

LIGHT

Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

July 1981



Inside LIGHT

This issue of LIGHT considers three areas in which Southern Baptists are not known for their expertise. We hope your impressions are changed after reading these articles!

Politics and Christian Ministry

John Buchanan, former United States Representative from Alabama and Southern Baptist pastor, gives an inside look at his pilgrimage as minister and congressman. He presents an excellent perspective on the Christian's calling to be a personal and social witness.

Human Rights

Bob Adams, former missionary to South America and chairman of the Department of Christian Ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, reflects on Southern Baptists' responsibilities in human rights. His biblical and theological base serve as a basic primer for gaining a clear understanding of human rights.

Moral Decision Making

"If only I knew the will of God on this matter," is a common phrase among Christians. David Matthews, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina, believes we know more of the will of God than we think. His article, "Moral Decision Making," gives a clear outline on Christian decision making.—WMT

Prophet and Pastor/Foy Valentine	2
In Addition	2
Baptists and Human Rights/Bob Adams	3
Politics and Christian Ministry/John Buchanan	6
Moral Decision Making/David Matthews	10
On the Ethics Front	12

Prophet and Pastor

Christians are called, Paul says, in one hope of our calling and know one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ, he went on, God has given "some, prophets. . . and some pastors. . ." (Ephesians 4:12 and 4:11).

The offices of both prophet and pastor are ordained by God. Neither office is expendable. Both are necessary to the life and health of the church. Neither can be neglected without harm to the body of Christ. One cannot ignore or denigrate the other without damage to both. They are, to use the words from ancient Chinese cosmology, the yin and the yang of the church's spiritual well-being.

In today's churches the offices have generally been combined. It is important for us to take great care, with such a combination of offices, not to sound one note to the exclusion of the other. Too much emphasis on the innovating work of the prophet would result in fragmentation, and too much emphasis on the conserving work of the pastor would result in stagnation.

Jerusalem honored its priests for their pastoral work of conserving the established structures and stoned its prophets for their innovative work of challenging the status quo. Jesus did not condemn Jerusalem for supporting or even praising its pastor-priests but wept over it for rejecting and even killing its seer-prophets (Matthew 23:27).

Both the prophet and the pastor have a life-wish for the church. The prophet pursues his dream of truth and peace and justice while the pastor pursues his dream of help and comfort and ministry; and God is the giver of both dreams.

In the ongoing life of the church, how can we save the structure with all that is in it that is worth saving and at the same time renew the organization

after the pattern of the ideal and keep the church moving forward aggressively to do God's work in the world?

Perhaps we can learn from a famous teacher. Roland H. Bainton, author of the great biography of Martin Luther, *Here I Stand*, and long-time church history professor at Yale, recently made a statement illustrating how the pastor with his God-given commitment to conservation and the prophet with his God-given commitment to innovation can collaborate for the common good.

William Pitt (1759-1806) served as Prime Minister in England and William Wilberforce (1759-1833) served as a member of Parliament. They were good friends even though the friendship suffered strain through Wilberforce's unrelenting opposition to slavery which he wanted to focus on in every session of Parliament but which Pitt resisted lest opposition to anti-slavery harden to the detriment of both the slaves and the society. Wilberforce kept hammering away against slavery and Pitt kept inching Parliament along until finally after thirty years the slave trade was abolished, but only the trade. So the pressure was continued for another twenty years until finally, on the day before Wilberforce died, Parliament voted the money to indemnify the slaveholders and free some eight hundred thousand slaves throughout all the British dominions. Pitt and Wilberforce today are buried in Westminster Abbey, side by side.

There is hardly a God-called person of any age or station who could not profitably consider this example of collaboration in prophetic and pastoral concern to the strengthening of the church and the enhancement of his total witness for Jesus Christ.

Joy Valentine

IN ADDITION

Gerald Mann, pastor of Riverbend Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, and Chaplain of the Texas Legislature, has added an intriguing interpretation to the literature on the Sermon on the Mount. His new book is *Why Does Jesus Make Me Nervous?* (Word, 1980, paper \$5.95). The following excerpt from his section on Jesus' teachings about "the narrow way" should tantalize you enough to read more:

"Traditionally, we have interpreted Jesus' words as meaning that the Christian is to take a rigid stance on one side of an issue—a stance which separated him from the world's position. In other words, the 'narrow way' has been viewed as a way of narrow dogmatism, the Christian's duty is to stand for the absolute right against the absolute wrong.

"I do not believe that this was Jesus' idea at all! On the contrary, a close look at Matthew 7 reveals that *the Christian way is the way of moderation*. 'The narrow way' is that thin line between truth and error, right and wrong, liberal and conservative, rigidity and permissiveness. For instance, consider the fact that the most difficult place to stand on any issue is in the middle. It's easy to take one side or the other, but if one tries to stand between the two and do justice to both, he is scorned and rejected by those on either side. . . . And yet that is precisely the place where Jesus calls us to live as his disciples. . . . His problem was that he accepted some of the truth from everyone, but all of the truth from no one. The narrow way is the middle way, which attempts 'to bring the world in and keep worldliness out.' "

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Baptists and Human Rights

by Bob Adams

"I have a right to _____" "We have a right to _____" "You have no right to do _____ to me nor to us." To begin a discussion on human rights we do not have to fill in those blank spaces, although we will have to fill them in before ending the discussion. The words *I*, *we*, *you*, *me*, and *us* really commence the discussion. Human rights include every human being.

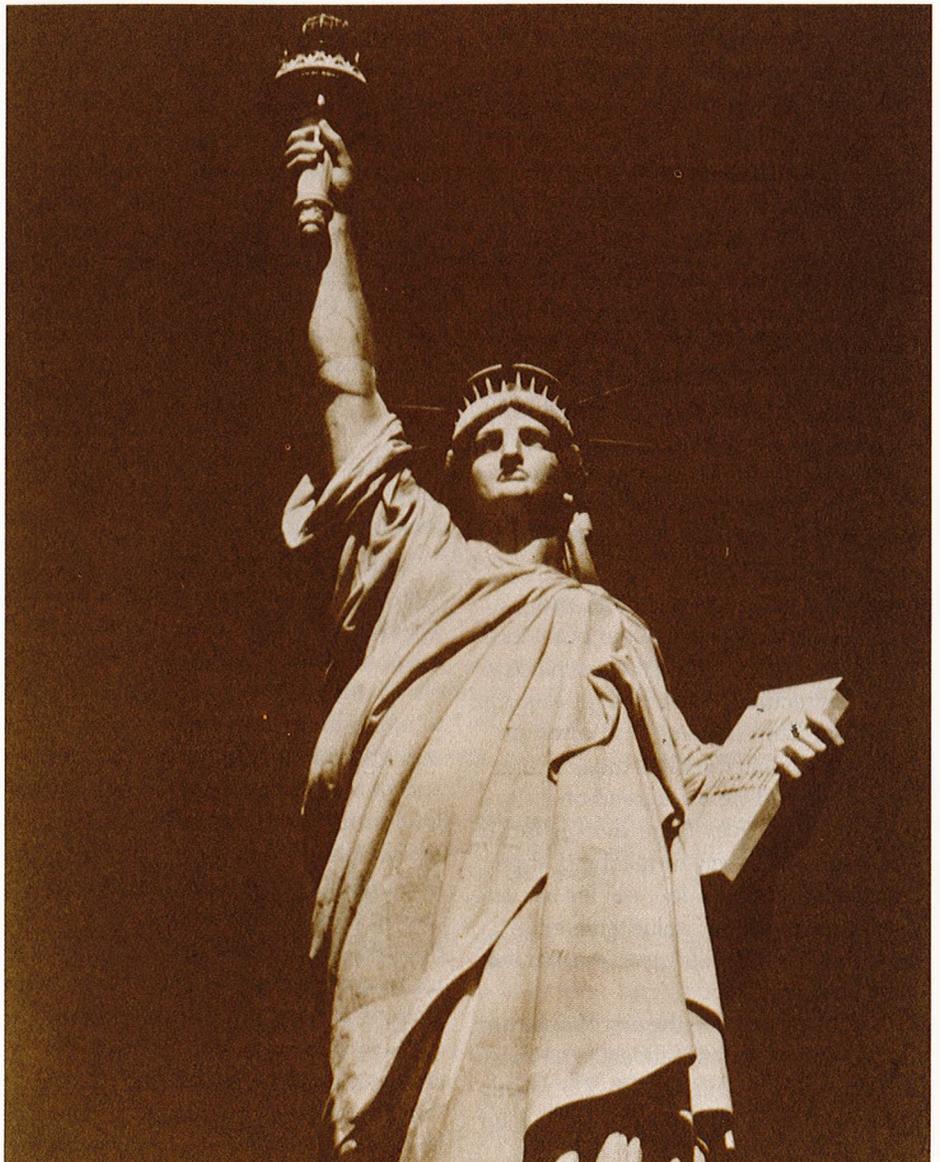
What part of the globe is home to me, what color my skin happens to be, what language I speak, what gender I am, my age, my intelligence, what religion or lack of religion I hold to—all these and other modifying terms, which can be so important in other contexts, fall irrelevant before the qualifier *human*.

When we speak and think of human rights, then every human being is included. To be able to say, "We have a right to _____ because we are human beings" places us on the foundation upon which all other human claims and rights are based.

The only way to deny human rights at this basic, foundational level is to deny the humanity of some individual or group. Such denial usually has taken a partial form. That is, some more powerful group says to a less powerful group, "You may be human, but we are more human than you are." Then if human rights are discussed, those that understand themselves to be more human will also understand themselves to have more or greater rights. Sadly, both history and the contemporary world furnish many examples of one group denying another's full humanity and so denying their enjoyment of human rights.

Until recently, prejudicial and discriminatory practices against blacks and native Americans in the United States and its territories were based on a partial denial, at least, of the full humanity of people who made up such groups. The same things occurred in Spanish and Portuguese America. The classic example in the western world has been the way Jews have been the object of such prejudice and discrimination.

July 1981



Human Rights— What Are They?

If, then, human rights are those rights to be enjoyed by every human being, exactly what are they? Where can we find a listing of them? Will everyone agree on the list? To answer these questions we could go one of two directions. We could look for a listing to which most, if not all, peoples contemporary with us agree. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations is surely the best example. Surely most Southern Baptists agree

with this declaration, which precedes and is so similar to the "Declaration of Human Rights" which the messengers to the 1978 session of the Southern Baptist Convention adopted. Yet all of us know that the 1978 Declaration represented the thinking of those messengers, and conceivably might not represent the thinking of some other part or future group of messengers. Probably the same kinds of qualifications would have to be made of the United Nations.

Such declarations represent the thinking, and we trust the best thinking, which
continued on page 4



Declaration of Human Rights

PREAMBLE. Human rights is a major moral issue of our time. It has captured the attention of the world. Introduced into the political equation it has threatened world peace on the one hand and engendered new hope for the oppressed on the other. Widespread abuses of human rights have helped create a rising tide of concern for the poor, for ethnic minorities, for dissenters, and for political prisoners. Baptist churches have a stake in the issue of human rights for our own Baptist history and heritage have been formed in a crucible which has both demanded and produced human rights.

DEFINITION. Southern Baptists believe that humanity is created by God in God's own image (Genesis 1:26-27). We believe that in Jesus Christ, God "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). We believe, as our nation's founders said in the Declaration of Independence, that all persons "are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." And we believe with the framers of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights that human rights include **freedom from** involuntary servitude, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, torture, unfair trial, cruel and unusual punishment, and invasion of privacy; **rights to** family life, property, work, and equal pay for equal work as well as food, shelter, health care, and education; and **freedom of** thought, speech, assembly, religion, movement, and participation in government.

BIBLICAL BASIS. Southern Baptists stand for the worth of the individual, the priesthood of the believer, freedom of conscience, and the sanctity of life. We hold that these human rights are the gift of God. We believe that they spring from the Bible's revelation that all persons are made in "the likeness of God" (James 3:9, RSV). We believe that they are vitally related to Christ's life and work and death and resurrection whereby, "having slain the enemy" (Ephesians 2:16) by bringing alienation and hostility an end, He brought into being a new humanity oriented toward "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). We believe that they coincide with the Bible's teachings in support of justice, mercy, peace, and righteousness. We believe that every human being has basic human rights which may not rightly be relinquished, abridged, or denied. Moreover, we believe that Jesus Christ revealed His own support for human rights when He declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19, RSV).

SCOPE. Today we are confronted with abuses of human rights at home and abroad. As in the days of the prophets, God has

looked for justice among the people of the earth and too often has found exploitation; He has looked for peace and too often has found bloodshed; He has looked for righteousness and too often has found the cry of the poor, the hungry, the orphaned, the widowed, and the oppressed (Psalm 10:18; Isaiah 1:23, 3:14-15; Amos 2:6-7; James 1:27-2:1-9). We are gravely concerned about the widespread denial of human rights at the hands of our political allies as well as our political adversaries. Our concern for tortured, unjustly imprisoned, and politically oppressed persons abroad is matched by our concern for the rights of women, blacks, ethnic minorities, the poor, the aging, the sick, and abused children in our midst. Christians are obligated not only to provide in Jesus' name cups of cold water for individuals whose human rights have been violated but also to deal in a forthright and corrective way with social structures which abuse and violate human rights. We are determined not to take our own rights and freedoms so lightly that we ignore the rights and freedoms of others no matter how far away or how small or weak they are; and we are determined to be courageous defenders of human rights who will not be deterred in the fight to make all people free.

CALL TO ACTION. We therefore issue this call to action on behalf of human rights.

Let Southern Baptist **citizens** be committed to political action on behalf of human rights at home and abroad, responsibly involving ourselves as God's salt, God's light, and God's leaven in the whole political process.

Let Southern Baptist **pastors**, knowing that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (Corinthians 3:17), preach the Word of God without fear or favor as it highlights human rights.

Let Southern Baptist **churches** be boldly involved in championing justice for the oppressed, providing food for the hungry, supporting changes in those laws and systems which abuse the poor while providing loopholes for the rich, doing the things that make for peace, and effecting change where change is needed to support basic human rights.

Let Southern Baptist **agencies** demonstrate by words and deeds unswerving loyalty to Christ issuing in uncompromised and uncompromising commitment to human rights.

Let Southern Baptists not be weighed and found wanting in commitment to God-given and Bible-based human rights. Let us heed Jesus who said, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, and I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me . . . As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:35-36, 40, RSV).

RECOMMENDATION. The Christian Life Commission recommends the adoption of this Declaration.

This declaration, drafted by the Christian Life Commission, was presented to the 1978 Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta by the commission chairman, Forrest Siler of Oklahoma. It was approved without amendments by Convention messengers.

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continued from page 4

is subject to alteration. Good though they are, they really represent a second stage in a process. Let us find, if we can, what is for us the first stage in that process.

Human Rights and the Bible

If we could ask some messenger to the 1978 Convention session why he or she voted for the Declaration of Human Rights, we would finally arrive at a statement something like this: "I voted for it because I believe that is what the Bible teaches and that is what God wants." Then and only then would we have arrived at the first stage, the foundation of the process.

For us as Baptists, the final and irreducible question is, "What has God said on the matter?" and the first place to which we recur to answer that question is the Bible. Baptists may, and often do, disagree on what the Bible means in certain places, but we are agreed on its importance in our lives. If we are convinced and agreed on a given teaching, then that teaching is foundational for us. Authoritative teaching, voluntarily accepted, is the second way to answer the basic question.

I want to assert that the first chapters of Genesis speak authoritatively to us about human rights. Genesis 1:26-2:3 relates the creation of human beings, and their God-given rights and responsibilities. First among those rights and responsibilities was their relationships to God: they (*both*) were made in his image and received communication (blessing and instruction) from him. They were also to enjoy sexual and family fulfillment. They were to enjoy a meaningful and positive relationship to the earth, the basic mode of material production.

They were to enjoy the primary fruit of their labor, food. By extension, they were to enjoy definite and periodic changes in work and production patterns and in rest. God gave these rights and responsibilities to the first humans, and although sin disrupted their functioning,

God himself never abrogated any of them.

Part of the story of the Bible concerns man's response to God's continuing initiative in these very areas. Many of the things that Jesus did and said clarify and reinforce those first God-given rights. Many sad pages of human history are filled with man's attempts to distort or destroy the same God-given rights.

From a biblical perspective, then, these five seem to be the basic human rights: (1) to respond to God's initiative, his grace and love (2) to enjoy sexual and family fulfillment (3) to relate meaningfully and positively to the forces of production, that is, to work (4) to enjoy the fruit of their labor, basically and typically, food (5) to enjoy meaningful periods of rest from the customary and necessary work activities. It is essential to note that these rights were given to both male and female human beings.

Today we customarily express our thinking about human rights in terms of societies and their institutions, such as religion, family, economics and state. Obviously there is a continuing struggle to attain even the semblance of justice and efficiency in recognizing, securing and guaranteeing these rights. Just as obviously, neither all human beings nor human groupings agree as to the source of human rights in God. As Baptists, our faith in God and our relationship to Him through Jesus Christ make us responsible for giving tangible witness to our convictions concerning human rights.

There is an analogy between Paul's recognition of the Athenians' serving an "unknown God" and our recognition of our contemporaries' struggle for human rights. Just as Paul did not negate the value of the Athenians' response, neither should we reject or ignore our fellow humans' search and struggle.

We need do no more than turn on the evening news, or scan the daily paper to be made excruciatingly aware of the abuse and negation of human rights, in our local communities and in our global community. One manifestation of the sin which so easily besets us is our willingness to take advantage of our fellow human beings in ways that deny them the enjoyment of human rights. Another, deeper manifestation of sin is the way in which we whitewash and gloss over our

advantage-taking and even justify it in the name, say, of national security or some economic system. It is true that the global situation is exceedingly complex, and it is difficult to know what to do that will both advance the human rights situation and give best expression to the Good News in Jesus Christ. The two march together, and from a Baptist perspective, the one cannot advance without expressing the other.

Human Rights and Missions

Our mission endeavors have customarily concentrated on giving verbal expression to the Good News in Jesus Christ. There must never be a minimizing of that expression. But the same Lord to whom we bear witness lived a life, died a death and rose a resurrection that sought and offered abundant, full life to all. In those times and at those places where we have soft-pedalled the Gospel expression of abundant life in every dimension, others have moved in with their evangels and captured the multitudes. Authentic mission spontaneously occurs as God's people live all the Gospel as they simultaneously give verbal witness to it.

We as Baptists surely want to live to the fullest those rights which we believe God has given to all human beings. We will at the same time want to press for the living of the same rights on the part of all peoples of all places. To split the two apart, to want for ourselves what we would deny to others, is rank hypocrisy. We can and should cooperate with people of good will everywhere, who desire the same rights for all.

A full commitment to human rights forms the basis, under God, for a trustworthy, just human community. A full expression of human rights is the goal toward which true human community, under God, strives. We as Baptists believe that such a community ultimately takes place as human beings joyfully recognize Jesus the Christ as Lord.

Bob Adams is former missionary to South America and chairman of the Department of Christian Ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Politics and Christian Ministry

EDITORS NOTE: The following LIGHT interview was conducted with John Buchanan, former eight-term Republican Congressman from Alabama. The interview gives insight to Buchanan's pilgrimage in fulfilling his call to Christian ministry through active involvement in politics.

LIGHT: Please share some highlights from your personal Christian pilgrimage.

Buchanan: Before I entered Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, indeed before I entered the ministry, I was a graduate of Samford University in economics and history and had done graduate work in economics at the University of Virginia. I carried with me therefore to the seminary and into the ministry a strong interest in certain political and economic questions, the kind of issues with which we deal in Washington. I had the privilege of completing seminary and serving for some ten years in Baptist churches in Virginia and Tennessee and Alabama. While pastor of a young church which I helped to organize in the Birmingham area, I was approached by the Republican chairman asking me to serve as one of their candidates for the Congress. After my wife and I had thought and prayed about it, we decided this was a new opportunity for a different kind of ministry and I resigned my church in order to enter the political race. Through the years since I have felt very strongly that our Lord opened to us a new area of service: and I agree most strongly with the thirteenth chapter of Romans in which public officials are described as ministers of God and servants of God. I think public office in its highest dimension can be nothing less than a ministry.

LIGHT: During your sixteen years in the House of Representatives, how did you allow your Christian values to work in your own political decision making?

Buchanan: While it was a great privilege to represent the people of my all-American city of Birmingham and while I had great confidence in the people I represented as representing some of the qualities that made our nation great in my Bible Belt district where many people are people of faith and of Christian character, it was always clear to me as a Christian that I had one Lord and Him only could I serve. On the bottom line



John Buchanan

I think a Christian must look first to our Lord for his own personal instructions in life. For example, when I met with the Moral Majority representatives during their march to Washington, I thanked them for their prayers and for their concern. I told them how much I appreciated their desire that our country have a religious revival and how I shared their conviction that Jesus Christ is the hope of men and nations. But I pointed out that the body has many members and not every member has the same function and what I had heard from our Lord was, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me." And because he laid that burden so much on me, that burden of world hunger and of the needs of the people in this and other societies, it influenced very heavily how I voted.

LIGHT: During your eight terms in the House of Representatives, how did you handle the matter of political give and take, which is sometimes called compromise, in view of your Christian commitment to the principles of truth and justice and peace and righteousness?

Buchanan: I will respond with two stories. In my first race, I walked into the office of a certain prominent newspaper editor in Alabama and he said to me, "You may be different so far as some people are concerned, but so far as I'm concerned you're just another politician like the rest, and if you're not a crook now, I'll give you six months in office and you will be." And I said, "Sir, if that's the way you feel you'd be immoral to give me your support and I hope you will oppose me in your newspaper." Whereupon I left his office. I later told the story to Walter Judd. This was his last year in Congress. He said that I should go back and tell my friend that if a man is going to be a crook he can be a crook pastoring a church, working in a factory, serving in public office, or editing a newspaper. If he's going to be a Christian, he can be a Christian serving in public office, or pastoring a church, or working in a factory, or even editing a newspaper. I have found that there are many people, more than most of us know to be the case, who are sincerely taking this stand as Christian people trying to do what is right under God, for the people, in Congress and out of it, in public life in this country. And it isn't that hard to do. Secondly, when I was a freshman Congressman, I was very troubled over an issue before us and I had a growing feeling that one way was the right way to vote. But I knew it wasn't a very safe way to vote and it would be much safer and perhaps more popular to vote the other way. John Burns who was then the ranking Republican on the Ways and Means Committee said to me, "John, always do what in your heart you believe to be right because then you can defend your position even with those with whom you disagree. But if you try to base your vote on what is popular or what is expedient, the chances are that you won't even be able to defend your vote to yourself much less anybody else." I did find it true in my experience that it was often hard to know what was right to do. It was a good deal harder to know what was right to do than it was to do what was right when I understood it.

LIGHT: As a further question related to this issue of compromise, would you accept the

definition of politics as practicing the art of the possible?

Buchanan: Well, of course, there are certain kinds of compromises upon which the whole country is built, from the Constitutional Convention forward. And there are times when you have to settle for half a loaf. When I was first elected, I gathered together about me those of the black leadership in our community who would meet with me, and that wasn't too many because I was a Goldwater Republican. I said, "I think there are three essential postures a man can hold in public life right now in the Southern United States. One posture is to stand in the schoolhouse door and say, 'Never!' I promise you I will never do that. The second thing he can do is to become so identified with your cause that, in a district like mine where there is a 70 percent white constituency, I serve one term, getting so far ahead of and away from the people that I lose my chance to serve any further and commit political suicide in the process. I am going to try to avoid that. There is a third course and that is going step by step in what you believe to be a right direction, trying never to go so far that you lose contact with the people and your chance to lead further but trying never to be so timid that you become a stumbling block rather than a stepping stone." I do think in politics you have to make some decisions like that, that today we can only get half a loaf and only go one step, so that another day we can go another step forward.

LIGHT: Mr. Buchanan, you come from a very strong Baptist heritage and have a commitment from that heritage and as a Baptist yourself to separation of church and state; so let me ask you in the light of those convictions that I know you hold, how can you, as a Christian, counsel other Christians to influence public policy when those Christians believe in separation of church and state?

Buchanan: I think certainly that we do well to guard with vigor and eternal vigilance the principle of separation. It is absolutely vital to all the things that we as Baptists believe and to the religious liberty we hold dear as American citizens. I think also we need to remember that our Lord has said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's: and unto God the things that are God's," that he has made plain that we do have responsibilities as citizens: and in our free society we, the people, are the ultimate authority. He said that we are to be the salt and the

...Politics

light in society, to influence it in the right direction. I think the salt and light of our influence must shine into all the dark corners in every aspect of our society, including politics and government. So I would say as individual Christians we have a positive obligation to involve ourselves, to inform ourselves on the issues, to listen to the voice of conscience within us, to seek God's guidance as individuals, and to assume the responsibility of being an active, involved citizen and trying to make sure that the Republican Party and the Democratic Party and, indeed, the whole process of politics and government is influenced for good by our active participation in it. Let me emphasize that I am not talking about our actions as a denomination or as churches. I am talking about individual Christians fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens.

LIGHT: Do we need a Christian political party?

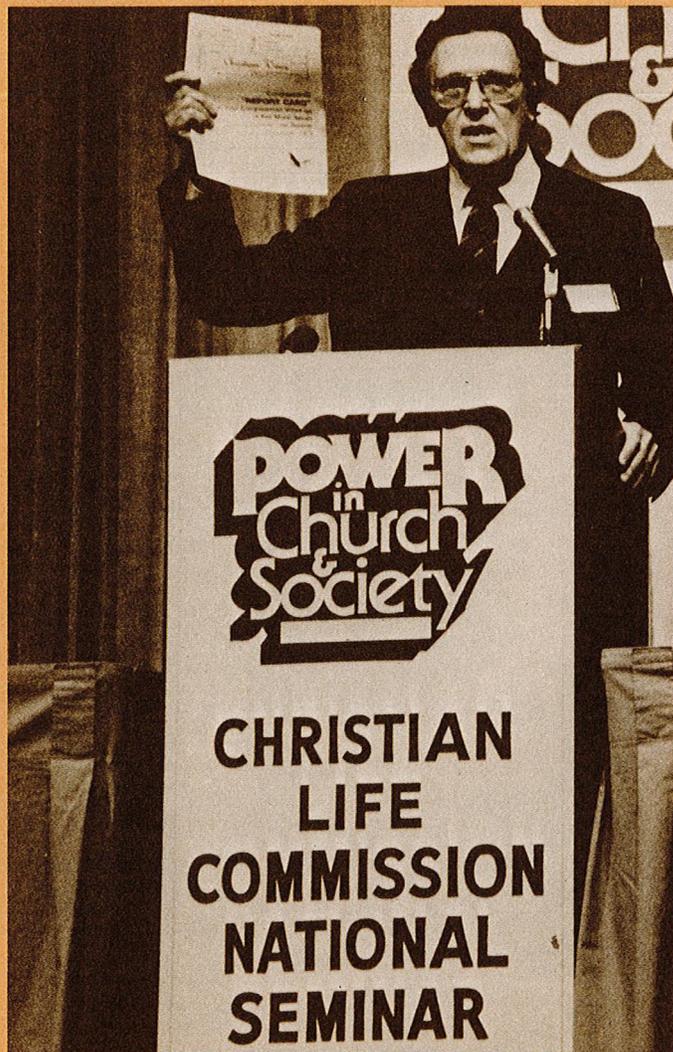
Buchanan: There are those in Moral Majority who believe that we now have one. They have always identified themselves to me as *the* Christians; but the truth is if we had a Christian political party, it would have to embrace both Republicans and Democrats, both conservatives and liberals, and everybody in between. One of the things that I have noticed is that some of the finest, most dedicated Christian people I have known have been very liberal Democrats. Some of the finest Christian people I have known have been very conservative Republicans and I have known a good many somewhere in between. So, if we are going to have a Christian party, it had better be a very, very broad umbrella that goes from the right of the Republican Party all the way to the left of the Democratic Party.

LIGHT: Have Christian political parties worked in other political systems in history?

Buchanan: No. It is always a very, very bad idea.

LIGHT: What can be done to help restore confidence in government?

Buchanan: I believe we greatly need much broader, more active participation by Christian people in politics and government. We also need to encour-



age leaders to lead. I know there is always a temptation to do what is popular, what is easy, what can be simplistically explained, what can be put down in catch phrases. Often the decisions of government, like the decisions of life itself, are difficult; and what we need is men and women to have the courage and the integrity to lead, to be willing to take the flak when a decision isn't necessarily popular, to understand that it is more important to do what is right than to remain in public office if the choice has to come to that. I personally think the American people are hungry for such leadership. I believe where it is encouraged, the people will reward it and follow it rather than cut off the individual who tries honestly to stand up for what he or she believes to be right even when it is complicated and hard to understand and even when it isn't as popular as a more easy course.

LIGHT: What are some of the most effective ways Christian citizens can amplify their voices in the political arena?

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Buchanan: What we must have is Christian people and Christian leaders who will fully inform themselves on the issues and then responsibly speak out, not representing a special interest, not with glib phrases but with an honest and forthright stand on such matters as civil rights, world hunger, problems of alcohol in our society, and those "things which make for peace." I think Christian people have an obligation to take a forthright stand on those matters that are matters of Christian concern, but our stands must be responsibly made on the basis of fulfilling what the Bible has taught us, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." I think there is a need for our voices to be heard and for Christian people to stand for public office, to involve themselves in the issues and in the activities of political parties, and to lend their abilities and their influence to the political process.

LIGHT: How do you view the so-called new religious right?

Buchanan: I feel the new religious right is comprised of a great many people who are sincere but who are mistaken in their approach to American politics and in their understanding of the Christian faith and particularly the Christian faith as approached by Baptists through the years. It is simply not possible to judge a man's faith or character on the basis of his philosophical outlook as to whether he is a political liberal or a conservative, a Democrat or a Republican. We are not made Christians by a laundry list of positions on political issues. As I once said to a group from the Moral Majority, it is wonderful to know that our salvation does not depend on politics of the right nor politics of the left, but on faith in and relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, plus or minus nothing.

LIGHT: What are some major issues which we are facing in the political arena for the near future?

Buchanan: The problems and process as related to peace, world hunger; the economic crisis in our country and its impact upon the disadvantaged in our own society; the continuing struggle for the rights of the people of our society regardless of race or sex or economic situation; the struggle for the rights of the people in the world for whom Christ died and whom God loves; the crisis in public education; the breakdown of a

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commitment to the rule of law in our society; and continuing problems related to alcohol and drug abuse—these are some that come readily to mind.

LIGHT: One last question, Mr. Buchanan. What is your opinion regarding the validity of Christian citizens organizing to inform themselves and then to seek to have a more significant impact in the political arena?

Buchanan: I think one of the problems of the present time is that we have a highly organized and highly motivated minority of Evangelical Christian media personalities who are having great impact on the political process through their very highly organized political "educational activity." The broad mainstream of Christians in general and the broad mainstream of Baptist Christians in particular continue in the state of apathy that is all too typical of American citizens. If someone threatened to take our vote away, we would all be willing to go do battle with the last ounce of our energy against that person who would take away our right to vote. But we don't exercise it. I feel it is essential that those of us who do represent the broad sweep and mainstream of Baptist Christians, for example, involve ourselves, inform ourselves, and get together to discuss the issues and to learn about them. If we're going to have the kind of balance in American politics that our country needs and if we're going to have the kind of participation by Christians and Christian leadership people that can keep our country strong and pure, we do need to inform ourselves and to involve ourselves. Particularly in the present situation where we have a militant minority that is exercising great influence and is very vocal, I think it is time for the rest of us to speak and to act. I urge the Christian Life Commission to intensify its efforts to help Baptists to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in political matters.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

How Can I Know God's Will?

by David Matthews

In John Dewey's best-known work, *Human Nature and Conduct*, the dean of American philosophers wrote:

The foremost conclusion is that morals has to do with all activity into which alternative possibilities enter. For wherever they enter a difference between better and worse arises. Reflection upon action means uncertainty and consequent need of decision as to which course is better. . . . Actually then only deliberate action, conduct into which reflective choice enters, is distinctively moral, for only then does there enter the question of better and worse.

Dewey goes on to insist that even conduct that is due to "impulse and matter-of-fact habit" is within the scope of morals, because it partakes of this "better-or-worse quality." But the point is, even for the secular philosopher, moral conduct hinges on a decision. "Because," writes Dewey, "there is no final recipe by which to decide this question, all moral judgment is experimental. . . ."

Sooner or later, for everyone, the great problem in moral decision making comes to be that of *knowledge*. Sometimes we know what is the good or right thing to do, and then the issue is a matter of the will. Sometimes the question is merely whether or not I am willing to do what I know I should do. But there are other times, enormously frustrating, when we find ourselves in a moral dilemma in which a decision must be made and we sense our lack of knowledge as to what is the good or the better or the best. It is true, as Dewey has said, that there is in every moral choice a dimension of uncertainty.

Sometimes this dimension of uncertainty is so large that it almost paralyzes my decision-making ability. Most of us, for example, have worked with young people who are frustrated at precisely

Out of my experience both with life and with the Word of God, I have an affirmation to make: God's will is something you can know. It does not have to be lost in mystery.

this point. In adolescence the world becomes extremely complex. Issues are no longer simply black or white, and interpreted by some unquestioned authority figure. The young person not infrequently goes to a minister or counselor and almost begs that person to become an authority figure in the gray areas he is experiencing. "Please tell me what is right and what is wrong in this matter! Give me knowledge," the young person is saying, "out of which I can make this moral decision."

For young people and adults alike, the Bible can be extremely problematic at this point. So often it does not *appear* to give us answers we need to make the moral judgments we must make. I remember people from my youth who wore out Bibles trying to make a substantive case against dancing. And it has not been a little disconcerting to discover social drinkers and teetotalers, integrationists and segregationists, pacifists and war-makers, all using the Bible to support their moral choices.

Here is a matter of immense importance: In the New Testament the emphasis is rather consistently placed, not on *knowing* the will of God, but on *doing* the will of God. Throughout the New Testament, when the subject of God's will is mentioned, there is usually simply an admonition to *do* the will of God.

Twenty centuries later people living in a wasteland world, desperately in search

of life's meaning, read those simple admonitions and cry: But how can we *do* God's will if we do not *know* God's will? A fellow named Parendelli has a play entitled, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. That describes our world pretty well. We are confused characters looking for the script, looking for someone who can make sense out of our living, looking for a word of instruction concerning where we should go and what we should do. "Do the will of God," the Bible says. "But we don't know the will of God," we answer back. "That is precisely what we are looking for!"

All my life the subject of "God's will" has been shrouded in mystery. As a young person facing all the uncertainties of the future, not knowing what I was to do or who I was to become, and perplexed by questions of rightness and wrongness, the church sent me in search of God's will. The impression I was given was that God's will for my life was a secret subject, but when I found it all my questions about my life would be answered.

I heard a thousand testimonies that encouraged that impression. People said that life had been a giant puzzle until (usually suddenly and dramatically) they discovered God's will. Then all the pieces fell in place. So I began waiting for a sign, a voice, a bolt of lightning. Someday I would know. Meanwhile, the Bible

seemed to be saying only: "Do the will of God."

Out of my experience both with life and with the Word of God, I have an affirmation to make: *God's will is something you can know*. It does not have to be lost in mystery. It does not have to be God's great "Easter egg hunt" for his human children. God's will can be *known*. Further, I want to affirm that God's will is something that can be known *now*. God's will does not have to be spoken of only in the future tense. It can be known in life's present tense.

How can I say that to you? Some of you have struggled literally for years in search of the will of God. Some of you have agonized in prayer, Bible study, and counsel, waiting for the revelation of God's will. Some of you have waited and worked long enough to have become suspicious of simple answers. Some of you have done everything you know to do, and have almost given up ever finding what you seek. How can I muster the audacity to say that God's will is something that can be *known now*?

Here is the answer I want you to consider: *I believe God's will is something you can know now because I believe God's will is something you do know now*. I am not playing with you. This is no word game. I intend the statement exactly as I said it.

First, I believe the Word of God assumes you already know the will of God when it simply says: "Do God's will." It doesn't spend much time on *knowing* God's will since it is something you already know.

Second, this is the only point of view that is compatible with my understanding of God. God is Father. The God of the Bible is a God of grace, love, infinite care. Such a God does not hide his will from his children. What kind of God, having a purpose and will for his creatures, would refuse to reveal it to them?

I tell you, God's will is something you *can* know because God's will is something you *do* know.

For instance, let's suppose I was led into a large room covered with chalkboards. And let's further suppose that I was asked to begin writing on those boards all the things I *know* are God's will for my life. The results might surprise us both.

Jesus says if we will do what we know of God's will, our knowledge will become increasingly more clear.

Maybe I would start with some very general things. I know, for example, that God's will is that I be a better Christian (whatever I understand that to mean). I know that God's will is that I more faithfully develop and use my vocational skills. I know that God's will is that I be a more sensitive husband, and I know some of the very specific things that means for me. I know that God's will is that I be a more responsible parent, and I am painfully aware of some things that means specifically. I know that God's will is for me to relate more to all persons on the basis of agape, and with some specific individuals I already know how that applies. I know that God's will is for me to become a more disciplined student of his Word. I know that God's will for me is that I grow through prayer. I know that God's will for me involves the vast subject of stewardship; and, if I have not worked out all that this means in terms of time, talents, and so forth, I know almost more than I care to know what it means in terms of my possessions. I know that God's will for me is integrity, honesty; and I could fill several chalkboards with the things I know that means for me specifically.

I could go on and on. The point is, I could exhaust all the chalkboard space available with my knowledge of God's will for me personally.

You say: "But that isn't what I mean by God's will." Right. Therein is part of the problem. When most of us speak of "the will of God" we actually mean God's will-in-certain-select-areas, the areas most important to us. As a young person I thought of God's will only in connection with where I was to go to college, what I was to do as a career, who I was to marry, and how much fun I could have in the meantime and still be moral.

I never made the kind of discovery of God's will I was looking for. You see, I was actually looking for Aladdin's lamp. I did begin to discover such things as this: "God's will means character long before

it means career." I began to discover that in those areas most important to God he had already shown me his will.

Please begin to see with me how foolish it is for us to complain about those things we do not know when we have so miserably failed to live up to what we know. Please begin to see with me how utterly false is all our supposed darkness and how the light literally shines all about us. We are not blind, God is not stubborn: we merely have our hands over our eyes.

There is one thing more. We must begin to see that in the Bible there is more emphasis on the *doing* that leads to *knowing* than on the *knowing* that leads to *doing*. For example, in John 7:17, Jesus says: "If any man's will is to do God's will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God. . . ."

We say to God: "Help me to know your will so that I may do it (maybe!)." Jesus says if we will do what we know of God's will, our knowledge will become increasingly more clear.

A young man was standing in a dark corridor of a train station directly in front of a telephone booth. It was too dark for him to read the directory or to make his call. He could find no light. Suddenly he heard an instructive suggestion from behind him: "Hey, you've got to step inside that thing before the light will come on." He stepped into the dark booth and as the sliding door closed behind him the light came on.

So it is. Take the step you know to take, even if sometimes it appears to be a step in the dark, and you will never be without the light you need. He has shown you, O man, what is "best." And he waits with an eternity of light for your eyes to see.

David Matthews is pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina. He delivered this address at a Christian Life Commission conference at Ridgecrest, North Carolina.

ON THE ETHICS FRONT

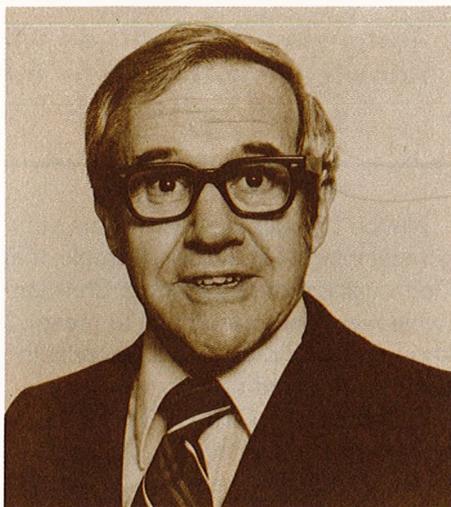
This is the first in a series highlighting state Christian social ethics personnel.

"Georgia's Christian ethics conscience is coming alive," says J. Estille Jones, consultant in Christian ethics, family life and administration for the Georgia Baptist Convention.

"The areas of race relations, labor-management stress, environmental concerns, hunger, poverty, and church programming are among our concerns for the 80s," Jones says.

Though the Georgia convention has had a Christian Life Committee for many years, Jones' position was made a part of the convention structure only last year.

Estille Jones brings a rich background of experience to his job. His denomination roots go back to his work with the Oklahoma Baptist Convention as a college student. After earning an A.B. degree from Oklahoma Baptist University in 1942, Jones went on to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. During his early seminary days he did summer work with the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Later, he worked in the Church Training Department of the Kentucky convention. From 1946 to 1958, Jones served on the faculty of Southern Seminary in New Testament Studies. In that same span of years, he received his Th.M. (1945) and Th.D. (1949) degrees from Southern.



J. Estille Jones

Following his teaching stint at Southern, Jones was a pastor for almost twenty years in Georgia, moving from the Dogwood Hills Baptist Church in East Point to his present job.

Jones rather modestly explains, "If I have any expertise, it is at the point of Bible study. My graduate work in New Testament Studies and my teaching in that area have provided a continuing challenge in the practical application of New Testament ethics." Relating how he applies New Testament studies to contemporary issues, Jones says, "I try to avoid the pitfalls of legalism and literalism in my clear dedication to New

Testament studies. The Bible . . . offers both counsel and direction to the practitioner. It is not to be understood, however, in negatives but in the positive affirmation of Christian love. Responsibility is a key word, and relationships provide the arena."

Estille Jones says he "enjoys most the relationships that I am having with young pastors in helping them to see the demands of Christian ethics in their ministry."

As another way to relate Christian ethics to Georgia Baptists, Jones is able to utilize *The Christian Index*, the state convention paper, as a forum for Christian ethics. Jack Harwell, the editor, has asked Jones to write a column each week entitled "Believing and Behaving."

Writing is not a new avenue of ministry for Jones. He has written several articles and reviews for theological journals and has written for the Sunday School Board's adult Uniform and Life and Work series. He also wrote Sunday School lessons for *The Christian Index*.

Jones adds to his list of published material study guides on Mark, Luke, and Colossians. *Working Together in Christ's Mission: Acts* is his most recent book.

Estille Jones and his wife, the former Elsie Violet Moak of Rome, Georgia, have three children—Jack, Jean, and Judson.



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