



# ETHICS IN THE ORDINANCES

## A Reminder for the Church

I think I had a reasonably clear understanding of ethics before I ever heard the word. My parents saw to that. And my kinfolks, and my public school teachers, and my pastor. Ethics has to do with right and wrong. It has to do with relationships. It has to do with society. It is not, of course, a discipline that stands alone. It has to be part and parcel of everything it touches.

I have come to be deeply impressed by the depth and quality of ethics in the ordinances. For Baptists, there are two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of which are traced to the New Testament churches whose patterns Baptists seek to follow.

Baptism comes first. Baptists have never believed that baptism is necessary to salvation. This does not mean, however, that a low view of baptism is justified or held. On the contrary, baptism is seen as immensely important. It is not optional but mandatory, not to be taken lightly but with utmost solemnity, and not to be entered into with anything short of profound seriousness.

While the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (John's record omits the actual baptism) tell of Jesus' baptism at the hands of John in the Jordan, quoting our Lord, according to Matthew to the effect that "thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," it is to Paul that we most often look for the key New Testament passage related to baptism: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

Ethics in the ordinance of baptism is seen in several ways. Repentance

is a change of mind and heart and will about sin which is both Godward and manward which is prerequisite to baptism as is faith toward God; and both repentance and faith have powerful ethical dimensions requiring the people of God to turn from lives of mark-missing and to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord. No person is a proper candidate for baptism who has not turned from sin, from idolatry, materialism, racism, greed, lust, pride, prejudice, selfishness, and unbelief to a clear and intentional commitment to go with God all the way, for time and eternity.

There is great beauty in this baptism. Total immersion powerfully pictures the old person's death to culture and the new person's resurrection to life in Christ, the burial of the old person and the resurrection of the new person, the dramatic abandoning of old ways of life and the intentional, willful embracing of wonderfully new ways of life.

To come up from the baptismal waters to "walk in newness of life" is to begin to live everyday life in an intensely practical dimension. Family relationships, all human relationships, the world of economics and daily work, citizenship, and all the moral issues with which moral beings must grapple in an immoral society are transformed for the believer by the grace of God. Baptism tells the story. It is permeated with ethics.

Ethics in the Lord's Supper is likewise important. It is to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 that we look for our best-known reference to this ordinance.

When we observe the Lord's Supper, we do it "in remembrance" of him. We remember his humanity. We call to mind his incarnational agenda. We recollect his self-giving

love, his demonstration that the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of right relationships, his personal life in which "he went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

When we hold the Lord's Supper bread in our hands and then put it in our mouths and then chew it and then swallow it, we do a very basic human thing and remember that the great God of creation who made the universe and fashioned the law and ordained the prophets finally took on himself the form of a human being just as we are, who salivated when he chewed the bread just as we do, whose taste buds responded to it just as ours do. That bread, then, is a powerful reminder, as William Temple said, that Christianity is the most worldly of all the great world religions.

When we hold the cup with its fruit of the vine, we solemnly hold a powerful reminder that Jesus' blood (was it O-Positive like most of humanity's?) emphasizes his humanity, his identification with us. We think on the truth that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of this earth" (Acts 17:26). We contemplate the age-old concept that "the life is in the blood" and that in the providence of God it is very much like the life experienced by five billion other human beings.

We drink that cup in the company of other believers and are reminded that "we know we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). And, then, before we leave, we generally sing, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love," affirming our commitment to leave that church service to go out into the world to be the church.

The church will be strengthened if we will carefully consider the ethics in the ordinances.

*Joy Valentine*

Foy Valentine  
Executive Director

**W**hy do our children use drugs? The obvious answer is to "get high," to feel good. But obvious answers aren't always the best. With drugs, there are a whole series of reasons why youth get involved and why they stay involved.

### Setting the Stage

**Friends.** One of the most important reasons youth use any drug is peer pressure. The more their friends do something, the more likely they are to do it. All of us tend to adopt the attitudes of the people we spend our time with. Teenagers spend most of their time at school or in recreational activities with their friends. As a result the most powerful influence on their attitude toward drugs during the teenage years is the attitude of their friends.

Eighty percent of teenagers who drink alcohol say their close friends also drink.<sup>1</sup> Marijuana use by young people has actually decreased since 1977. About three-fourths of high school students now consider marijuana at least as dangerous or more dangerous than alcohol.

Similarly, daily smoking of cigarettes by youth has decreased

substantially as anti-tobacco attitudes have become stronger. Over 70 percent of high school students believe their friends would disapprove of daily use of marijuana, tobacco or alcohol.

On the other hand, only about half feel friends would disapprove of weekend drinking or of occasional recreational marijuana use.<sup>2</sup> According to one recent study, peer pressure is the main reason teens use drugs and alcohol.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, who their friends are makes a difference. The more their friends use drugs and approve of using drugs, the more likely they are to use them themselves. On the other hand, the more their friends refuse to use drugs and disapprove of using drugs, the less likely they are to use them.

**Parents.** A second major reason teenagers use drugs involves their families. Teens are much more likely, for example, to drink or to use drugs if their parents drink. Eighty-two percent of drinking parents raise children who drink. Seventy-two percent of nondrinking parents raise children who don't drink.<sup>4</sup>

How do parents relax and how do they cope with life? Children whose parents either relax or cope by using

alcohol, tobacco or other drugs grow up seeing use of these substances as a normal part of life. If parents disapprove of their children using drugs but use them themselves, teenagers learn that drug use is an adult activity. They often then begin to use drugs themselves as a part of discovering what it means to be an adult.

The important point here is that parental approval or disapproval does not seem to matter as much to teenagers as what the parents actually do. Youth whose parents drink or smoke will be likely to drink and smoke also. They will also be more likely than children of abstainers to use other drugs in addition to alcohol and tobacco.

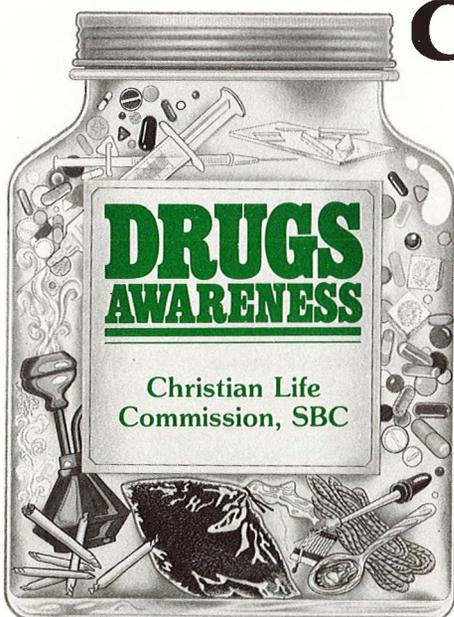
**Popular Culture.** Over the past 20 years, drug use has become more and more accepted in American life. Drug activities are seen on television and in the movies. Drugs are joked about by disc jockeys and sung about by rock groups. In many states marijuana has become one of the largest cash crops. Most high school students have ready access to the more common drugs such as tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana. In some states simple possession of marijuana is no longer a crime. Even in states which have strict laws against drugs, "head shops" often sell all kinds of drug equipment quite legally.

Since drugs are all around us, youth receive a constant stream of messages which seem to say that drug use is okay. Only those with strongly anti-drug peer groups, families and churches appear to have much chance of escaping the influence of the drug culture.

**Personal Problems.** A fourth general category of influence leading to drug use by teens includes a broad range of personal difficulties.

Everybody wants to feel good. Many people, young and old, are bored, restless and unhappy. They turn to drug use as a temporary way of escaping their problems. It doesn't work, of course. Drug use never solves problems. But people refuse to learn. Use of drugs is one of the most common techniques people employ to try to solve their problems.

## WHY DO OUR CHILDREN USE DRUGS?



By Ronald D. Sisk

Youth also face a great many pressures—to achieve, to grow up, to succeed socially. Much stimulant use, for example, is by students trying to stay awake to study or to increase their alertness for an exam. Some teenagers start smoking

mentioned above tends to begin somewhat later. Most cocaine use, for example, begins in the last two years of high school.<sup>8</sup> Generally, older teens use more drugs and more different kinds of drugs than their younger brothers and sisters.

maturity by many.

Getting hooked is a different process for different people. The general term “addiction” means becoming hooked on drugs or being drug dependent. *An addict is a person who needs a drug in order to function.* Addiction has several aspects, however:

**Tolerance.** The first stage in moving toward addiction to a drug is development of tolerance. The first time you smoke cigarettes, you are likely to get sick at your stomach. If you keep smoking, you become used to the smoke and cease getting sick. With alcohol, someone who starts drinking will get drunk much more quickly on a smaller amount of alcohol than someone who is accustomed to its effects.

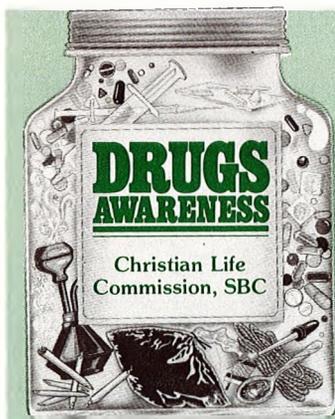
Tolerance works in two ways. With some drugs, the body simply learns to process the chemical substances more efficiently. As the body learns to process the drug, it takes more of the drug to get the same effect. The second form of tolerance develops when the body learns to function even under the influence of the drug. Persons who are tolerant to alcohol may appear to be nearly sober when they’re actually quite drunk.

For some drugs, such as LSD, the body becomes so tolerant after a few days of use that the drug actually stops having any effect. Repeated doses of LSD over a few days time may reduce its effect on the user to zero.

The problem with tolerance, of course, is that people keep taking larger and larger doses trying to get high. Developing tolerance to a drug may lead rapidly to addiction. Tolerance to one effect of some drugs may lead the user to take such large doses that another effect is death.

**Dependence.** When a person needs a drug to get through the day we call that need addiction or dependence. Basically, it means what it says. They are no longer independent. They have become dependent on the drug for mental and/or physical well-being.

*Psychological dependence means feeling emotional or mental craving for a drug.* You believe you need it.



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because it makes them feel grown up. Others drink at parties in an attempt to be sociable.

Still other youth use drugs because of serious personal or family problems. Drug use becomes a kind of cry for help, a dramatic way of saying things are not okay.

### Trying It Out

Once we have an idea of the basic influences which lead people to try drugs, we still need to understand who uses drugs and when they get started.

**When.** Drug use has been moving down the school grade ladder for some time, especially for the more common drugs. Today, most first-time use of alcohol, marijuana and tobacco takes place before tenth grade.<sup>5</sup> The average age for first use of alcohol is 12.<sup>6</sup> Fifty-five percent of teenagers have tried alcohol before they enter high school. Daily cigarette smoking is begun by 15 percent of students before high school and by only another 9 percent during high school. Over one-third of students have tried marijuana before they reach tenth grade. Use of inhalants is also heavier for younger students, primarily because inhalants are readily and legally available. Use of drugs of all kinds in grades six and over increased steadily throughout the 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

Use of drugs other than those

**Who.** There is no way to predict with certainty who will use drugs. It is possible, however, to say who does use drugs.

Drug users, for the most part, tend to:

- be boys rather than girls (except for cigarettes);
- live in the suburbs;
- be white;
- be less religious;
- work more;
- spend more evenings away from home;
- date more;
- have more money to spend;
- attend large schools;
- make lower grades;
- avoid extracurricular activities;
- have friends who use drugs; and
- have parents who drink and/or smoke.

**How Much.** Obviously, all teenagers do not use drugs. Many of those who do use drugs use more than one kind. The chart indicates the percent of all high school seniors who reported having used a particular drug in 1982.

### Getting Hooked

No one ever thinks they’re going to become hooked on drugs. Those who begin taking them usually believe they’ll be able to handle the drug and continue with a normal life. Being able to “hold one’s liquor,” for example, is considered a badge of

People who use cocaine, for example, often become psychologically dependent. The drug creates such an intense high that the user becomes depressed when it wears off. All he or she wants is to feel good again. Life becomes centered around the feeling which the drug creates. The user "must" have it in order to function.

People can also become psychologically dependent on a drug as a means of helping them cope with certain situations they face, from overcoming inhibitions to relaxing. But anytime they believe they need a drug to cope, function normally or enjoy themselves, that is psychological dependence.

*Physical dependence on drugs occurs if you must take the drug to avoid withdrawal symptoms.* Many drugs actually change the body's way of functioning so that the user begins to need the drug to function normally. The drug becomes a kind of grease to allow the body's wheels to turn. If it is taken away, the person goes through withdrawal. His or her body painfully readjusts to life without the drug.

Because withdrawal is uncomfortable and often dangerous, a physically dependent user concentrates on getting and keeping a supply of the drug. In large cities addicts commit a major portion of street crimes in their efforts to get money to feed

their habits.

Many youth do not understand drug dependence. They think they are smart enough or strong enough to use drugs without getting hooked. Drugs, however, are extremely powerful. Even spree users or weekend users may quickly become addicted.

If you are addicted to more than one drug, untangling things can be even more treacherous. It is not uncommon today, for example, for one person to be alcoholic, psychologically dependent on marijuana and hooked on cigarettes. Another person may be dependent both on uppers and downers at the same time. An increasing number of cases in drug rehabilitation centers involves this kind of polydrug dependence.

Is it possible to use drugs without running a risk of dependence? No, it isn't. Every person's body is different. Two people react differently to the same drug. Even a drug which one person finds unpleasant or repulsive may cause addiction in someone else. The only certain way to avoid the risks of drug dependence is to avoid using drugs.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>"Why Some Teens Avoid Alcohol and Drug Use," *The New Jersey Council News*, Spring, 1982, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>*Highlights from Student Drug Use in America, 1975-1980*, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1981, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup>"Peer Pressure Cited for Teen Drug Use," *The Tennessean*, April 27, 1982, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Robert H. Coombs and Katherine M. Dickson, "Generational Continuity in the Use of Alcohol and Other Substances: A Literature Review," *Abstracts and Reviews in Alcohol and Driving*, April, 1981, p. 1.

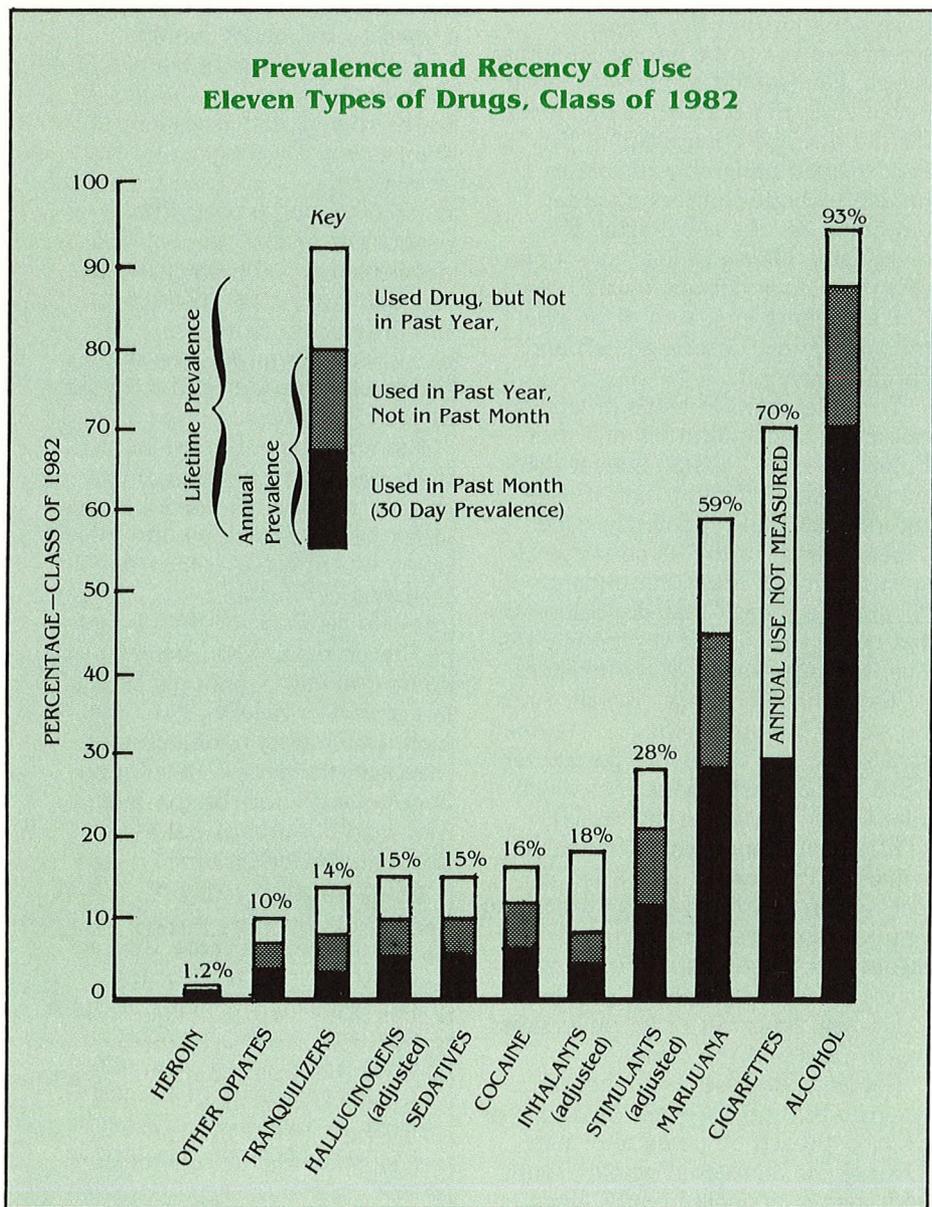
<sup>5</sup>*Student Drug Use, Attitudes, and Beliefs, National Trends 1975-1982*, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1983, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup>"Generational Continuity . . .," p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>*Student Drug Use . . .*, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61.

Sisk, who directs the Christian Life Commission's assignment for education and action on the abuse of alcohol and other drugs, has written a 20-page resource booklet, *Drugs Awareness: A Guide for Youth and Youth Leaders*, now available from the CLC.



# PREACHING ON ETHICAL ISSUES

## An Old Model For a New Time

By W. David Sapp

Nearly three years ago I left the staff of the Christian Life Commission to accept an Atlanta pastorate. The transition was filled with all of the difficulties you would anticipate. My travel schedule gave way to a calendar full of night meetings. My finely-honed and oft-delivered speeches gave way to roughly-hewn and soon-discarded sermons. My folders full of useful resource materials vanished, having fallen prey to the voracious appetite of the pulpit.

My long-held opinion that there are few great models for ethical preaching, outside the Bible, was utterly confirmed. Who shows the preacher how to preach what the prophets preached? Who gives ethical concerns adequate expression in the pulpit on a week-by-week basis? Who shows us how to be relevant and effective and yet avoid the martyr's stake? My own experience says practically no one.

It was with some surprise, therefore, that I stumbled onto an old book of sermons last January in the library at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr. was a missionary, a professor and a pastor. Fifty years ago, while he was serving the Pullen Memorial Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., he published a remarkable book of sermons entitled *Jesus and the Liberal Mind*.

Again and again, Poteat meets the issues of righteousness in his preaching with a sharp, two-edged sword. He backs away from no issue, and he speaks with style, conviction and force. In spite of his title he is not easily labeled liberal or conservative; he opposes militarism, for example, but supports prohibition. He abhors creedalism, but he also reserves a blast or two for liturgy. He is an

independent mind and a courageous preacher. He is, in short, a Baptist.

For several days during my January visit to Southern's campus, the electricity of this 50-year-old volume recharged my preaching. In the pages of this old book I had heard of but never read, I found the model I have been looking for. Poteat seemed to me to be wrong on some issues. He seemed at times to lapse into a style too bookish and scholarly for the average congregation. But he also seemed admirably unable to preach without confronting great moral issues. His scholarship was exemplary. His sensitivity to scripture was marvelous. His style was potent. For preachers in search of prophetic models, Poteat deserves fresh and careful attention.

To understand Poteat's preaching, one must understand his title. For Poteat in 1934, "liberal" meant something entirely different than it does in the popular mind today. He used "liberal mind" in the same sense as we use "liberal arts." He understood "liberal" to mean "that disposition of the human spirit that is eternally restive in the presence of the mystery of the nature of things" (p.viii). And he saw liberalism as the "... temper that seeks to establish at the center of all human institutions the values that inhere in personality" (p.ix).

It is this temper which Poteat perceives in the gospel, and it is this perception which drives his preaching naturally and frequently toward issues of righteousness. For Poteat, as for all timely prophets, prophetic utterance flows out of an understanding of God and the Bible.

Poteat addressed a number of issues which are relevant for those of us who preach 50 years after him. Usually, he addressed whole groups of issues in a single breath. Once he

"got on a roll," no sacred cows were spared. Listen, for example, to the following passage:

*Ten million houses in the United States ought to be demolished because they are not decent habitations. If cleanliness is next to godliness then indecency is next to immorality; we know it is productive of all sorts of delinquency. In December, 1933, Congress offered the nation to the bondage of the liquor interests. What quick free-*

### Profile

Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr. was born in 1892 in New Haven, Conn., where his father was pastor of Calvary Baptist Church. After another pastorate in Philadelphia, his father became in 1903 president of Furman University in Greenville, S.C.

A brilliant scholar, the younger Poteat graduated from Furman in 1912 and from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1916.

After a year as traveling secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement, Poteat served as a Southern Baptist foreign missionary in Kaifeng, China (1917-26) and as associate professor of philosophy and ethics at the University of Shanghai, China (1926-29).

He returned to the United States in 1929 and became pastor of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C. He served that congregation for 15 years (1929-37, 1948-55). He was minister of Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio, 1937-44, and served as president of Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, 1944-48.

Poteat wrote more than a dozen books on religion and life, touching the fields of theology, economics, science and other areas. In 1940 he delivered the prestigious Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale University. He died in 1955.

dom from that iniquitous servitude the moral conscience of the nation might win! There are legal technicalities that turn crooks loose and legal injustices that crack down on the poor and dispossessed. It may be the law but it's wrong. There are black folks among us who are denied elemental decencies and rights, who cry out against exploitation and discriminatory ordinances that have no basis in common moral attitudes. We get by with them, but they are wrong. So also might a wearisome reference be made to workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance, the protection of women, and what-not. Economics and politics have had their day. Let us turn the government over to the moral conscience of the nation! (pp. 206-207)

Where is such courage or insight to be found among today's preachers? In one paragraph Poteat has addressed housing, crime, alcohol, poverty, race, women and economics. All of these are issues which challenge us still. He offered no complicated solutions, only simple Christian virtue. Passages like this one occur in virtually every sermon.

Here are a few other examples:

*The race for armaments is immoral, even if it stops short of leading into actual war—which it has never failed to do (p. 204).*

*Millions of men out of work, through no wish of their own, while fabulous wealth is in the hands of a very few—these things are, first of all, symptoms of moral blindness, however they be regarded, secondarily, social and economic problems (p. 204).*

*Property rights and property power are justified only as they serve human well-being (p. 129).*

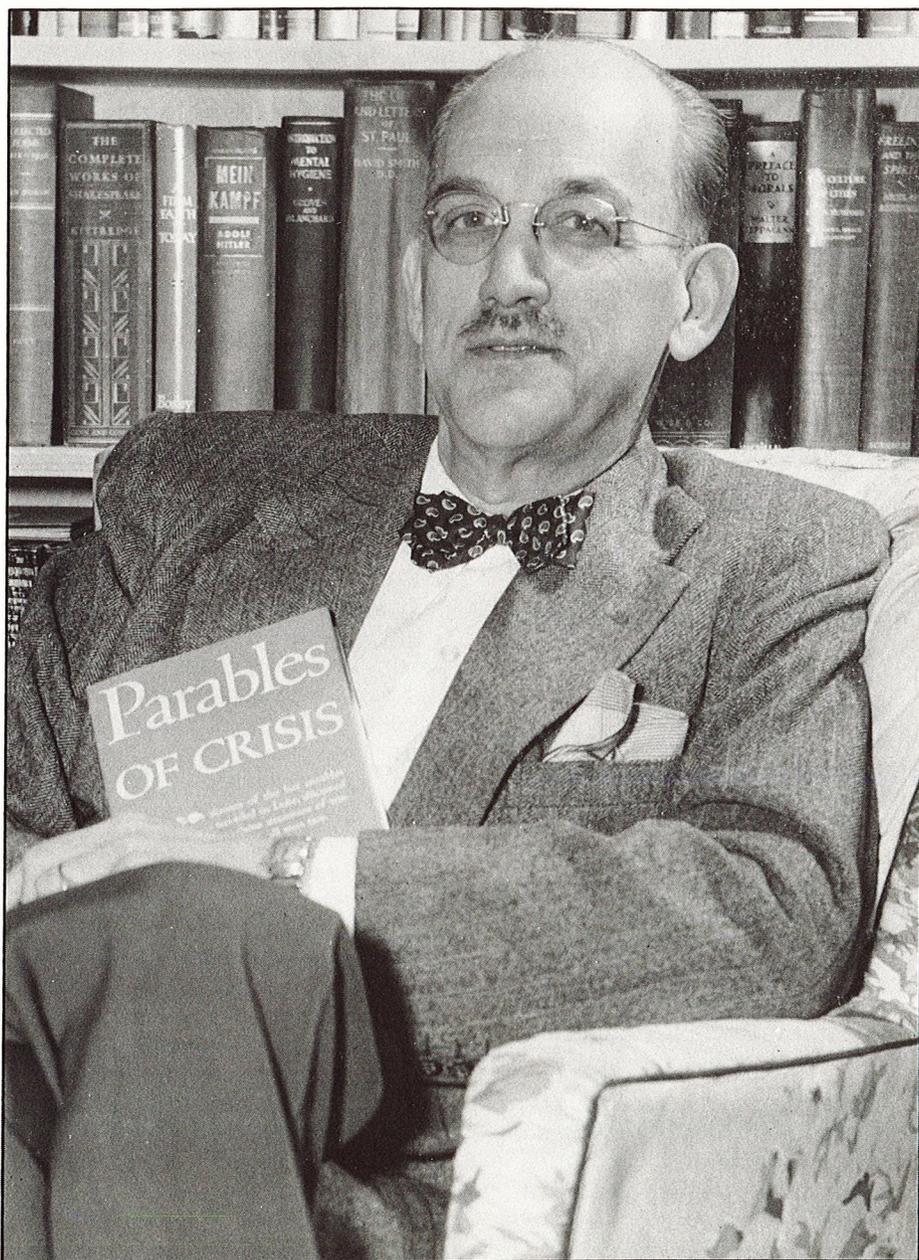
*I learned today of a minister's conference in a great central western city in which it is customary for the clergymen of one of the evangelical groups to remain out in the hall until after the opening prayer is offered since they do not regard prayer by a clergyman of a sect other than their own as valid!*

*That's monstrous. That's an infamy. That's crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to open shame (p. 229).*

The significance of these quotes, of course, is that they are from sermons. They show one man's forthrightness in applying the gospel as best he understood it. I generally cannot speak with so much boldness. Perhaps I am afraid. Or perhaps my pulpit is more restrictive than his. But one thing dawns on me as I read

Poteat: There is no way to be a timid prophet. Prophets always speak boldly.

That is why most of us agonize over ethical preaching. We would like for it to be easy, safe, comfortable. We like warm comments at the door, not hot ones. Personally, I am not about to risk martyrdom if I can help it. My style is softer than Poteat's, but at the same time I know that if I do not speak boldly on the issues which affect people's lives, I will not



PREACHING MODEL—Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr., Southern Baptist missionary, teacher and pastor, offers a challenging model for preaching on ethical issues. Many of his views are still relevant and persuasive today.

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speak at all.

Another interesting feature of Poteat's ethical thought is that he freely crosses the lines we usually think of as liberal and conservative. Today one who would support prohibition and oppose militarism would be seen as ideologically inconsistent. Poteat saw both as causes to be espoused by those committed to a Christian ethic. Our ideologies box in our preaching too much. My ethical judgments are not always the same as Poteat's, but like his they should be grounded in a godly faith, not a human ideology.

One sermon in the collection has particular relevance to contemporary Southern Baptists. In "Baptists for Such a Time as This," Poteat reflects on the freedom which is such an indispensable part of the Baptist identity. In an age when many of our people have forgotten that heritage, this sermon needs a fresh hearing.

Poteat reminds us that our Baptist heritage is to resist anything that denies human freedom. Thus Baptists have been champions of such well known causes as "soul competence" and religious liberty. This much comes as no surprise. Those schooled in our traditions have been well aware of these primary Baptist distinctives for most of our lives, even if many Johnny-come-latelies are currently abandoning these cherished principles.

More surprising, perhaps, is Poteat's contention that three of the staunchest enemies of the Baptist spirit are creed, liturgy and sacrament. It is the combination which surprises us. All three of these, he says, are expressions of a formalism which undermines freedom. In his thinking, creed undermines the freedom of ideas. Liturgy restricts the freedom of devotion and affection. Sacrament restricts the freedom of the will. Here is how he says it:

*Creed inescapably tends toward the establishment of the ideas of men in definite and inviolate categories; liturgy tends to canalize the religious emotions of men in regimented devotional routine; sacrament tends to substitute a vicarious and mediated act for an act of the will (p. 226).*

Again, what is surprising about this is the combination. In our current denominational controversy, creed has been at the center of our discussions. The moderates want no creed in any shape, form or fashion. At

Eloquence means power. We trade it away too easily for lunch with a friend or an afternoon on the golf course. God's call to righteousness deserves to be sounded on a golden trumpet! Listen to the tones of this

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**"Perhaps if we can return to the idea of liberty as the cradle of both religious feeling and religious thought, we can all be in that cradle together and be rocked freely into peacefulness by the loving hand of God."**

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least some of the fundamentalists openly espouse creedalism. But today many of those who oppose creedalism have come to appreciate liturgy, and they are introducing it to their churches.

By the same token, those who support creedalism fulminate in their pulpits against the evils of liturgy. Perhaps both groups are opposed to sacramentalism, but even here there has been a move toward a more sacramental understanding of Baptist ordinances in recent years.

Perhaps Poteat's observation of our current denominational problems would run something like this: Our battle is not between those who believe in freedom and those who do not. Our battle is between two camps who choose their freedom differently. Between those who give preeminence to freedom of thought and those who give preeminence to freedom of feeling. Thinkers do not understand "feelers;" and "feelers" get an uneasy feeling about thinkers.

Like any analysis of our problems, this one lacks something. It is too cut and dried; but it does point to a starting point where we might begin to rebuild Southern Baptist unity. Perhaps if we can return to the idea of liberty as the cradle of both religious feeling and religious thought, we can all be in that cradle together and be rocked freely into peacefulness by the loving hand of God. If this is right, it ought to color our preaching on the ethical issues of denominational life.

The final characteristic of Poteat's preaching which I find challenging is his eloquence. Too often our preparation is too careless to allow God's causes to find an eloquent voice.

magnificent conclusion to one of Poteat's sermons:

*On June 15, 1215, in a meadow called Runnimeade, on the South bank of the river Thames in County Surrey, John the First affixed the Great Seal of England to the Magna Charta, and put into the hands of the truculent barons a series of rights that established the foundation for popular participation in the greatest of the empires of the world. Nineteen centuries ago on a grassy slope on the horns of Hattin, by the Northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee Jesus promised the government world to a little group of men he had reason to feel shared a measure of His moral enthusiasm and He affixed to that promise the seal of God's eternal grace. What King John gave reluctantly made it possible for Britain to girdle the globe with the Union Jack; what King Jesus gave enthusiastically made it possible for the Kingdom of God to girdle the globe with a Christian aegis, of the cross. What a promise! What a prospect! (pp. 208-209)*

God has called us to be bearers of His message of truth. He has given us a golden trumpet. Sounded loudly, clearly, and beautifully, our preaching holds hope for the world. Let us play that trumpet like our Baptist forebears. What a promise! What a prospect!

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# Alternatives to Abortion

By Harry N. Hollis, Jr.

The *debate* about abortion in our society has taken much energy from needed work on *alternatives* to abortion. Surely all will agree that something must be done about the insanity of performing over one and one-half million abortions in this country each year.

Two approaches to decreasing the number of abortions include preventive education and finding alternatives to abortion after an unwanted pregnancy occurs.

## Preventive Education

There are theological foundations for an education that can lead to the prevention of so many abortions in our society. The Bible teaches that God is active in the world as Creator, Judge and Redeemer. And he calls us to respond to his actions.

### Creation.

The Christian understanding of creation has many implications which relate to the problem of abortion.

(1) *God is active in the world as Creator.* This means that the whole creation is good because God made it good. If we think life is of little consequence, abortion really does not matter. But if life is a good gift of God, the destruction of life must be viewed with utmost seriousness.

The fact that God is active as Creator also means that the process of reproduction is good. God, not the devil, is responsible for sex. As Creator, he included sex as one of his good gifts intended for the enrichment of our lives.

(2) *We are called to respond to the Creator.* We can respond with celebration for his creation. We can celebrate by participating in activities which enhance life.

Celebration of life does not require the glorification of an endless quantity of babies. The quality of life must be enhanced, and this requires limiting the number of children brought into the world. We can also demonstrate in our behavior that we under-

stand sex to be God's good gift. We can respond to the Creator by being stewards of the gift of life. We can uphold the sanctity of life. And when life is entrusted to us, we can protect it and affirm it.

### Judgment.

(1) *God acts as Judge.* Sin in society complicates abortion decisions. Some people do not want their children. There is sexual promiscuity. There is rape, incest, and sexual exploitation. Advertising is used to exploit sex for profits.

God has so structured the world that when we violate his laws we will experience his judgment. If we turn to abortion in a casual manner, we will suffer judgment. A society that ignores its responsibility to protect the rights of the mother, father and fetus will experience God's judgment in some way. As a society, if we continue to turn to abortion as a primary means of birth control, then all of us will suffer from living in a world where human life is cheapened.

(2) *We are called to respond to God's action as Judge.* We can act with repentance in response to God's judgment. For some there must be repentance for ignoring complex abortion issues. Some of us need to repent for ignoring the plight of lower income couples who do not see how they can support another child when an unplanned pregnancy occurs. Others need to repent for turning to abortion as an escape from God-given responsibilities.

We can also respond to the Judge with self-discipline, which is a gift of God's Spirit. Self-discipline is required for those who covet more of the gadgets which money will buy, and thus choose to abort an unplanned child which threatens their material kingdom. Self-discipline is required of sexually promiscuous people who turn the beauty of sex into selfish exploitation.

We are also called to respond with the control of sin in society. As Christians, we are to be involved in

the world. We cannot ignore those matters which affect the good of society as a whole. Abortion is not merely a private decision to be made by a woman, or by a woman and her doctor.

Abortion involves all of us; and we need to be a part of the process by which our society determines the rights of the fetus, mother, father and the community at large. We must also face up to social conditions that often lead to abortion.

### Redemption.

(1) *God is active in the world as Redeemer.* Because God has revealed himself as Redeemer, we have hope that something can be done about the dreadful frequency of abortions today. We are not left without the strength that comes from God's Spirit. Our Christian witness declares the good news that we can do something about sexual exploitation, about the difficult life situations in which abortion seems to be the only way.

(2) *We are called to respond to the Redeemer.* We can show our love for God by being compassionate toward people who are faced with abortion decisions.

It is our responsibility to see that adequate counseling is provided for women and men facing abortion decisions. Abortion involves morality. It is not simply a surgical procedure. It is a decision of conscience.

We can respond to God's redemptive activity by helping women find the freedom not to have an abortion. Alternatives involve economic help to care for deformed children, better sex education, information about adoption procedures, and economic justice which makes care of children possible.

## Abortion Alternatives

In addition to providing an education to help prevent abortions, Christians can also work for alternatives once an unwanted pregnancy occurs. It is our responsibility to provide compassionate help for people caught in the problems related to unwanted pregnancies. Several practical actions can be taken.

(1) *Help people struggling with abortion decisions to get guidance*

from qualified counselors. Some churches have counseling programs designed to help individuals trying to decide about abortion. There are also qualified chaplains and counselors who can help in most communities.

Counseling from competent and compassionate people is essential for those under pressure to make decisions that affect individuals and society. What people need in such stressful situations is guidance in thinking through consequences. They need moral advice. They need to see some possible alternatives. They need the hope that Christian resources can bring.

(2) *Encourage adoption as an alternative to abortion.* Many more unwed women would be open to having their babies and allowing them to be adopted if they received some guidance and help in taking this approach. There are also many couples who would be delighted to adopt such babies.

Much practical help is needed to make this possible. And the church is a fellowship where such aid can be provided.

(3) *Work to provide support and financial resources for married couples who are considering abortion.* Many married couples would not choose abortion if they felt that they could manage the pressures that another child would bring. Perhaps the promise of child care could help them if they both must work. Financial counseling might be provided. Christian support can help married couples under great financial pressure to seek alternatives to abortion.

### Christian Hope

Debates about abortion problems will continue. Christians can contribute to the solution of these problems as we share with others the resource of Christian hope.

*Hollis is associate director and director of family and moral concerns for the Christian Life Commission. The article was adapted from an article by Hollis in Church Training magazine, March 1983. © Copyright 1983 The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. All rights reserved. Used by permission.*

## Correction

# Southern Baptist Response Reflected in Statistics

Repetition can be a good thing. It can also be disastrous.

In the table of "1983 World Hunger Receipts by States," printed in the March issue of *LIGHT*, a typesetter's inadvertent repetition of one figure led to a series of miscalculations for five Baptist state

conventions.

Accurate totals for Kansas-Nebraska, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and Mississippi are included in the corrected table on this page.

We regret the errors and any confusion they may have caused.

## 1983 WORLD HUNGER RECEIPTS BY STATES

State	Domestic (HMB)	Overseas (FMB)	Total
Ala.	\$ 2,283	\$ 454,502	\$ 456,785
Alaska	408	2,997	3,405
Ariz.	2,927	13,325	16,252
Ark.	435	27,910	28,345
Calif.	374	85,642	86,016
Colo.	1,392	15,329	16,721
D.C.	NA	9,137	9,137
Fla.	1,580	310,776	312,356
Ga.	81,755	377,816	459,571
Ill.	9,915	50,810	60,725
Ind.	60	20,371	20,431
Kan.-Neb.	2,380	24,493	26,873
Ky.	2,095	363,471	365,566
La.	36,683	135,737	172,420
Md.	1,038	25,443	26,481
Mich.	500	3,501	4,001
Miss.	1,091	203,603	204,694
Mo.	52,616	219,073	271,689
No. Plains	175	3,998	4,173
N.M.	69	41,511	41,580
N.C.	233,220	606,647	839,867
Ohio	101	18,543	18,644
Okla.	399	122,919	123,318
Ore.-Wash.	226	30,227	30,453
Pa.-S. Jersey	484	5,334	5,818
S.C.	59,256	538,556	597,812
Tenn.	1,899	60,321	62,220
Texas	3,314	1,129,483	1,132,797
Utah-Idaho	73	1,518	1,591
Va.	92,875	447,443	540,318
W.Va.	136	4,295	4,431
Other States	667	38,937	39,604

(NA—Not Available)

Compiled from information supplied by the Foreign and Home Mission Boards, SBC. Figures rounded to the nearest dollar.

## Poverty multiplies, any way you count it

Poverty in America continued to increase from 1979 to 1982, even when the value of food stamps, public housing, Medicare and Medicaid benefits was counted as income, the Census Bureau reported.

The bureau used two methods of calculations: one counting only cash income and one including non-cash benefits. The latter method was used for comparison in response to the Reagan administration's criticism that totals based only on cash income have the effect of inflating official poverty figures.

Indeed, when only cash income was counted, the number of poor was higher: 26.1 million in 1979 and 34.4 million in 1982, compared with 15.1 and 22.9 million when full market value of non-cash benefits was included as income. However, when non-cash income was counted, the percentage of the total population classified as poor increased more sharply over the four-year period.

Counting non-cash income, 6.8% of the nation's population fell below the poverty line in 1979. In 1982 this figure rose to 10%, a growth of 47.1%.

—The New York Times

## Draper addresses moral concerns

Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr. cited contemporary moral concerns ranging from pornography to world peace as issues "we need to join hands on" in an address to the SBC Executive Committee.

On pornography, Draper said Southern Baptists "ought to be leading the way in concern for the polluting of the media. This is a national disgrace and a great problem in our society."

On hunger: "I'm not sure we're really that concerned about world hunger. I for one believe we could feed the world if we put our minds to it." By sharing food with hungry persons, he added, "we would earn the right to witness to them."

On gambling: This issue lies "at the very heart of the cancer that is destroying American society." Like other moral problems, he explained, gambling threatens the family unit. "I'm proud of what we're doing through our Christian Life Commissions throughout the whole Southern Baptist Convention in opposing gambling."

On abortion: "I think we need to speak out very positively about the evils and the tragedy of abortion. We have allowed

the independent groups to sort of take the flag from us."

On peace: "Certainly we need to be praying for peace in our world, and I was glad to see we have a Prayer for Peace Sunday in August. Nobody wants war. We may debate about nuclear arms and nuclear freeze . . . but we ought to all be praying for peace."

Working together on such issues, Draper concluded, will help Southern Baptists "find some common ground."

## Drugs cost everyone

Experts disagree about the extent of drug abuse in America. But everyone agrees that efforts to control the flow of drugs are costly.

The federal government is spending more than \$1 billion on drug-related programs each year, more than 70% of it earmarked for law enforcement and most of the rest for treatment of adult drug abusers.

Government spending to intercept drug imports before they reach American shores increased from \$83 million in 1977 to \$278 million in 1982.

Even so, such efforts are doing little to cut down on the drug traffic, according to a study by the Rand Corp., a private, non-profit research group. Drug seizures "cannot dry up the supply or even raise the retail price of drugs very much," said one researcher, "because imports can easily be replaced at a small fraction of the street price."

—The Tennessean

## Mobile Americans slowing down

Americans are still on the move, but the pace is slowing.

Twenty years ago a record one in five Americans was changing residence annually, according to government statistics.

Since then the number has declined steadily and 1982 Census Bureau figures show less than 17% of the population changing residence each year.

Three main factors were cited for the decline: an increase in home ownership and a rise in the price of homes and in interest rates for mortgages.

—Associated Press

## Hunger persists, but productivity rises

As famine and world hunger continue to make headlines, the productivity of America's farms continues to increase.

Today's farm worker produces enough crops and livestock to meet the needs of 75 people.

In 1965 one farm worker could feed an average of 37 people. In 1953 the figure was 17.2 people and, in 1929 it was 4.1 people.

Despite economic problems, agriculture continues to be the largest U.S. industry. Farm assets at almost \$1.1 trillion last year were equal to about 70% of the capital assets of all manufacturing corporations in the nation.

The agribusiness pipeline, from farmers to retail stores, is also the largest employer, with about 23 million workers.

Agriculture and the system required to get food to consumers add up to approximately one out of every five jobs in private enterprise.

—Associated Press

## Sports gambling in the Bible Belt

If you think sports gambling is confined mostly to large northern cities, think again.

According to Bob Barrett, assistant commissioner for institutional relations for the Southeastern Conference, betting on athletic competition has become a serious problem in the Bible Belt.

"Outside of Las Vegas," Barrett said, "the city with the largest amount of wagering on football and basketball, per capita, is Birmingham. And Nashville, Memphis and Knoxville are running a close second."

Barrett, who spent 26 years with the FBI, counsels players, coaches and fans about the negative side of gambling.

"I'm concerned about public apathy on the amount of money being wagered," he added. "There seems to be a complete lack of any local, state or federal involvement in the investigation of gambling operations."

—The Tennessean

## Women in ministry to meet at SBC

"Women in Ministry, SBC" will meet June 9-10 at the Radisson-Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City prior to the Southern Baptist Convention.

The meeting, according to its planners, is designed for "women who, out of a sense of God's call, professionally minister in a local church" or are employed by institutions, agencies and churches of the SBC and for men and women who are interested in "Women in Ministry, SBC."

# Conferences Focus On Current Issues

Two contemporary social issues, race relations and abuse of alcohol and other drugs, will be explored by Southern Baptist leaders this summer at conferences sponsored by the Christian Life Commission.

Topics and dates for the week-long conferences are as follows:

**“Alcohol and Other Drugs: New Dimensions in Education and Action”**

July 2-7

**Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center**  
and

**“Christian Responsibility in a Multi-Racial Society”**

August 19-25

**Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center**

Program leaders for the Glorieta conference will be J. Emmett Henderson, executive director, Georgia Council on Moral and Civic Concerns; W. David Lockard, director of organization, Christian Life Commission; and Ronald D. Sisk, director of program development, Christian Life Commission.

Sessions will focus on subjects

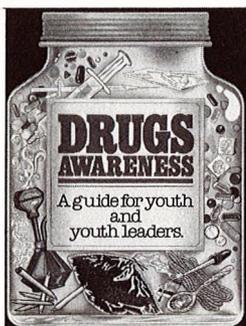
such as today’s drug culture, biblical perspectives on alcohol and other drugs, drunk driving, and educating youth and children about alcohol and other drugs.

Several “how-to” sessions will be included on action and education in the local church and on working effectively with legislators.

Speakers for the Ridgecrest conference will be Chad Garret, associate director, black church relations department, Home Mission Board; Emmanuel McCall, director, black church relations department, Home Mission Board; Daniel G. Rodriguez, editor of Spanish materials, Bible teaching division, Sunday School Board; Sid Smith, consultant, ethnic liason unit, Sunday School Board; and Lockard of the Christian Life Commission.

Lockard also serves as program coordinator for both summer conferences.

Sessions will deal with current issues related to black Southern Baptists, Hispanics, refugees, biblical teachings on race relations, overcoming prejudice, ministry to ethnics and relating to black churches. A panel discussion, led by McCall, will focus on progress in race relations among Southern Baptists.



## Drug Awareness Resources for Youth

**Drugs Awareness: A Guide for Youth and Youth Leaders**—includes five emphasis sessions which deal with the following topics: “What Are Drugs?” “Why Do People Use Drugs?” “Drugs and the Bible,” “Deciding About Drugs” and “Living Drug Free.” This is an excellent resource for a retreat, for a special emphasis in the church or for use in the home by teens and their parents.

Single copies \$1.75

**Additional Support Materials:**

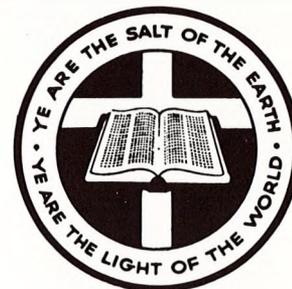
**Drugs Awareness promotional wall poster**—helps in publicizing the emphasis.  
Single copies 15¢ ea.

**Christian Life Style for Youth: Drugs and Issues and Answers:**  
**Drugs**—two up-to-date, biblically-based pamphlets.  
Single copies 15¢ ea.

Order from Christian Life Commission  
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