation which will require the death penalty for violation of the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Strict enforcement of the decalogue would require the wholesale slaughter of all non-Jews, non-Christians and non-Muslims. To keep the decalogue, would require that all persons who do not observe the Sabbath, as set forth in scripture, be put to

Government endorsement of the decalogue brings neither the decalogue, nor the government any honor.

Government endorsement does not elevate the decalogue; it only lessens its import.

death. Enforcement of the decalogue would mandate all Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox Christians, who bow down before statutes and icons, be killed. Every murderer, adulterer, and adulteress would die. Rational minds will quickly conclude that no such enforcement will ever take place in this nation. It never did in Israel, either. Therefore, the posting of the decalogue in public buildings and school classrooms becomes a meaningless, empty act of profanity.

Government endorsement of the decalogue brings neither the decalogue, nor the government any honor. Government endorsement does not elevate the decalogue; it only lessens its import. The decalogue has the stamp of approval of the Lord God who gave it. It scarcely needs the puny hand of government to tack it to a wall as some symbol of pretended piety. The decalogue has stood through the ages because of the power and spirit of God, not because of the authority of government.

The decalogue stands not because it was written upon government walls, but because it was written in the hearts and minds and lives of people of faith as they were freely led and directed by their God-given conscience to follow it, observe it, and obey it. To the extent that any politician or preacher, no matter how well meaning, supports and endorses the imprimatur of government, at whatever level, in the posting on government buildings of the decalogue, they have defiled and degraded the Ten Commandments.

From a Christian perspective, it is interesting and important to note that when Christ was asked by the lawyer which was the great commandment in the law, his response was not to quote the decalogue. The first and great commandment, He said is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind; and the second is like the first: it is to love our neighbor as ourself. On these two commandments, Christ proclaimed, hang all of the law and the prophets. *Matthew 22:35-40; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18.* More importantly, for the Christian believer, we live not under the decalogue. By personal repentance and personal faith we have a relationship with God our Savior based on grace. We are to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free. Accordingly, as a matter of conscience, as a matter of soul freedom, a Christian believer should not be entangled with the yoke of government-mandated bondage to the decalogue, but should oppose it because of our higher loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord. ■

Dangerous Waters of Justice and Righteousness

By Ruth Ann Foster

[Dr. Ruth Ann Foster is Assistant Professor of Christian Scriptures at Truett Seminary at Baylor University. She prepared this address for the 1999 annual conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission. It was subsequently printed in *Therefore* edited by Dr. Joe Haag. I am indebted both to him and to Dr. Foster for permission to share it here with readers of *Christian Ethics Today*.]

The classic Old Testament text quoted on the subject of justice is Amos 5:24:

But let justice roll down like waters
And righteousness like an ever flowing stream.
(NASB)

Spoken by the prophet to a people who perceived themselves as religious and godly, this call to overflowing justice reveals the lie of their existence. The people (then and now) who claim to be within a covenant relationship with God must respond to his requirement “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with ... God” (Micah 6:8; cf. James 1:27).

The only hope for the individual Christian, the church, and society lies in the overflowing “dangerous waters of justice and righteousness”¹ as Berquist calls them,—waters dangerous “for mind and spirit.”² For the mind the danger comes in our finitude, our inability to think beyond our general sphere of reference; for the spirit, the danger is in the temptation to build our own theoretical “Babel,”³ rationalizing a comfortable way to deal with the uncomfortable.

What is “Biblical Justice”?

Defining the term ‘justice’ in the Old Testament is difficult given its complexity and varied usage. In the legal codes the term describes “ordinances which regulate communal life (e.g., Ex. 21:1-23:10) and which prescribe restitution for injury done to person or property, as well as for cultic regulations.”⁴ Throughout the Old Testament justice is overwhelmingly related to the idea of relationship and the life of the community; thus, justice in biblical thought concerns “fidelity to the demands of relationship”⁵—to God and neighbor.

The Justice of God in the Old Testament

The nature and content of the justice of God informs the practice of Christian justice. The Hebrew terms *sedāqā* (righteousness) and *mišpat* (justice) are consistently tied together in

relationship to God’s role as judge; their meanings at times are practically synonymous. According to Abraham Heschel, “There are few thoughts as deeply ingrained in the mind of biblical man as the thought of God’s justice and righteousness. It is not an inference, but [is] self-evident; not an added attribute to His essence, . . . and identified with his ways.”⁶

To distinguish between the two terms, ‘justice’ usually relates to legal issues, while ‘righteousness’ denotes “conformity to a norm. Often the norm is the covenant.”⁷ Both terms as employed in the Old Testament are ultimately relational terms, interpreted in the light of the covenant’s purpose in maintaining relationship between God and the people and the people with their neighbors. Heschel understands righteousness to be what might almost be called “the underlying soul of justice.” Although justice involves legal issues, it does not compare to righteousness’s “burning compassion for the oppressed.”⁸ In reality, God’s justice cannot be separated from God’s love. While it is arguable that justice is central to the Old Testament,⁹ other intertwining concepts, such as God’s love, mercy, compassion, grace, and truth, must interpret the Old Testament view of justice.

Old Testament ideas of justice and righteousness include God’s wrath, judgment, and punishment (Isa. 10:18, 28:17-18). God’s punishment is just in that it provides salvation and restoration and “can overcome even the power of death.”¹⁰

God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the Exodus served as the foundation of Israel’s understanding of Yahweh’s concern and purpose to deliver the suffering. The Scriptures reveal God to be the champion of the outsider, the sojourner, the orphan and the widow. Defending the poor and the marginalized was the focus of Israel’s social justice (Jer. 22:15-16).

The Partiality of Biblical justice

Is God’s justice partial or impartial? The popular Western concept of impartial justice derives from the memorable statue of the blindfolded goddess of justice who reminds all that justice plays no favorites. Biblical justice alternatively is not impartial, since it consistently shows preference to the marginalized and oppressed. This partiality is grounded in the concept of covenant community, that finds persons to be part of one another as members of the community.¹¹

Western society’s view of justice, based on the assumption that “individuals naturally live in separation from one another,”¹² results in the need for a justice that protects people from harming each other. The biblical model conversely upholds the idea of mutual and active care for community members (and strangers) in a context in which social, family and

covenant relations are the focus of life — affirming justice as “that which is regarded as of basic importance in social relationships.”¹³

Who Deserves Justice?

The tendency to question whether or not someone “deserves” to receive justice or even mercy (an attitude pervading much of our modern life inside and outside of church) cannot be defended from Scripture. Jesus nor the disciples asked potential recipients of attention about their work history, their dependence on addictive substances, their mental state or any other discriminating type of question. Jesus simply felt compassion for people’s needs.

We on the other hand seem to forget that our blessings and salvation and wholeness are the result of God’s grace and not our inherent goodness. Therefore, we are able to justify the small line item for benevolences in our church budgets because “so many of *those* people” do not deserve any of our bounty. I heard a story a couple of years ago at *The Christianity Today* Institute on Global Consumerism and Stewardship about a situation in a town in Oklahoma during the depression. The city leadership passed a resolution requiring that restaurants should empty the left-overs (including those from used dinner plates) into gallon “slop” buckets to be given to the needy or rather, to the worthy needy. To prove their worthiness to receive these slops, the recipients were required to chop wood for a given period of time. We find this bizarre requirement disgusting, but often sneer at the homeless woman holding a sign offering to work for food.¹⁴ So then, what is the underlying motivation or purpose in showing justice? The idea of jubilean justice provides a clue.

Jubilean Justice

Jubilean justice, for example, as set forth in Deut. 15:1-11, purposed to maintain the distressed within the confines of community (cf. Lev. 25:35; Ps. 107:36). The jubilean code envisioned a radical change in social practice with the “scheduled cancellation of the debts of the poor.”¹⁵ In antiquity when the poor, as their only recourse, sold themselves into slavery, they became entangled in a trap from which there was no escape. The remission of debts provided by this legislation revealed the purpose of God as compassionate and just protector of the helpless.

Walter Brueggemann points out that the unusual inclusion of five absolute infinitives in the text highlights the “enormous intensity of Moses and the urgency Israel felt” about God’s jubilean command in Deuteronomy 15.¹⁶ He translates these verbs thusly:

if you really obey (“if only,” v. 5),
if you really open your hand (“rather open,” v. 8),
really lend (“willingly lend,” v. 9),
really give (“give liberally,” v. 10),
and really open your hand (“open,” v. 11).¹⁷

The urgency and intensity are “rooted in an exodus vision of social reality.”¹⁸

Enabling people to retain community participation is at the center of Old and New Testament justice; and, as Mott asserts,

[Participation] has multiple dimensions ... including physical life itself, political protection and decision making, social interchange and standing, economic production, education, culture, and religion. Community membership means the ability to share fully within one’s capacity and potential in each essential aspect of community.¹⁹

The Old Testament prophets drew attention to the concept of corporate sin and corporate responsibility. Isaiah declared that individuals are responsible for the sins of society, while Amos pointed out “the reality of corporate sin (abusive religious and political practices among the nations) ... [that] had created a state of hopelessness for the socially marginalized; . . .”²⁰ The unjust attitudes of Israel and Judah, according to Amos, emerged from a corrupt religious system, irreligious political system, and a prosperous aristocracy who had no concern for the outsiders.

The Prophetic Call to Justice

Amos preaching against the excesses of injustice to the foreign nations revealed God’s abhorrence of injustice and demanded an end to “disparaging socio-religio-political practices” that employed their power to oppress the helpless.²¹ Even more disgusting was the behavior of Israel and Judah whose very existence was founded on God’s justice shown to them and whose covenant with God precluded such reprehensible inhumanity. God had brought them out of bondage and made them a holy nation to witness to his mercy and righteousness. Their righteousness resulted from their status as God’s people rather than vice-versa. Over the centuries however they began “to exercise righteousness of their own in order to fulfill the covenant ... [straying from] the original goals set forth by God.”²²

Amos called the people to remember their identity, reminding them that God’s “demands extend to all areas of life, not just to religious activities.”²³ Isaiah and Amos exhorted the people of God to abandon their faulty perception of justice that had resulted in self-seeking security, blinding them to the injustice they perpetuated (Amos 2:6-7. 3:15-4:1; Isa. 1:10-17, 58:5-7). Jeremiah declared that the people “refuse to do justice” (Jer. 5:26-28). Avoiding God’s values and implementing their own incited God’s wrath and incurred judgment.

Amos argued that:

... evil perseveres as long as the poor are trampled upon (5:11); evil lingers as long as human justice conforms to the dictates of created interests (5:12);

evil dominates as long as dissidents are forced to silence and the powerless are denied due process (5:12). In summary, evil shall continue unabated among God's people as long as their established order continues its policies of exclusivism, harassment, intimidation, and violation of the rights of people.²⁴

God's righteousness pouring out from heaven brings salvation upon the earth and "provok[es] righteousness to spring up as [God's] creative act,"²⁵ giving birth to human justice. God's justice is the model for one's relationship to God²⁶ and to others, even to that of the entire created order.

The Just Individual

Psalms, Proverbs, and Job describe the just individual as one who preserves the wholeness of the community (Job 4:3-4) and who helps the weak, the orphan, the widow (Prov. 29:7; Job 31:16-19). This just one defends the helpless and exercises appropriate care over his land and employees (Job 31:13). The wisdom literature reveals that "justice is a harmony which comes from a right relationship to the covenant Lord and to the neighbor to whom a person is related by covenant bond."²⁷

Justice in Jesus' "Upside-Down Kingdom"

To ignore issues of justice and integrity exposes the church to accusations of aiding injustice. Genesis 2 clearly reveals that God created humankind to live together in community; being called the people of God requires even greater attention to injustice, especially that perpetuated by God's people. Modern American culture particularly is at odds with Christ's "upside-down" kingdom and often is outright anti-God in its enunciation of materialism, hierarchical structures, acceptance of violence, misuse of the environment, and blind disregard for those who do not possess the American dream.

Historically, when interpreting Jesus' teachings and work, Baptists have emphasized the spiritual over the social/physical needs of persons. The numbers of converts that we proudly proclaim (but cannot always locate) reveal a proclivity for addressing spiritual needs to the neglect of the social. Jesus' ministry focused on the spiritual needs of people, but, as a close inspection of the New Testament reveals, He also dealt clearly with the needs of the whole person.

Jesus' self-proclaimed mission in Luke 4:18-21, where he quotes Isa. 61:1, indicates attention to the whole person. Unfortunately, Protestants particularly have interpreted the passage as relating only to the spiritual. The jubilean nature of the Isaiah passage must have been recognized by Jesus as having to do with justice—in every realm of life.

Recalling the themes of Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55, Jesus revealed His upside-down kingdom as a radical reversal of normal human values. The focus then of His coming was on the poor, the enslaved, the blind, and the downtrodden, a focus that embodied God's nature as defender of the weak. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament teaching concerning justice for the

needy and helpless in his teaching (Luke 4:16ff) and in his attention to the physical as well as the spiritual needs of people.

If any doubt exists about how Jesus understood his mission, his reply to John the Baptist's poignant question from prison, "Are You the Coming One, or shall we look for someone else?", clarifies for us his thinking. Jesus sent John the answer that "the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:5).

The church then becomes the stage on which Jesus' radical way of living is acted out. Brueggemann argues that the church "as a wedge of newness, as a foretaste of what is coming, as home for the odd ones, is the work of God's originary mercy."²⁸ These peculiar people that Brueggemann calls "that odd community" are those who question what the content of "neighbor justice" is and who consistently seek to act out the answers.²⁹

The justice evidenced in the ministry of Jesus Christ exemplifies "a victory over evil powers.... It is manifest both in the historical lives of the people and as an object of their eschatological hope."³⁰ The attainment of perfect justice in the fully consummated messianic kingdom "does not free human beings from establishing justice now, to the extent possible."³¹ Indeed, the New Testament decisively teaches that Christians must establish justice in the present (1 John 3:17-18; James 2:14-17). The "waters of righteousness and justice"³² are dangerous, but "the church in its dangerous obedience [to Christ] is endlessly at risk. It is, however, not alone, not bereft, not abandoned."³³

The Church has been given the Scriptures and the empowering of Spirit who bestows gifts upon the Church "to renovate and restore us to the image of Christ so we will, through knowing him, become like Him in character and conduct (see Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10)."³⁴

"God has revealed His universal demand for righteousness [and justice and] did not give the Church an imbalanced and limited gospel, neither a Social Gospel nor a gospel solely interested in evangelism. God gave the Church a gospel that is to leaven every aspect of life—private and public, individual and community."³⁵ Therefore Christ's followers must vigorously pursue social justice as a universal due that transcends any partisan or self-serving agendas. Until the world knows we are willing "to have our own economic ox gored for the sake of justice, the world will continue to think ill of any pronouncements that seem to serve the status quo or personal interests."³⁶

Jesus: Model of Divine Justice

"Where God has shown himself generous to the point of the cross, man is called upon to imitate him and to adopt a new scale of values."³⁷ Jesus' example concerning justice must undergird our contemporary struggle with how to be a just people today. Surely, Old Testament texts such as jubilean/sabbath year passages and prophetic calls to justice, read in light of Jesus' mission as proclaimed in Luke 4 require reflection

... upon the exercise of social power and social lever-

age that makes some strong and some weak, some worthy and some undeserving. We do indeed hold each other in hock by money and influence, by attitude and action, by property and by speech.... We practice such destructive leverage between suburb and inner-city, between capital long held and labor so precarious, between developed economies and the Third World. The cycles of poverty, not only economic but also psychological, hold folk in thrall and generate massive despair. The despair lasts until the vicious cycles are broken. Moses [and Amos and Isaiah and Jesus] propose that the breaking can happen by generous, intentional acts that forgo advantage for the sake of communal equity.... This is the [odd] community that, before the hour of worship is out, will pray for forgiveness, 'as we forgive our debtors'.³⁸

In both testaments, being in relationship with God means taking up the cause of the lowly and poor. With Jesus as our example we cannot separate faith from doing justice. "Justice is concrete. It combines non-exploitation of the poor and taking their cause. The doing of justice is not the application of religious faith, but its substance: without it God remains unknown."³⁹

Biblical Perspectives on Justice: A Summary

Biblical justice can be characterized as being:

1. based on the theology of God's justice
2. related to relational, covenant community issues
3. partial to the marginalized and lowly
4. based on Old Testament covenant responsibilities
5. based on Jesus' proclamation and mission in the New Testament, which is worked out in the ethical teachings of Acts and the Epistles
6. based on Jesus' "upside-down kingdom" values
7. drawn from biblical teachings rather than based on perceived cultural needs or natural law/philosophy
8. never self-serving, condescending, patronizing, or manipulative

9. most concerned with the value of persons and their place in the community
10. an aspect of humankind's role as stewards of God's creation
11. a safeguard against the danger of reducing the Bible to a "manual of personal piety."⁴⁰
12. the heart of true religion, found in active attention to the poor, the oppressed, the widow and orphan, the helpless, the weak, the outsider, the marginalized of society.

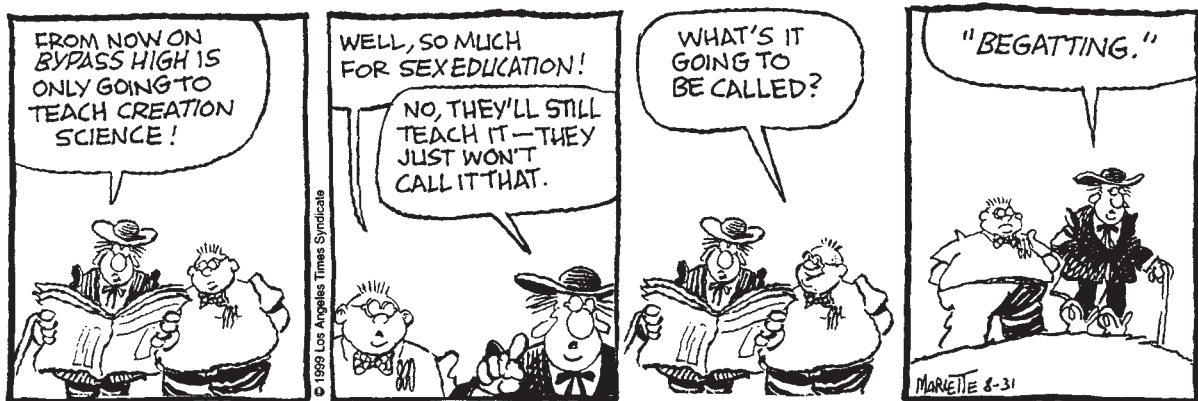
Conclusion/Challenge

Although most Christians acknowledge the New Testament to be their authority for faith and practice, a great diversity exists in the understanding of Christians about how the New Testament should inform ethics and morality. "Most Christians, in fact, come up short at the very beginning of their attempt to think and act 'Christianly' in areas of social morality, unable to decide how the New Testament should guide them in doing so. And being thwarted here, they become catatonic ethically."⁴¹

We as Southern Baptists have tended to focus on loving people -through evangelism almost to the exclusion of justice issues (except on a institutional level), assuming the convention level to be sufficient. [On the convention level we have given attention to social issues, which is good; although that attention needs broadening.] However, we as individuals and as local churches have often ignored the "shadow people"⁴² outside our walls. They are the people we see right through, the ones whom we discount as unworthy of our focus. We pass them throughout our busy days—noticing only a blurry shadow in our peripheral vision—not worthy of a concerned glance let alone an inspection. If however we are to embody Christ's actions and teachings as they reveal God to the world, then we must be more holistic in our approach to persons.

The waters of justice and righteousness are dangerous to those of us who have promised to follow Christ and to live in covenant with His people. God's justice is dangerous because:

- to ignore it reveals we are not truly his;
- to misunderstand it can lead to depersonalizing and compartmentalizing those made in God's image;



- to rationalize away its demands hardens our hearts to God;
- to seek to live out the demands of God's justice is risky and goes against the grain of normal behavior and cultural norms;
- to pray for God's justice calls us into involvement with those who need justice.

Are we courageous disciples? Are we brave enough to be God's light and justice to those in the shadows? If we are to know God fully through his Son Jesus Christ, we must live justly. If the world is to know Jesus Christ through us, we must risk entering into the dangerous waters of God's justice and righteousness. ■

Endnotes

¹Jon L. Berquist, "Dangerous Waters of Justice and Righteousness: Amos 5:18-27," in Biblical Theology Bulletin 23:54.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 55.

⁴John R. Donahue, "Biblical Perspectives on justice," in The Faith that Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change ed. John C. Haughey (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 68.

⁵Ibid., 69.

⁶Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 199-200.

⁷Ralph L. Smith, Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 218.

⁸Heschel, 201.

⁹Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 1:370.

¹⁰Donahue, 72.

¹¹Stephen Charles Mott, "The Partiality of Biblical Justice," in Transformation 10 (Jan.-April 1993): 23.

¹²Ibid., 25.

¹³Ibid., 23.

¹⁴Caring for the homeless and helpless is a complex issue in itself. Christians are torn between compassion and fear of being duped, as well as the appropriate concern about the potential damaging use of one's monetary gift used to feed an addiction. On the other hand, many comfortable people believe those who are "down-and-out" have reaped

their just rewards. We must always ask ourselves: "Is it ever as simple as that?" Jesus dealt with people as persons, not as categories. Can we do less?

¹⁵Walter Brueggemann, Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 76.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 77.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Mott, "The Partiality of Biblical justice, 25.

²⁰Donoso S. Escobar, "Social justice in the Book of Amos," in Review and Expositor 92 (1995): 169.

²¹Ibid., 170.

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²³James D. Nogalski, "A Teaching Outline for Amos," in Review and Expositor 92 (1995): 148.

²⁴Escobar, 172.

²⁵Ibid., 171.

²⁶Ralph Smith, 218.

²⁷Donahue, 71.

²⁸Brueggemann, 36.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Donahue, 73.

³¹Gennadios Limouris, "Peace and justice: Eternal Struggles for Life Today," in Asia Journal of Theology 5 (April 1991): 81.

³²Berquist

³³Brueggemann, 53.

³⁴Richard C. Chewning, ed., Biblical Principles and Public Policy: The Practice (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Navpress, 1991), 7.

³⁵Ibid., 29.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷J. L. Houlden, Ethics and the New Testament (New York: Oxford Press, 1977), 18.

³⁸Brueggemann, 78.

³⁹Donahue, 76.

⁴⁰Ibid., 69-70.

⁴¹Richard N. Longenecker, "New Testament Social Ethics for Today," in Understanding Paul's Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches edited by Brian S. Rosner (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 337.

⁴²This term comes from a chapel sermon at Truett Seminary preached by Karen Gilbert, Minister of Missions at Wilshire Church in Dallas.

Tamar and Her Modern Sisters

By Robert Prince

[Dr. Robert Prince is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Vernon, Texas where he recently preached this sermon.]

We don't want to talk about it, especially in church. Yet it happens every day. It has left millions of girls and women with deep emotional and spiritual scars.

Good statistics on this subject are hard to find, but various studies indicate that around 16% of all women report that a relative sexually abused them before their sixteenth birthday. About 34% of all women report that when they were children an adult sexually abused them. Furthermore, one in six women reports being raped at some point in their lives.

Though we shrink from considering the horror of sexual abuse, the Bible does not. In 2 Samuel 13:1-22 we find a graphic account of an incestuous rape and its terrible aftermath.

I. The Sorrow of Tamar and Her Modern Sisters

A sad drama unfolds in 2 Samuel 13. Its characters are David, king of Israel; Amnon, King David's son through his wife Ahinoam; Absalom, David's son through his wife Maacah; Tamar, David's daughter through his wife Maacah; and Jonadab, Amnon's friend.

The narrative says that Amnon fell in love with Tamar, his beautiful half-sister. Amnon was a young man, probably in his twenties, while Tamar was a very young woman, perhaps only in her early teens.

The biblical account seems to use the word "love" loosely. Amnon's feelings for Tamar weren't healthy or normal. They were a sick lust. Because he couldn't have her, he became frustrated to the point of illness. She was beyond his reach because she was an unmarried virgin, and his half-sister. The account suggests that marriage may have been a possibility for them, though the law prohibited such unions. But marriage wasn't on his mind.

Amnon's friends began to notice his pale, disheveled look. One of them, named Jonadab, asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?" Amnon answered by proclaiming his lustful feelings for Tamar. Jonadab was sympathetic to his friend, and together they hatched a plan to get Tamar into Amnon's bedroom.

Amnon went to bed and pretended to be gravely ill. King David became worried about him, and went to check on his condition. When the king arrived, Amnon spoke in the weakest and most pathetic voice he could muster. He said that it

would make him feel better if his sister Tamar would come, bake some of his favorite bread in his sight, and feed it to him.

David had no reason to be suspicious of this request. So he told Tamar to go to her brother and do as he asked.

Tamar arrived in Amnon's quarters dressed in a beautiful, richly ornamented robe. It was the customary clothing of the king's virgin daughters. Amnon played his part well, as he reclined in his bedroom, and watched Tamar through the door as she went to work. He saw her carefully knead dough, make bread, and bake it. All the while, he longed for her innocent beauty.

When the bread was done, Tamar took the pan of bread to Amnon and tried to serve him. But he refused to eat.

Amnon then said, "Send everyone out of here." Everyone left except Tamar. After that, Amnon called to her, saying, "Bring the food in here to my bedroom, so that I may eat it from your hand."

Trusting her brother, and suspecting nothing, Tamar did as he requested. When she approached him with the bread, he abruptly grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister!" Horrified, Tamar cried:

Don't, my brother! Don't force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you!

But Amnon let his lust overwhelm him. He refused to listen to Tamar's cries, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.

What happened next confirmed Amnon's sickness and evil. It's written that after raping her, he hated her more than he had loved her. The object of his lust became the object of his loathing.

This change may be hard for some of us to comprehend. But if you've encountered this sickness of the human soul, you know Amnon's feelings were consistent with his sexual problems. With cruel coldness he said to Tamar, "Get up and get out!"

Totally humiliated, Tamar pled with him, saying, "No! Sending me away would be a greater wrong than you have already done to me." He had already done a terrible thing, but if he sent her away, she would be condemned to live the rest of her life as a soiled and devastated woman. No one would ever want to marry her.

Tamar also had the law on her side. Deut. 22:28-29 said

that if a man raped a virgin, he had to marry her and pay her father damages. Furthermore, he could never divorce her.

Amnon was deaf to her cries. He called to his personal servant, saying, "Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her!" The servant dragged Tamar out of Amnon's house and bolted the door.

In her grief, Tamar tore her beautiful, richly ornamented robe, the very image of her happiness and innocence. She put ashes on her head, and went away from Amnon's house, weeping loudly.

Tamar's full brother Absalom heard what had happened and went to her. He tried to comfort her by saying:

Has that Amnon, your brother been with you? Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart.

On the surface, it seemed that Absalom was trying to play down the seriousness of the rape. Yet Absalom was a shrewd man, and was already plotting his vengeance. He took his sister into his house, and she lived there, a desolate woman.

When King David heard about all this, he was furious, but apparently he did nothing about it.

The story ends by saying that Absalom said nothing to Amnon about all this, either good or bad. Nonetheless, he quietly seethed at Amnon in his heart. Two years later, he would lure Amnon in a trap and violently kill him for his sin. The sword would afflict David's house for the rest of his life.

Tamar's sorrow has echoed throughout the centuries among women and girls who have had similar experiences. For many of them it's a secret shame, something too humiliating and embarrassing to share with others. Many of them think that they are the only ones who have experienced such things, but they are not alone.

As we consider Tamar's story, we find in it elements that are often present in cases of incest. First, there's a perpetrator. Here it was Amnon. The perpetrator may be a father, a stepfather, a brother, a stepbrother, a half brother, an uncle, or another person who has a perverted sexual desire for a young female.

Second, there's a victim. In this story, it was Tamar. The victim is a young innocent girl or woman, lured into sexual abuse.

Third, there are co-conspirators. In this story they were Jonadab, David, and others. These are people who aid the perpetrator either by actively helping him commit his crime, or by ignoring what he's done.

Though such problems are as old as humanity itself, those who study such things say that incest and other forms of sexual abuse are increasing in modern society. Why is that so? In their book *Christianity and Incest*, Imbens and Jonker suggest several reasons. First, they point to rapidly-changing standards of sexual morality. They write:

Sex used to be taboo. Now, everyone is more or less expected to like sex, regardless of with whom, when, or how. The person with the most power resources is in control.

Second, they speak of the myth of the pedophile. Some people operate from the illusion that sexual abusers actually love their victims.

Third, is the prevalence of divorce. In many cases of incest, the perpetrator is a stepfather.

So Tamar has a growing number of modern sisters who are either being abused now, or living with the pain of past abuse.

II. Hope for Tamar and Her Modern Sisters

Is there hope for such girls and women? What can we do to help those among us who carry such pain?

There is hope, and to offer it, we need to address three groups: Perpetrators and coconspirators; those who have experienced incest and/or rape; and those who want to help.

First, if you're a perpetrator, you need to see the seriousness of your sins and crimes, and you need to stop committing them. They are destroying you and the ones you are abusing. If you are a perpetrator, stop what you're doing and get help. There are child-abuse hotlines you can call, and places you can turn for help.

If you're a co-conspirator, you need to know that you aren't helping perpetrators or their victims by your silence. It's a horrible, sickening, and terrible thing to stand and name an abuser. Nevertheless, you are morally and legally obligated to do so. You can report the abuser to the authorities, and you



can get help to deal with your own pain.

Second, if you are experiencing or have experienced sexual abuse and/or rape, you need to get help. The abuser's power can seem absolute, and it can seem that no one will believe you, but you must change your situation. You haven't caused the abuse, though your abuser says otherwise.

God doesn't want you to stay in that kind of situation. Please contact the authorities if the abuse is taking place now, or seek counseling if it occurred long ago.

Third, if you want to help, you need to know that as many as one in three girls experience some kind of sexual abuse. When someone shares with you her experience of abuse, be open to hearing her questions and expressions of pain.

Such revelations can be shocking and disgusting. The person she identifies as an abuser may be someone respected in your family, or in the community, or even in the church. You can be tempted to say, "Stop saying things like this, and stop spreading lies about a great person." To be sure, sometimes people falsely accuse others of abuse. But if someone tells you a personal story of abuse, give her the benefit of a doubt and hear what she has to say. Help her find the help she needs, and don't condemn her for her revelation.

You can help her know that she's not to blame for what happened. Often, abusers will make their victims feel that they, the victims, are responsible for the abuse. Help them to see that the abuser is the person in power, not the weaker party.

Again, remember that if you know of sexual abuse of a child that's going on right now, you are morally and legally obligated to report it.

There are Tamars in our churches even today. There are also many Tamars in our work places and in our schools and in our extended families.

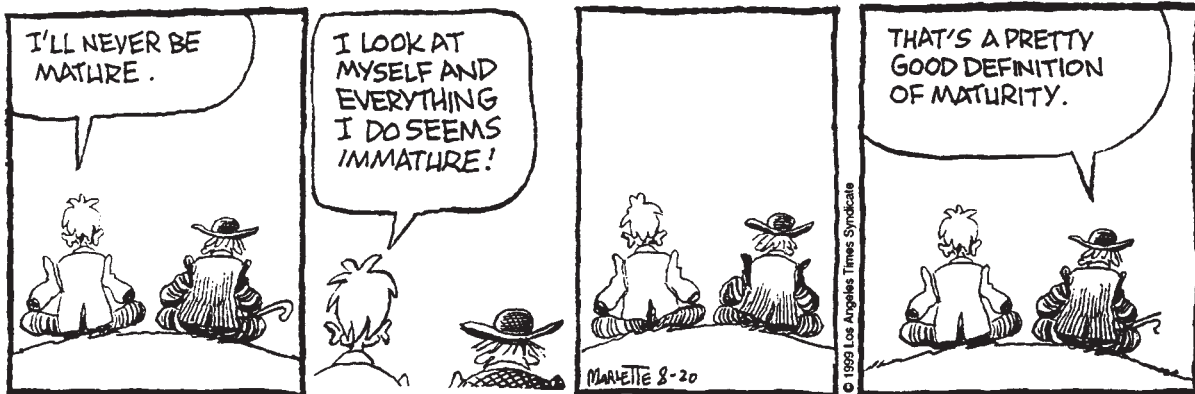
Please, please don't just look the other way and ignore their problems. Instead show God's compassion for them by attitudes and actions. And let us pray that God will help and heal them. ■

Don Quixote

(continued from page 2)

He has a passionate desire to do ethics.
He dreams the impossible dream.
He does not count the cost in pursuing justice.
He wears his authentic humanity honestly.
He relates to Sancho decently and fairly.
He has courage, even to tilt at windmills.
He knows the Bible and often quotes it.
He can laugh at himself.
He is tireless in his pursuit of the good.
He loves words and is unfailingly loquacious.
He employs a vocabulary that would fell a water buffalo at 100 yards.
He is often funny enough to make a dog laugh.
He is gloriously literate.
He is the kind of chap who would seem to like his chili hot, his heroes human, and the truth with the bark on it.

Besides all this, to tell the truth, the old codger just seems to me to be quite a lot like my kind of folks.
Let's hear it for Don Quixote. ■



Public School Values

By Frosty Troy

[Frosty Troy is Editor of *The Oklahoma Observer*. He is a highly decorated journalist, a nationally sought-after speaker, a tireless champion of public education, and a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*. This article on “Public School Values” and the two following brief pieces on “Charter Blues” and “It’s Money” are his lead articles in the August 25 issue of his award-winning “Independent Journal of Commentary” available for \$25 per year at 500 N.E. 39 Terrace, P.O. Box 53371, Oklahoma City, OK 73152-3371.]

“Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.”

Philosopher Blaise Pascal

Of all the groundless, hurtful attacks on public educators, none is more painful than the charge that public schools are “godless” institutions of secular humanism.

From Phyllis Schlafly and William Bennett to Pat Robertson, D. James Kennedy, James Dobson and Pat McGuigan, the staccato drumbeat against public education includes religious defamation.

The Constitution requires that public education be neutral in the arena of sectarian religion, but that’s a far cry from the debasement heaped upon public educators.

A torrent of abuse has flooded the airwaves since the shootings in Littleton—if only the Ten Commandments had been posted. If only prayer had been permitted. If only school teachers were not void of values.

It is ironic that the religious and political critics bring no facts to the table. Columbine High School was rife with religion—the kind permitted under the Constitution. There were Bible clubs, a religious organization for athletes, prayer at the Pole, and a largely Christian faculty.

The crescendo of calumny heaped on public education by the likes of Pat Buchanan, Rush Limbaugh, Newt Gingrich, Dan Quayle and other rightwing politicians is a partisan attack—they promote vouchers and charter schools so children cannot only be educated but indoctrinated.

Who is for spiritual values for kids and who is just kidding? Can you name one other institution in America that comes nearest biblical injunctions?

Feeding the hungry? Last year for nearly 30% of public school children, it was the only hot meal they got.

Clothing the naked? There’s hardly an elementary school in a poor neighborhood in America that does not have a clothing closet stuffed with underwear, socks and other necessities for have-not children.

The widow’s mite? The average teacher spent more than \$400 of personal funds for such things as workbooks and pencils for poor children.

Visiting the prisoners? Those are public educators manning the vo-Tech, literacy and skill centers behind the walls—redeeming tens of thousands of otherwise lost lives. Those are public educators teaching in alternative schools—rescuing troubled youth being given a second chance.

No greater love? The Littleton teacher who herded children into a room for safety, then shielded them with his own body, lay shot and dying in front of the praying students he had saved.

Role models? No other profession provides a higher percentage of Sunday school teachers.

Suffer the little ones? Who takes the little ones who are retarded, developmentally disabled or mentally handicapped? Who redeems the dispossessed and the delinquent in alternative education programs?

If you’re looking for values, consider the majority of teachers who spend their own time and money mentoring students, sponsoring non-academic class activities, all the while attempting to deal with the most undisciplined generation ever to enter public education.

Because teachers can’t pin on a church label and baptize the students doesn’t make public education any less spiritual. It isn’t the babbling critics who wrap themselves in religious intolerance who are making a difference for all of God’s children. They preach to the saved in the rear echelon while public school teachers staff the front line.

Public educators don’t have the time or the inclination to bash Christian, parochial or private schools, or the home schoolers who so bitterly denounce public education.

Look who comes to public school among the 46.5 million enrolled this year, then consider who truly does God’s work:

- Six million for whom English is a second language.
- Six million special education children.
- More than two million abused children.
- Nearly 500,000 from no permanent address—the homeless ones.
- One out of four comes from extreme poverty, are often born out of wedlock and many are abused, neglected, unwashed, unwanted and unloved.

You won’t find these kids on the 700 Club or at D. James Kennedy’s Florida church or playing in the backyards of William Bennett or Lamar Alexander. They won’t profit from \$114 million that poured in Focus on the Family last year, and

they won't be adopted by the childless Pat Buchanans.

The teachers who minister to them are scorned on editorial pages and maligned from ignorant pulpits, but they keep on keeping on—and only God knows why.

They earn the poorest salaries among all industrial nations, yet a new study shows they are among the brightest college students and nearly half hold master's degrees. More than 61% call themselves "conservative", and they are church-related in excess of the national population.

With all its warts, public education produces more math and science brains than all of private education combined. From astronauts to Pulitzer prize winners, from Nobel laureates to the clergy, they are in the front rank.

America has the highest percentage of church-goers in the western world—the overwhelming majority from public schools.

The public school day may not start with a Hail Mary or an Our Father, a mantra or a blood sacrifice, but public education does more of God's work every day than any other institution in America—and that includes the churches.

Charter Blues

While right wingers continue to push for charter school legislation across America, report after report highlights problems in states that were among the first to authorize charter schools.

The first charter state, Minnesota, which approved charter school legislation in 1991, is taking a long, hard look at its charter schools following a stinging report by the Minnesota Office of Education Accountability (OEA).

A multi-year study conducted by OEA reveals that many charter schools in Minnesota are plagued with "low achievement scores, low attendance rates...and low graduation rates."

Serious problems plague California charter schools:

- Only 40% of charter school students met the state's graduation requirements for math, compared with 71% statewide.
- Only 43% of charter school students met state achievement goals, compared to 68% statewide.
- Attendance rate in charter schools is 79%, compared with 92% in traditional public schools.
- The charter high school dropout rate is 36%, compared with 11% statewide.

The Minnesota study comes on the heels of three other reports that cast doubts on charter schools:

- A study conducted by researchers at the University of California at public-funded quasi-private schools found that charter schools were selecting students they want and rejecting those they don't.
- A Boston College study found that charter schools in Massachusetts operated by-for-profit companies have

engaged in a pattern of disregard and often blatant hostility toward students with disabilities. Researchers suspect it's because special education students tend to lower cumulative test score averages. (These companies need high test scores to market their services.)

- A report prepared for the state Board of Education in North Carolina notes that half of the 235 teachers employed by charter schools in that state are not certified to teach.
- Michigan public school students out-scored charter school students in statewide exams last spring, leading to a reevaluation of the movement there.

This list could go on, but you catch the drift. America is being sold a bill of goods about using public school money for charters and vouchers. And the only people suffering the consequences are the kids.

It's Money

Bewildered educators are puzzled by the power grab of so many businesses for a piece of the education pie via privatization. That's because they haven't done their homework.

The sharpies have their eyes on public schools for reasons unrelated to helping kids learn. They're following the money.

- "Education is a \$600 billion market, and at 8.6% of U.S. GDP, ranks second only to health care in terms of national expenditures."
- The K-12 market is a \$318 billion market, or 48% of total education expenditures. It is projected to grow 38%, to \$440 billion, by 2007.
- Higher Education is a \$200 billion market, projected to grow to \$267 billion by 2008. Record numbers of high school graduates and college enrollments are expected to fuel this strong growth.
- Corporate Education and Training is a booming \$60.7 billion market, driven by firms seeking lower costs, higher productivity, and more skilled employees.
- Education stocks have performed extremely well in the last two years. The combined index of education companies has returned a compound annual growth rate of 20.6% since October 1996.

One of those investment forums published this item to lure investors: "As growth in the education industry continues to spiral, investors are beginning to take notice of what used to be an industry dominated by public and private not-for-profit service and product providers." The name: "Evaluating the K-12 Market: Capitalizing on Dissatisfaction with the Public System."

Wall Street badmouths public education in order to cannibalize it for the greater glory of the profit motive. Some of their investments—from Baltimore to Cleveland—have been educational disasters, but they still got their money. ■

Religious Freedom Award Response

By James M. Dunn

[The remarks carried here were made on September 2, 1999 by Dr. James Dunn in New York City in response to the Associated Baptist Press' presentation to him of the Religious Freedom Award. Broadcast journalist Bill Moyers presented the award which honors individuals who have championed the principle of religious liberty. For 18 years Dunn headed the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. Upon his retirement on September 1 he began his service as visiting professor of Christianity and public policy at Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C.]

If when the books are closed, the final thirty is written, and we know how it all came out; if when we see, no longer through a dark glass, that some good has been done; if some evils have been averted and some harm avoided, it will be perfectly clear that many people have been a part of the process.

Converging circumstances counted for a lot of what's taken place.

At a farewell party for Congressman Richard Bolling of Missouri in the early Reagan years I was whining. Fred Wertheimer of *Common Cause* said, "Dunn, stop complaining; our sad plight just means that we've never been more needed." I described the debaptistification of the Southern Baptist Convention to Martin Marty and he responded, "James, just remember you don't know enough to be totally pessimistic." Maybe not. It is clear that I have had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time.

Time for the Baptist word came due and it was simply my job to say it... and to say it when not many others were. (I must admit here, however, that most fearless friends who were trying to get out the same sort of message didn't have a Stan Hastey, Larry Chesser, Pam Parry, or Kenny Byrd not only to turn it into news but to egg me on, say "sic 'em" to this watchdog.) Many of you in this room gutsily got out the word. That's the journalist's job.

Then, I had the incomparable blessing of having spent two years learning everything I could about Joseph Martin Dawson; did my doctoral dissertation on him in 1966, thanks to Jimmy Allen who shoved me into doing it.

I had drunk deep at the Dawson well 14 years before anyone even mentioned my coming to the BJCPA. Dawson had been its first executive, 1946-1953. So for the first year or two in his chair, I just did what he did and said what he had said. It got me in trouble.

So when y'all say nice things and awards and unearned doctorates come my way, it seems to me as if you are giving

me credit for choosing my grandfather well or picking my predecessor wisely.

But we do have some stewardship of all experience. We always need to ask, as Jeanette Holt does, "Now, what can we learn from this?" Not as some fatalist with Calvinistic certainty that God, the "heavenly computer," mixes, matches and merges our lives like little puzzle pieces to be put in their proper places, but by looking back so that we see some other things more clearly.

They did try to do us in.

At one point the fundamentalists who set out to destroy the mission and message of the Baptist Joint Committee demanded a list of all the periodicals subscribed to by the BJC. They asked for 3 years of all correspondence to or from the Committee. (Fat chance!) Paige Patterson, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told the *Houston Post* (June 12, 1982) when asked about me, "...There will be something done to silence him." The outrages continue: boycott Disney, target Jews, keep women submissive, beat up on gays.

One concludes, then, that to be a whistle blower on anti-baptists trying to pass for the real thing is not for the faint-hearted; no room for a fence-straddling, word-mincing, soft-spoken, pseudo-Baptist.

Stubbornness may be the most needed "gift of the Spirit." Those scriptural gifts of the Spirit are mediated to us by mere mortals. Indulge me as I catalog a few of those human shapers of this stubborn so-and-so.

Through Mother and my milkman Daddy, God sent leanness. They helped this depression baby put material matters in perspective. Mother, whom I never heard curse or say a dirty word, taught my sister and me that "shooey," (her word) happens. I was scrawny, sickly, but a tough little kid, the last one chosen to play on every team, the first one beat up by the bully of the month. I got even tougher in Ernest Parker Junior High, wonderfully 70% Mexican. To prevent certain indignities in 9th grade P.E. classes, I bought protection from Frank Escalante and Steve Coronado by doing their algebra for them. Those other "machos" had better not mess with me, and they didn't.

Years later, Phil Strickland and I worked that demonstration plot for original sin, that laboratory for total depravity, known as the Texas legislature. So I was for twelve years politically immersed in Austin working with and on people like John B. Connally and Rep. Bill Heatly, the Duke of Paducah, whose head was memorialized in the State House of Representatives as the "state rock."

Then, Foy Valentine and Jimmy Allen, great coaches,

helped me see that perception is everything in politics and political effectiveness depends upon what they (the politicians) think you can deliver, but that you shouldn't lie. You don't speak *for* Baptists. You only speak *to* Baptists. When Richard Land says, "speaking for 16 million Southern Baptists" or "most Baptists believe," as he does, he misrepresents reality.

Let's face it. All of us added together who share a passion for soul freedom make up a tiny minority even among Baptists. Our kind always has been outnumbered, likely always will be. The only authority we have is the authority of veracity. We count on truth telling and what rings true in fellow believers' innards.

That leads me to theology and the idea so passionately shared with me by Stewart Newman and Bill Estep. This Baptist belief in religious liberty is not just "doctrine," or the First Amendment, or a political elective. It is, rather, *the* Baptist basic: soul freedom.

Each individual comes immediately to God. All vital religion is voluntary. Even God Almighty will not trample an individual's freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God.

I've come, under their tutelage and that of Dawson and Maston, to believe that there is no such thing as "required religion" (except, of course, in some college), no such thing as "forced fellowship" or "coerced community." All those phrases are oxymorons, and folks who think they can force, coerce, or require them are ordinary morons.

Then T.B. Maston, my major professor, an H. Richard Niebuhr Ph.D., nudged a lot of us into the real world. He taught us that "there is nothing inherently evil about compromise unless we lose sight of the ideal," that we live with creative tension, that "the Bible is a divine-human book."

Then, there is this 8th century prophet, Bill Moyers, born out of due season. Bill, without any doubt and as a matter of fact attested to by all sorts of authorities, is the prophetic voice of the last quarter of the 20th century. So when Bill, my friend, indicates that he thinks the stuff I'm doing is OK, that gives me more than a smattering of confidence.

Finally, Marilyn, as uninhibited as her father, well almost.... She is "no respecter of persons" in the best biblical sense.

....there is no such thing as "required religion" (except, of course, in some college), no such thing as "forced fellowship" or "coerced community." All those phrases are oxymorons....

I'm really not trying to avoid responsibility for my doings in the 19 years at the BJC but to say again when the books are closed that *if* we've done any good, you and those I've mentioned deserve the credit and the blame. We're in it together and we still face serious challenges.

There are Democrats, even Vice President Gore, who according to what I fervently hope was one sadly misguided foray in Georgia, would trade off the separation of church and state for a mess of Senator Ashcroft's "charitable choice" potage. To funnel tax dollars directly into "faith-based" programs effectively neuters their first name: "Faith."

Republicans have made their first priority the passage of education vouchers, massively misled by the one church that owns 90 percent of the parochial schools. Few friends of vouchers will say the Roman Catholic Church desperate to save its schools has partnered with fundamentalist

Christians seeking public money for their segregation academies: a marriage made in hell.

I was saddened by all the carrying on when a federal judge in Cleveland ruled a voucher scheme unconstitutional. Remember the Katzenjammer kids. Rollo and Hans and Otto were always into some mischief and the last frame of the cartoon carried the same moral every week: "They brung it on themselves." They did.

Folks in both parties in Kansas, for instance, have placed a premium on ignorance for the sake of "creationism."

Then, following the flavor of the year in righteous outrage, scores of parroting preachers speak of the "clear teaching of scripture" characterizing biblical passages that arguably might deal with homosexuality. Serious scholars suggest that violence, idolatry, prostitution, and pederasty contextually crowd those debatable verses. But there are clear teachings, not in question, condemning adultery, divorce, greed, and mistreatment of the poor, slighted by church leaders who skew the scriptures for their own agenda.

We have a lot to do. In Chesterton's words, "We're all in small boat on a stormy sea and we owe each other a terrible loyalty." ■

Natural Law

By John M. Swomley

[Dr. John Swomley is professor emeritus of social ethics at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City. He is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.]

The Roman Catholic popes have for many decades relied on “natural law” as the basis for their decisions on sexual issues as well as on some other matters. Sometimes popes speak of this as moral law. Pope John Paul II in speaking to some American bishops in their *ad limina* visit [to the highest authority] June 27, 1998, said, “There exists a moral law ascribed in our humanity, which we can come to know by reflecting on our own nature and our actions, and which lays certain obligations upon us because we recognize them as universally true and binding.”

In that pope’s encyclical, “*Evangelium Vitae*”, requiring the obedience of American Catholics in opposing abortion and euthanasia, he wrote, “No circumstances, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the church.”

Earlier popes have also referred to natural law. Pius XI in his 1930 Encyclical on Christian marriage, “*Casti Connubi*”, wrote:

“Any use whatsoever of matrimony, exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life, is an offense against the law of God and of nature. . . Those who prevent birth violate the law of nature . . . Therefore, the sin of those married couples who by medicine either hinder-conception or prevent birth, is very grave; for this should be considered an unholy conspiracy of homicide.”

This idea of natural law raises certain historical and ethical questions. It is not in origin Jewish, or rooted in Jesus’ life and teaching. It came into the Apostle Paul’s writing as a result of Stoic philosophy. Paul lived in the Greek world and his native language was Greek.

A New Testament scholar, Lindsey Pherigo, wrote, “Language carries with it certain thought forms and these help us to understand the new ideas of Paul . . . In every culture the people have inherited from their culture certain basic life-questions. It is not known how these arise. No religion can succeed in a particular culture unless it provides an answer to that culture’s life-questions.” (Lindsey Pherigo, “Six Lectures on Paul”. Educational Opportunities, Lakeland, FL, pp 14, 15)

After discussing such questions, Pherigo notes “the significant

Stoic influence on Paul in the field of ethics. The Stoics believed that what was in accord with nature was good, and what was not in accord with nature was not. Everything natural was good.” Although Paul continued to make basic ethical decisions from his Jewish heritage; he demonstrated the Stoic influence in some of his letters.

In Romans 1:26-27 he comments on the homosexual activity of the gentiles or Greeks: “. . . Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another.” This was not Paul’s only use of the Stoic philosophy of the natural as good and the unnatural as evil.

In First Corinthians 11:14-15 he wrote, “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair it is her glory?”

Pherigo uses another illustration of Paul’s Stoic ethics: “The Stoics held that all the virtues are from God. If a human has a virtue it is really God’s virtue in the human. Paul indicates that we cannot have any righteousness of our own striving and choosing.” However, traditional Jewish thought presupposes human free will and the need for repentance to prepare for the coming Kingdom. (See Romans 5:1-3; 10:1-4; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Phil. 4:8h-9).

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is largely responsible for the current Catholic interpretation of natural law. He believed that there is an eternal law of God which is imprinted on humans who as rational creatures participate in the eternal through what is called “natural law.”

There are many critics of this concept of natural law, or at least of its current interpretation by recent popes. One criticism is that the popes contradict their own version of natural law as applied to sex. Presumably sexual intercourse is natural if other human beings are to be born and continue the human species. Yet these same popes decree celibacy for priests and nuns and therefore make it morally wrong for them to practice natural law.

One priest who has left the Roman church, wrote that “There is no such thing” as natural law. “If there is any law in nature, humans have been interfering with it since they reached consciousness and awareness. . . . The sexual organs have diverse purposes, only one of them reproductive. The sexual organs are a seat of immense pleasure and also an instrument for showing affection and love. To say that they have only the function of reproduction seems to contradict nature.” (John Sheehy, *The Church’s History of Injustice and Why This Priest Left*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD. 1999, pp. 60-61)

He continues, “Declaring it wrong to interfere with the normal flow of semen trying to reach the ovum would make it wrong to fly, dam rivers, send water to homes . . . take medicine, wear glasses, wear clothes,” etc. Is a condom that much different from a dam?”

Jacques Maritain, a Catholic exponent of natural law, says it is derived "from the simple act that man is man, nothing else being taken into account." It is an unwritten law. "Man's knowledge of it has increased little by little as man's moral conscience has developed." (Jacques Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, The University Press, Glasgow, 1958, pp 36, 39)

Paul Ramsey, a Protestant ethicist, wrote, "No one can actually draw up a statement of the precepts of natural law for the workaday world. Social policy has to be formulated in any case in realistic adjustment to the concrete factors in any given situation; it cannot be derived through step by step deduction from a revealed or intuitively grasped absolute natural law. 'Relative natural law' may therefore be defined as intuition in search of a social policy." (Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, New York, Scribners, 1950, p. 342)

John C. Bennett in his book *Christians and the State* acknowledges the value of the ancient Greek concept of the "naturals": "It is the conviction that there is a real unity in the human race and that all men have a right to equal consideration as human beings regardless of their race or class or nation. It was one of the great contributions of Stoicism to bring this insight to the ancient world. . . ." He indicates that "there is a much clearer understanding than formerly of the actual biological and psychological similarity of men with individual differences having more importance than racial or ethnic differences There is another fact about humanity. . . . all men are bound together by a common fate in this world." (John C. Bennett, *Christians and the State*, New York, Scribners, 1958, pp. 17, 18)

Bennett, however, is critical of Catholic natural law. "Protestants," he wrote, "have been troubled by the conception of the natural law for two reasons The first is that they do not have the rationalistic confidence that the natural law is universally known without such knowledge being seriously distorted by human sin and finiteness."

The second reason "is the tendency to rigidity in the way" natural law is applied. It does not make room for the endless variation in human situations, for the dynamic nature of history. In the context of Roman Catholic thought this rigidity is seen in its most extreme form in Catholic teaching about birth control and about medical ethics. But there is also a tendency to absolutize the type of medieval society in which the church was most at home." (Bennett, p. 98)

In actuality, the various popes have used the natural law claim to foster control over women, parents, and government. For example, the Vatican claims that natural law gives parents the right to control their children's education but also assumes parental inability to act effectively. The result is that the church takes over the rights of parents. According to canon law, the church and specifically the bishop of the diocese has "the right...to decide under what circumstance and with what safe guards to prevent loss of faith it may be tolerated that Catholic children go to such [secular] schools." For many years there weren't lay school boards in the various dioceses, and after the Vatican Council when some church school boards were elected, those elected had to be approved by the bishop.

Another example of the use or non-use of natural law is the

failure of the popes to recognize full human rights for women. A former priest wrote in 1999: "Not only do we have the denial of full human rights to women, itself a heinous crime, but presently all around the globe, women are persecuted, raped, murdered by their spouses and even mutilated. In Africa and elsewhere, females are regularly mutilated by the practice of clitoridectomy. The unspeakable tearing, cutting and destroying parts of the female genitalia must stop. Not only does it ruin women's bodies . . . it ruins their souls and extinguishes the inner spirit and all self esteem. The church has not taken a stand on this. *The Pope says nothing.*" (Sheehy, p. 112)

The former priest also said, "The Catholic Church teaches the inferiority of women by forbidding them to be priests" (Ibid., 113)

The failure of Pope John Paul II to recognize the equality of women as an aspect of natural law is his commitment to patriarchy. Men are the leaders at every level, from priest to pope. John Paul II is quite specific about the role of women in that "a woman is by nature fitted for home work . . . not suited for certain occupations." He wrote that paid work outside the home is the abandonment of the role of motherhood, which includes "taking care of her children: and "is wrong from the point of view of the good of society and of the family when it contradicts or hinders these primary goals of the mission of a mother." (*Laborem Exercens*, September 14, 1981 at page 91)

The rigidity of Catholic natural law was illustrated by a "Catholic question-and-answer column. Question: 'My wife is sterile but wants her "marital rights." I have a contagious venereal disease. May I wear a prophylactic sheath?' Answer: 'No. Even though she could not conceive and you would infect her, contraceptive intercourse is an intrinsically evil act.'" None of the facts made any difference. (Quoted in Lawrence Lader, *Politics, Power, and the Church*, New York, Macmillan, 1987, p, 77)

The conclusions to be drawn from the papal use of natural law are first, that it is the exclusive province of the church or pope to interpret natural law; and second, that the papal interpretation of natural law supercedes individual freedom, conscience and democracy. When John Paul II met with a group of U.S. bishops at the Vatican June 27, 1998, he told them: "The notion of freedom and personal autonomy is superficially attractive; endorsed by individuals, the media, legislature and the courts....Yet it ultimately destroys the personal good of individuals and the common good of society." He then said, "The nobility of men and women lies not simply in the capacity to choose but in the capacity to choose wisely," which means "witnessing to the moral laws inscribed in the human heart."

The pope then said, "As bishops you have to teach that freedom of conscience is never freedom *from* the truth but always and only freedom *in* the truth. . . . the Church is preserved in the truth and it is her duty to give utterance to and authoritatively to teach that truth. . . and to declare and confirm by her authority those principles of the moral order which have their origin in human nature itself." (*Dignitatus Humanae*, 14)

The fallacy in such reasoning is that if natural law is inscribed in every human heart it should not need interpretation by one man who can override the decisions of millions of people who do not recognize his authority. ■

Saint Augustine

By Garry Wills
Penguin Group, New York, 1999

A Book Review
By Darold H. Morgan

This is a brief, exceptionally well written, excellently researched volume by a Pulitzer Prize winning author in the well-known Penguin Lives series of biographies. The author's purpose is realized as Augustine, one of history's seminal thinkers, comes to life. As this happens through the skill of research and writing, one readily concludes that his life from the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era has much to say to today's milieu.

Augustine's life is set historically at a time when the fabled Roman Empire was crumbling and collapsing while a maturing Christianity was dramatically expanding. His lasting contributions through his writing and preaching took place in a provincial area of North Africa, while serving as a Catholic bishop in Hippo. His writings in particular extended his influence far beyond the scope of this ancient parish. His ministry coincided with the sack of Rome in 410 A. D., the rise and fall of whole host of heretical movements, and the remarkable expansion of a nascent Catholicism which turned out to be the only stable influence left as the Dark Ages began to settle in on those regions surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

Wills' approach to the life of Augustine is basically one of chronology, beginning and ending in North Africa with specific attention given to the major spiritual developments which took place in Milan and Rome. His treatment of Augustine and his parents, his early sexual escapades, his dramatic and classic conversion to Christianity while in Italy, his wide-ranging personal friendships and enmities, his ordination to the priesthood and subsequent ministry as a bishop, and his major work as a voluminous author and correspondent constitutes the balance of the book. It is readable, quotable, practical, helpful as one realizes again that in Augustine one has one of the true geniuses of the Christian movement.

One does not get far into his life until the issue of sexual ethics not only comes to the foreground, but it stays there. One cannot help but wonder if the current and almost

frenzied preoccupation with Freudianism has not spilled over in this attempt to understand the life of this early Christian leader. His lack of paternal influence, the dominance of his mother, Monnica, his potential (but never proved) homosexuality, his taking of a concubine (in an age when this was not discouraged), his fathering of a child with her, his ending of this relationship when he was baptized—all of this is documented in this volume and presented in a way

that encourages the reader to draw his own conclusions about these complex issues. It surely points to the fact that situational ethics is not just a twentieth century phenomenon.

Another ethical challenge comes from a problem that dogged Augustine at every turn of his long life ... how to deal with doctrinal heresy which often was related to a long list of his close friends. These were competent and persuasive individuals who were aggressive in promoting these teachings. Manichaeism, the Donatists (in particular), Arianism, Pelagianism were streams of influence during Augustine's long bishopric at Hippo in North Africa. He personally came out of the powerful Manichaeism movement to a firm Christian position. Anyone of these systems of theology, left unchecked and unchallenged, would have polluted Christianity fatally. Perhaps the single most important influence in checking these heresies (despite close personal friendships in these philosophies) was Augustine. Through brilliant powers of reasoning, his extended correspondence, his widely quoted sermons, and above all, his books, several of which have become classics, he confronted these half-truths, often projected by adherents of remarkable rhetorical skills, and ultimately won the battle.

Augustine's role as one of Christianity's earlier and most able apologist serves somewhat as a role model to succeeding generations. No age needs that more than these current times. Not only did he possess the insights of original theological skills, related to biblical truths, but he had a unique personal disposition and maturity which enabled him to triumph in these visceral debates which seemingly were interminable in his day. In our times with heresies almost beyond number and with a compliance mentality of accepting almost anything that smacks of a peculiar sincerity, the need for apologists of the Christian faith with an Augustinian mindset is beyond debate.

Another key ethical issue emerging from those distant times is found in the on-going struggle to define Christian citizenship. Augustine was Roman in culture and citizenship. But Rome was all but destroyed in his lifetime, and a few years after his death the barbarians completed their destructive work and the Roman Empire was no more. It shifted to Constantinople with enormous complications theologically between the East and West.

Augustine defended the emerging papal power in the Roman Church. The political vacuum in Rome somewhat

naturally fed the political arm of Catholicism, and it moved gradually into ecclesiastical politics. Augustine was the formative theologian in this evolutionary transfer. His classic volume, "The City of God", written during these years of one of history's greatest international disasters, proved ultimately to be the framework of this political extension of a Roman Catholicism. Seemingly the only stability in those increasingly unstable times was the church. With Augustine's reasoning of the bishops constituting the church, it did not take too long a period of time until the unchanging core of Catholic authority became dominant. It may be that the times shaped this concept of citizenship, an approach that ultimately resulted in a thousand years of Catholic political authority, ending only when the Protestant Reformation began. In essence, however, the Roman Curia still holds this Augustinian theory until this very hour.

The ethical issues of church and state are still under attack in contemporary society with some of the same underlying factors which were apparent in Augustine's time. The historic and respected American concept of the separation of church and state is being undermined by the arguments of radically changing culture which seemingly justify authoritarian areas—a movement which strangely resembles the expansion of religious powers into those peculiar vacuums of the fifth century. They knew nothing about "a free church in a free state", but the lessons of history should counter the siren song of Augustine's theology which is amazingly alive and well today.

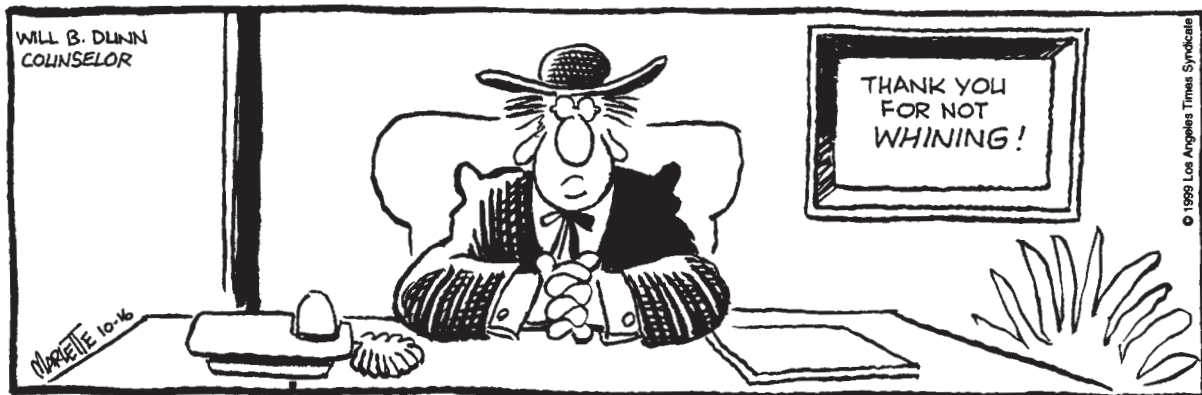
Wills' book is "a good read". Augustine is a force to be reckoned with, not only from a theological perspective, but from the purview of an extraordinarily interesting life at a major turning point in history. ■

Christian Ethics Award to Sarah Frances Anders

Dr. Sarah Frances Anders will receive the 1999 T.B. Maston Christian Ethics Award on November 5 at a special awards dinner sponsored by the T.B. Maston Foundation.

Dr. Anders is a distinguished Christian ethicist who has recently retired as Professor of Sociology at Louisiana College. She is now serving as Moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and is a prolific writer and noted speaker. The guest speaker for the occasion will be Dr. Carolyn Ann Knight who is the Academic Director and Assistant Professor of Homiletics at the Interdenominational Theological Seminary in Atlanta. The T.B. Maston Foundation presents this award every other year to a Christian leader who has demonstrated outstanding commitment to making practical in daily life and significant in society Christian ethical ideals.

Banquet tickets may be secured through the office of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission at (214) 828-5290. ■



Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land

By Jimmy D. Neff

[Dr. Jimmy D. Neff is pastor of the First Baptist Church in Edmonson, Texas where he preached this sermon on June 13, 1999. He has pointed out that the notion that old age is a foreign land is suggested by the title in Mary Pipher's *Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of our Elders* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999) and that while she, an internationally noted psychologist, does not write from a faith perspective, her book has nevertheless provided much of the organizational framework for this sermon.]

In Jerusalem, jackals howled and tumbleweeds drifted where throngs of earnest worshippers once jammed the temple complex. Mighty Israel had fallen. Nebuchadnezzar's minions chained the best and brightest Hebrews for the long trek to bondage in Babylon. Once there, the captives sat down and wept when they recalled the splendor of what once was in Zion. Their spirits were so dejected that they put away their musical instruments. But their captors, possibly wanting entertainment for a pagan banquet, demanded songs of mirth. The entertainment committee insisted, "Get dressed up in your little native temple costumes and sing us one of those cute songs of Zion with the tambourine rhythm."

Now, the dilemma front and center was this: How is one supposed to be an authentic believer in such difficult circumstances? Or, to put the question as the captives posed it in Psalm 137:4, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

Though most of us have never sat beside the streams of Babylon, we all likely know something about singing the Lord's song in a foreign land. This is especially so if we have cared for the aged. We discover what it means to be a believer in difficult circumstances. When I speak of the aged, I'm not referring to the *young-old* who are having the time of their lives pulling travel trailers to national parks, volunteering as pink ladies at the hospital, playing cards or dominoes with friends three times a week, or having a standing tee time for golf at the country club. I'm speaking of the *old-old* whose capacity to care for themselves has been significantly diminished by failing health. One reason that caring for our loved ones can be so difficult is because the land of old age is such a foreign place for those of us who are younger.

When dealing with most foreigners our nervousness is allayed a bit if we can find a derogatory way to refer to these people; e.g., "Krauts," "Wops," "Kikes," "Spics," "Gooks," "Rag-heads," "Wetbacks" etc. The list of pejorative terms for old age is long; e.g., "biddy," "codger," "coot," "geezer."

Further the fact that we tell jokes about the old, as if they were an ethnic group, betrays our uneasy cultural phobias. Perhaps you heard the one about an old woman who was fishing from the riverbank when she spied an unusually alert frog. As she stooped down to pick up the frog, it said, "If you will kiss me, I'll turn into a handsome prince." Instead of kissing the frog, the old woman put the frog in her pocket. The frog croaked loudly, "Hey, don't you want to kiss me and have a handsome prince?" "Not particularly," the old woman replied, "at my age, I'd much rather have a talking frog."

In this foreign land where there are multitudes of the aging, we struggle for appropriate words. In a culture that prizes youthful, wrinkle-free bodies, it is not surprising that no one wants to be labeled "old." In ordinary usage "old" has a negative connotation. To call something "old hat" is an insult; to say, "That's an old idea" is to kill the proposal in favor of some more innovative way; to say, "You haven't aged a bit," is to bestow a compliment. Well, then, how do you sing the Lord's song in this foreign land of loathed linguistic options? Shall we rely on the politically correct language, like "senior citizen?" Or shall we say, "I'm not old, just 'chronologically challenged'?" One of the better words is "elder," which suggests wisdom and respect.

For the most part we are unfamiliar with the world from which our elders have come. Elders come from a time zone on the other side of sliced bread, electric light bulbs, radios, telephones, movie theaters, slick magazines. Folks from this foreign land call oatmeal, oats; refrigerators, ice-boxes; sinks, lavatories; restrooms, privies. What passed for discipline in their strange land looks a whole lot like abuse to the rest of us. In this strange land "depression" has nothing to do with mental health, but refers to a time when there was no money. And, if the Super Bowl is anything like the Dust Bowl most of these folks would just as soon skip it. In this foreign world few strangers clamored for individual rights; instead, neighbors and friends forged communities that worked for the common good. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land of such quaint notions?

Another reason this world is foreign to us is that we have a tendency in this country to segregate people by age. Our three-year-olds are at KinderCare; the thirteen-year-olds are over at Estacado Junior High; the eight-year-olds are at the Prairie House. When we are isolated from each other, we become strangers. When we become strangers, we have no reason to interact as community. An old Russian proverb says, "The tears of a stranger are only water." Yet, each age has its own kind of love and wisdom. For the sake of community,

that love and wisdom needs to be shared with each segment of society. By isolating people the way we do, we lose a lot as a culture. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land of sequestration? One of the vital things to note about the church is that it is one remaining vestige of communal gatherings still taking place. Will we let this too slip away?

In this foreign land of the aging, what constitutes an important issue is intriguing. Most notably, it is a land filled with loss. There is the loss of brothers, sisters, spouses, friends, peers. Old age is like a cruel game of dodge ball where, in random fashion, people are hit out of the game, one by one. Further, there is loss of hair, muscle, memory, strength, agility. Letter writers no longer have legible penmanship; avid readers lose eyesight, attention spans wane; champion athletes fret about making it to the bathroom. In this foreign land of the aging, everyone seems to be consumed with the latest details of dwindling health. Even dinner conversation is about aches and pains. How can we sing the Lord's song in this foreign land of such dismal news and doleful brooding?

Residents of this land live with the dreaded double standard. While adolescence is about loss of childhood, old age is about loss of adult status and the power and perquisites that go with it. Children and young people burn counter tops, forget appointments, write overdrafts, have fender benders. And when they do, we say "Oops, accidents happen." But, for the elderly these same mistakes have severe implications and loss of privileges and freedoms. How shall we sing the Lord's song in such a strange land of inequitable response?

Perhaps the greatest fear in this strange and foreign land is loss of control. Inhabitants are frightened by one of two conditions: Becoming trapped in a body without a mind or having a clear mind without a functional body. For many, age becomes a cage. Along with loss of control comes loss of dignity. No father wants to ask a daughter to help clean him up. No adult son or daughter wants to take the keys away from the

Aging, and then death, if at all possible, ought to be a family event. And on this last leg of the journey, elders need love, respect, time, and touch.

very person who taught them to drive. As the actress, Bette Davis, said, "Old age isn't for sissies." How shall we sing the Lord's song in this foreign land where elemental fundamental rights are being gradually diminished?

What to do? What to do?

First, care for our elders is good for them and us. While there are certain aspects of aging that can't be controlled, no one deserves to grow old and then die surrounded by a bunch of unknown technicians monitoring machines. Aging, and then death, if at all possible, ought to be a family event. And on this last leg of the journey, elders need love, respect, time, and touch.

Almost no one objects to being told they're appreciated. Dying should not be wholly unlike that exercise where you close your eyes, cross your arms, and fall backwards. It works best if you are relaxed and the people catching you are strong and nurturing.

Caring for our elders is good for the care givers, too. Admittedly, the adult child will likely feel guilty no matter what is done. There is an old saying, "You're damned if you do and damned if you don't." There are anxieties about doing too much and doing too little. As one adult child said, "I may have been a good nurturer to my mother in her last months, but I was a lousy wife to my husband and an even poorer mother to my own children."

In the end, nobody can ever do enough. There is not enough money, enough time, enough opportunity to repay the gift of life and all the sacrifices of parenting. Parents can't be saved from pain, sadness, loss, nor ultimately from death. But, there are choices to be made; balances to be struck. You can be a responsible nurturer or walk away and refuse to grow up. Good counsel is: Pace yourself. Be a marathon runner. Don't sprint too quickly. You'll burn out. Finding your own proper level for providing care is the morally responsible, adult thing to do.



Among the Native American tribes of the great Plains were the Omaha. Long before the covered wagons came to domesticate the land, the Omaha would survive the harsh winters of the Great Plains by sleeping grandparents beside grandchildren. It kept both generations from freezing. The old need the warmth of the young; the young need the light and wisdom of the old. Sharing is one way for us to sing the Lord's song in the foreign land of aging.

Secondly, see elders as indispensable teachers. They teach the younger generations about a more civil time, about accountability, about our past. If elders live to become great-grandparents, and they themselves knew their great-grandparents, they span seven generations. That's a tremendous resource. Alex Haley, the author of *Roots*, said, "The death of an old person is like the burning of a library." Consider it an honor to learn from elders. Their stories are about how to live together, how to nurture children, how to share the loads of life.

Julia Kasdorf's poem, "What I Learned from My Mother," written nearly a hundred years ago, illustrates what can be learned from a previous generation.

I learned from my mother how to love
the living, to have plenty of vases on hand
in case you have to rush to the hospital
with peonies cut from the lawn, black ants
still stuck to the buds. I learned to save jars
large enough to hold fruit salad for a whole
grieving household, to cube home canned pears
and peaches, to slice through maroon grape skins
and flick out the sexual seeds with a knife point.
I learned to attend viewing even if I didn't know
the deceased, to press the moist hands
of the living, to look in their eyes and offer
sympathy, as though I understood loss even then.
I learned that whatever we say means nothing,
what anyone will remember is that we came.
I learned to believe I had the power to ease
awful pains materially like an angel.
Like a doctor I learned to create
from another's suffering my own usefulness, and once
you know how to do this, you can never refuse.
To every house you enter, you must offer
healing; a chocolate cake you baked yourself,
the blessing of your voice, your chaste touch.

Learning. That, too, is how to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

Third, recognize that we all have teaching roles, too. As we care for our elders, we are inadvertently instructing our children how we want to be cared for. This truth is a simple application of the Golden Rule we learned as children: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." As we care

for our parents, we teach our children to care for us. The more we love and respect our elders, the more we teach our children to love and respect us.

A worthy example. That's how we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

Fourth, realize the importance of saying good bye. Good byes linger. Because the last years are spent in the cauldron of loss, parents and children have new opportunities to know each other. Dying offers a chance for both to come clean. It offers an occasion to work through and understand relationships that may have been contorted, misshapen, or misunderstood for years. There are no perfect parents. Neither are there any perfect children. Loving someone means living with bitter disappointments, tolerating imperfections. We mend what we value; we value what we mend. Sometimes, a bad life can be redeemed by a good death.

When the time comes, how do you say "good bye"? Hospice suggests that five statements be uttered: (1) "I forgive you," (2) "Please forgive me," (3) "Thank you," (4) "I love you," and (5) "Good bye, for now."

A meaningful good bye. This is another way you sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

Fifth, rehearse the full dimensions of our Christian faith. As Christians, our faith is in a God who knows about difficulty. One dark Friday afternoon in a public execution on Calvary's hill, God's boy died unjustly. Our pain really counts with this God. No wonder the writer of Hebrews proclaims, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like we are....Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

Christian hope is grounded firmly in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the apostle declared, "...[I]f Christ be not raised, your faith is vain" (1 Cor. 15:17). Though physical separation is inevitable, our Christian hope affirms that nothing shall "...separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39); that "...to be absent from the body...[is] to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8; that "...to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Our Christian hope gives witness to "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1) in which "God shall wipe away all tears...and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Indeed, it is our belief that because of the awesome dimensions of the Christian gospel, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). So, get to your feet. Get up from besides the waters of Babylon. Chafe no more. Fetch the musical instruments hung there on the willows! With the full dimensions of the gospel in our hearts, we can sing the Lord's song in any foreign land, including the strange land of the Elders! Hallelujah! ■

Olin T. Binkley: To See His Monument, Look Around

By Jimmy Allen

[Jimmy Allen is Assistant Editor of the *Biblical Recorder* in Raleigh, North Carolina. When he published a somewhat shorter version of this story, I was so moved that I sought and received permission to share the original version with readers of *Christian Ethics Today*. Dr. Binkley was a member of the Christian Life Commission in 1960 when I was called to be the agency's executive director and later came to be a fast friend. In deep appreciation and profound respect, I share in this last salute to this giant among Christian ethicists. Foy Valentine.]

Olin T. Binkley has been eulogized as a man of faith who impacted the world.

Binkley, a North Carolina native who served as president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1963-1975, died August 27 of congestive heart failure. He was 91.

Thomas Bland, a colleague of Binkley's at Southeastern, spoke during the service at Wake Forest Baptist church in Wake Forest and talked about an engraving at St. Paul's Cathedral in London that says, "If you would see the man's monument, look around." The same is true for Binkley, Bland said.

"If, today, you would see Olin Binkley's monuments, look around. Begin here. But be prepared also to look around all over the world. Faithful servant-leaders carry with them equipment for ministries which were shaped by the efforts of their teacher, Olin Trivette Binkley. They carry with them ethical monitors from Scripture, which he espoused, incarnated and urged upon us."

Another colleague, James H. Blackmore, noted in an interview that Binkley was blessed with two daughters, five grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. But, he also noted Binkley's impact on others.

"I would list hundreds and thousands of students and friends who are part of his family—spiritual descendants," Blackmore said.

Several hundred of those students and friends gathered in the church that Binkley first saw as a 16-year-old student at Wake Forest College from the Iredell community of Harmony. The son of a farmer and Baptist pastor who served one church 51 years, Binkley was a man in Christ, a family man, and a churchman, Bland said.

In the summer of his 12th year, Binkley went to every revival in the area where he heard all kinds of preachers. Many were concerned with the wrath of God, a subject he discussed with his father, Joseph M. Binkley. His father recommended his son read the four gospels and give close attention to the

type printed in red, the words of Jesus Christ.

"The Holy Spirit worked in his life and he followed his father's counsel," Bland said.

On a Saturday afternoon while fishing from a creek bank, Binkley prayed and gave his life to Christ.

"At that point and to the end of his life, Olin Binkley was a new person in Christ," Bland said.

With another story, Bland showed Binkley's devotion to his family: He once left one college institution to teach at another. A colleague upbraided him, saying he thought Binkley was permanently committed to the institution he was leaving. Binkley replied: "The only institution to which I'm permanently committed is marriage."

As a churchman, Binkley loved and served the Lord Jesus Christ, Bland said. Binkley also loved Wake Forest Baptist Church, Bland said, and during his last hours, he talked about how much the church had meant to him, a place where he found a spiritual home as a teenager almost 200 miles from home. While a student at Wake Forest College, Binkley missed just two Sunday services. Once he was sick. The other time he was speaking elsewhere.

After graduating from Wake Forest, Binkley earned degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Yale Divinity School, and Yale University. The same year he earned his doctorate at Yale, Binkley married Pauline Eichmann and was called as pastor of Chapel Hill Baptist Church, now known as University Baptist. While in Chapel Hill, he was invited by Wake Forest professor A.C. Reid to speak during the 1936-37 school year to a philosophy fraternity in Reid's house. One of the students attending was Blackmore.

"I was impressed. He was a very intelligent man who was a very religious man," Blackmore said. "With him we could discuss all questions."

Students asked about socially taboo subjects like sexuality and race relations, as well as socially controversial topics like evolution, Blackmore said. "Here was an opportunity for open discussion of all matters...and discussion of God's will and purposes for us," he said. "This was just tremendous for me. From then on he has been a hero, an example, and, at last, a dear friend."

Binkley left Chapel Hill in 1938 to join Reid on the faculty at Wake Forest College. He moved to Southern Seminary in 1944 and taught for eight years before returning to North Carolina to teach ethics and philosophy at Southeastern. He became dean of faculty in 1958.

The chairman of the seminary's trustees in 1964, J. Glenn Blackburn, wrote the following the year Binkley was elected president: "When the trustees invited him to match his talents

with this opportunity, they made crystal clear their intention to continue trusting the interests of the seminary to the best leadership available.

"They felt that in spirit, experience, and learning he was the one to stand out as example, guide, and servant. His faith, his character and his record made the choice an obvious one."

Blackburn also noted Binkley combined a brilliant mind, a spirit of humility and strong Christian convictions. "He is known to be a man who is firm with himself before he is so with others," Blackburn wrote. "With a keen sense of humor he can at once be fair and firm in his devotion to truth and right. His convictions seem always to come equipped with love and courage."

During his tenure, Binkley's spirit and diligence helped the seminary through a time of social restlessness with students boldly questioning authority, as well as a time of dealing with a few faculty members who espoused ideas deemed to be contrary to the seminary's purposes.

Blackmore remembers Binkley would always listen to the person with a problem and then work on an agreement in a kind and gracious manner. Faculty members were asked to follow the seminary's "Abstract of Principles" and three instructors gave unsatisfactory support. Binkley gave them each the opportunity to write their reasoning. None did. Two left the school for other jobs. One failed to make amends or explain.

The president offered the remaining faculty member one year of salary to leave. The instructor made a counter offer of two years. Binkley agreed.

Blackmore said he remembers what Binkley said afterward: "Jim, if we made a mistake it was in the direction of generosity and kindness. I can live with that."

When Binkley retired as seminary president in 1974, Claud B. Bowen, who was president of the school's board of trustees, wrote: "As a teacher, Dr. Binkley is profound, honest, and diligent. He has disciplined his mind to concentrate and to gather knowledge of essential value....Because of his interest in persons he has been able to impart his knowledge to his students.

"As an administrator, Dr. Binkley has shown unusual ability in leading Southeastern Seminary in a marvelous way. Today Southeastern is one of the outstanding seminaries in the world and much of this has come about through the administration of Dr. Binkley."

Binkley was involved in numerous endeavors. He served as president of the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada (1964-66), led the effort to build a public library in the town of Wake Forest and served on the Wake County Council of Aging for 12 years (four years as chairman). He received numerous awards, ranging from citizen of the year in Wake Forest to having the chapel on the seminary campus and a church in Chapel Hill named in his honor.

Binkley shared a personal story four years ago with *The Wake Weekly* in Wake Forest. Money was scarce for his parents, he said. They would send their son \$5 whenever they could while he was in college. During his sophomore year, he decided he would stay home to work and earn some money for school for the next two years.

When school let out for the Christmas break, he got a ride to Winston-Salem and then another to Harmony. There, he noticed his mother's hands were yellowed and blistered.

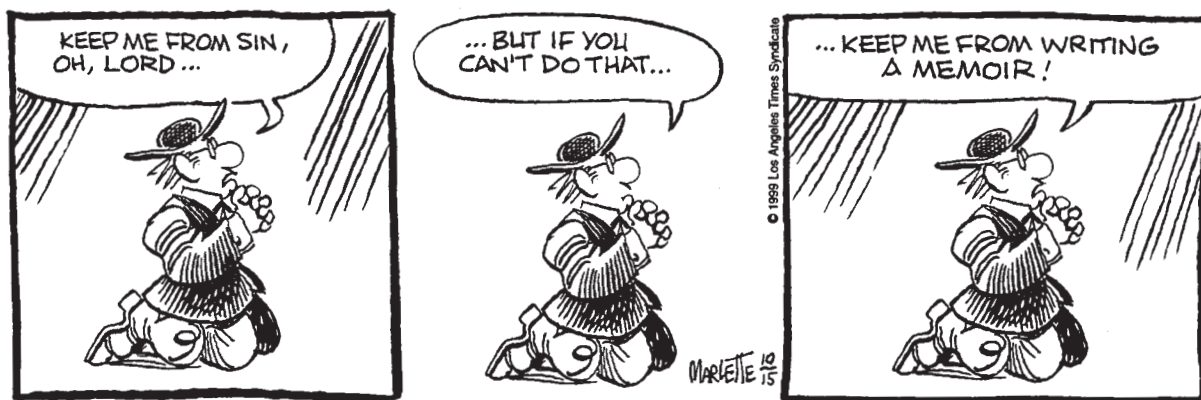
"I asked her what caused it," Binkley said. "She wouldn't tell me."

On Christmas morning, he went to the family dinner table, and typically, the plates were turned upside down until the blessing was finished. When he righted his plate, he found a gift.

"There was \$75 that she and my father had made by cracking black walnuts to sell," he said.

Tears came to his eyes and his voice quivered as he told the story.

Bland said few people can forget Binkley's love for and insistence upon the ethical guidance found in Jesus' response about the greatest commandment and also in Micah 6:8: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God?" ■



THE CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS AT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

The Center for Christian Ethics exists to bear witness to the relevance of the Christian gospel in the world. It maintains an emphasis on applied Christianity with program activity based on Christian experience, Biblical truth, theological insight, historical perspective, current research, human needs, and the divine imperative to love God with our whole hearts and our neighbors as ourselves.

CHRONOLOGY

- In 1988 plans were made and the foundations laid for the Center for Christian Ethics.
- In 1989 the Center for Christian Ethics name was carefully chosen.
- In 1990, on June 14, the Center was chartered as a non-profit corporation.
- In 1991, on June 17, the Center was granted 501(c)(3) standing by the Internal Revenue Service.
- In 1997, a mutually beneficial relationship between the Center and Baylor University was established, with the Center's primary offices situated in the Baylor Administration Building, in Pat Neff Hall, Waco, Texas.

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SUPPORT

Financial support for the Center for Christian Ethics has come from churches, through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, from Foundations, and from interested individuals.

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE

- Greatly needed
- Urgently solicited
- Genuinely appreciated

OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen and support the cause of Christian ethics.
- Champion the moral values without which civilization itself could not survive.
- Publish a Christian ethics journal as a needed voice for the Christian ethics cause.
- Conduct forums to discuss critical ethical issues with a view to recommending practical responses.
- Address the ethical dimensions of public policy issues.
- Prepare and distribute Christian ethics support materials not being produced by others.
- Work with like-minded individuals and entities to advance the cause of Christian ethics.
- Perform needed Christian ethics projects and services for those welcoming such help.
- Recognize and honor those who have made unique contributions to the cause of Christian ethics.
- Utilize the contributions of responsible stewards who designate resources to be used in furthering the cause of Christian ethics.

The **VOICE** of the Center for Christian Ethics is *Christian Ethics Today*. Within the constraints of energy and finances, this journal is published about every other month. It is now sent without charge to those who request it.

COLLOQUIUMS are Center-sponsored conversations held several times a year with knowledgeable participants coming together to discuss relevant ethical issues with a view to recommending appropriate actions.

INITIATIVES in Christian Ethics (related to such things as race, class, gender, publishing, mass media, translation, teaching, and curricula) are Center agenda concerns.

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