
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

Phone: (904) 262-6626 Fax: (904) 262-7745 CServe: 70420,73

March 4, 1993

CLC seminar examines
medical ethics issues

By Lonnie Wilkey

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Southern Baptists were challenged to rise to the forefront of discussions of medical ethics issues in the months and years to come during the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's 26th annual seminary March 1-3 in Nashville, Tenn.

The "Life at Risk: Crises in Medical Ethics" seminar drew 523 registrants to the three-day meeting at the Baptist Sunday School Board. It was the largest attendance at a CLC seminar in about six years, one staff member said.

The urgency of the issues and quality of speakers were major drawing cards, said Ben Mitchell, director of biomedical ethics and life issues for the CLC. Major medical ethics issues have hit the "frontburner," Mitchell said.

They no longer are just academic subjects, Mitchell told the Baptist and Reflector. People deal with medical ethics issues daily, he said, citing patients in the hospital, dying family members, or treatment of genetically linked diseases in children as examples.

In the opening address of the bioethics seminar, CLC Executive Director Richard Land reminded conference participants that Christians are "the last line of defense against a rapid descent into an evil abyss of barbarism" toward human life in the United States.

Followers of Jesus Christ must oppose the "lethal combination of technical expertise and spiritual ignorance" which would deny the sanctity of human life and result in abortion, fetal experimentation, euthanasia, and infanticide of mentally and physically impaired babies, Land said.

Several speakers addressed issues of abortion, AIDS, physician-assisted suicide, genetics, and other bioethical concerns during the meeting.

A Nashville university professor called for Christians to take a more active role in showing that religion and science are compatible.

Despite the beliefs of some scientists who feel religion and science do not mix, there is evidence for a Christian doctrine of science and technology, said Thomas Harris, a layman from First Baptist Church of Nashville who chairs the department of biomedical engineering at Vanderbilt University.

He observed that bioethics "has become a significant arena for the interaction of moral theology and modern medicine."

Specific concerns for bioethicists, Harris said, include issues

related to the beginning and ending of life (abortion, the right to die, euthanasia, support of severely handicapped newborns), ethical dilemmas in the allocation of health-care resources, the ethics of research using human and animal subjects, and the ethics of genetic manipulation.

Harris concluded that bioethics has a "significant debt to Christian moral theology." He noted that "to a large extent, evangelical and conservative Christianity has withdrawn from the science-technology-Christianity discussion."

Because competent, informed bioethics is important to everyone, "evangelical and conservative Christians should be doing more to preserve and improve what we have," Harris said.

Describing physician-assisted suicide advocated by Michigan doctor Jack Kevorkian and others as "medicalized killing," David Biebel called on Christians to "make an absolute commitment to serve God who is for life by preserving and protecting all human life."

Biebel, director of communications for the Christian Medical and Dental Society in Colorado Springs, Colo., said end-of-life decisions should not be made in isolation by patients or caregivers who need the support of their family, friends and church.

"I believe it is nearly impossible for people immersed in pain beyond their darkest imagination to be objective in life-and-death decisions," said Biebel, who has lost two sons to a rare metabolic disease that causes brain damage.

While Biebel opposes extraordinary treatment to prolong life, he opposes withholding food and water from a person in a vegetable state to bring about death.

"Obviously, it's not very popular these days to maintain that withholding food and water from a person in a persistent vegetative state is neither right nor humane.

"But if the intention of any action or inaction is to cause another person's death, it is manslaughter at the very least, regardless of how compassionately the perpetrators feel," he said.

A former abortion provider told conference participants that the abortion industry is motivated by profit, not concern for women.

Carol Everett, who once co-owned two abortion clinics, said her abortion counselors were actually trained telemarketers selling a product.

"Abortion is not about rights or choices, or even about rape or incest. Abortion is about money," Everett said.

Everett said that during her six years in the abortion industry she was not only responsible for 35,000 abortions, but also the death of one woman and the maiming of 19 others due to hysterectomies or colostomies. She said it was routine for doctors and abortionists to work together to cover up such mistakes and that these same types of complications are going on throughout the nation today, but the public never hears the truth.

"I was indeed the Scarlet Lady. I think of myself now as the Scarlet Lady, but it's different. It's (because of) the redemptive blood of Jesus Christ," Everett said.

Everett said she left the abortion industry because of a Baptist preacher who told her about the plan of salvation.

Everett said the church needs to reach out lovingly to those who have had an abortion because the world does not have the morals to make a difference.

Southern Baptist educator Timothy George also addressed abortion by noting the failure of Southern Baptists to take a strong stand against

abortion in the early 1970s. He noted that messengers to the 1971 SBC meeting in St. Louis, Mo., passed the first resolution on abortion.

"While this resolution included a perfunctory tribute to the 'sanctity of human life,' it was in essence a strong call for the liberalizing and legalizing of abortion in this country.

"The resolution called for the legitimizing of abortion not only for the hard cases of rape, incest, fetal deformity and threat to the life of the mother, but also 'carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, as well as physical health of the mother,'" said George, dean of the Beeson School of Divinity at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

"The failure of the Southern Baptist Convention to make a timely and prophetic response to the holocaust of abortion on demand reflects the loss of theological vision resulting in the malign neglect and distorted understanding of the most basic doctrinal affirmations we profess to believe," George said.

A Texas physician said Americans are being lulled to sleep by a sense of false security that they cannot acquire sexually transmitted diseases.

Joe McIlhaney of Austin, Texas, pointed out problems in Africa caused by sexually transmitted diseases. Besides the AIDS epidemic, about 25 percent of Africans are sterile because of STDs, he said.

"We think that in America we are not as susceptible as the Africans. But the problem in Africa is sexual promiscuity. Americans need to wake up," he said.

The transmission of STDs has become a crisis, he said. Before 1960 syphilis and gonorrhea were the primary STDs. Now, he said there are 20-25 different STDs. More than 12 million people are infected each year with STDs, he added.

McIlhaney said the message of safe sex is not working. In fact, he said, the more the message is given, the greater the problem is becoming.

Approximately \$3 billion has been spent in the United States on sex education in schools, he said. "We have proof the typical condom education done in schools does not work," he said.

The only answer is to teach people to save intercourse until marriage, McIlhaney concluded.

A Southern Baptist geneticist said breakthroughs in the treatment of cystic fibrosis, breast cancer, Lou Gehrig's disease and thousands of other genetic disorders will result from the 15-year project to map the human genetic blueprint.

At the same time, more knowledge about genetic makeup poses a range of moral and ethical dilemmas that must become the focus of discussion among the scientific, ethical, legal, political and religious communities, said Francis Collins.

Collins will move from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor where he has been professor of internal medicine and human genetics to direct the National Center for Genome Research in Bethesda, Md., later in March.

"I believe the vast majority of research of the Human Genome Project will be beneficial -- alleviating suffering, saving lives -- all the things God has called us to do," he said.

Southern Baptist School Board President James Draper gave three theme interpretations during the seminar.

He noted there is a "great gap between biblical beliefs and principles and public policy" in some areas.

"It is imperative that we as Christians address that gap and bridge

it. The response which we make to this crisis may well be our greatest legacy we leave to the world of tomorrow.

"It is vital that we act biblically, responsibly, and compassionately in this matter," Draper said.

-30-

.....
CORRECTIONS: An unusually large crop of shameful mistakes made their way into recent issues of ABP and only recently came to our attention. To minimize the embarrassment, let me correct them all at once:

In the Feb. 18 story "Hobbs urges leaders...", please delete the word "was" from the phrase "he has was not" in the 19th paragraph.

In the Feb. 25 story "HMB study goes easy on Masons...", please change FMB to HMB in the 20th paragraph.

In the Feb. 25 story "Free speech, student aid....," please change "blind" to "deaf" in the 3rd paragraph.

In the March 2 story "Alliance to continue...", change Greenville, N.C., to Greenville, S.C., in the 19th paragraph.

And in the 3rd paragraph of the same story, add the words "about 300" after "Hastey told."

Thank you.

***** END *****