

The background of the cover is a photograph of a diverse group of people, including a man in a red shirt, a woman with braids, and a man in a grey polo shirt, all looking down at an open book. The lighting is warm and focused on the book.

BA

BIBLE ADVOCATE

January - February 2006

Human Race:

Alive and Alike

A look at the 'beast' (p. 4)

Stem cell debate (p. 18)

Just for youth (p. 22)



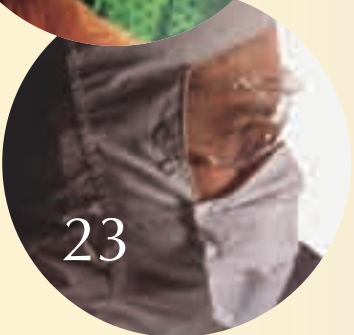
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Did you miss the last issue on the Second Coming? View selections from it and download the last eight BAs at www.cog7.org/BA.

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In the January and February issues of *Now What?*: bipolar disorder, death of a baby (<http://nowwhat.cog7.org>)

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Christ and Culture

One young fellow wrote a letter to
 heaven, or so it's told: "Dear God, can
 You put something fun between New
 Year's and Easter? There's nothing any good in
 there right now."

Some of us probably feel like that lad,
 though for different reasons. If we like our celebrations accurately
 timed and unadulterated, we may find little enthusiasm for Valentine's
 and St. Patrick's days, for Lent, even for Easter and New Year's.
 Reading up on the origin and practice of these holidays might
 enlighten us — and surprise us as well.

For those who love God's Word and pray for its impact upon
 American culture, January holds something we can use for good. Two
 days this month, in particular, are significant for our faith and add force
 to the themes of this issue. Martin Luther King Day, on January 16
 this year, is one. The other is January 22, anniversary of the 1973 U.S.
 Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade* that legalized abortion.

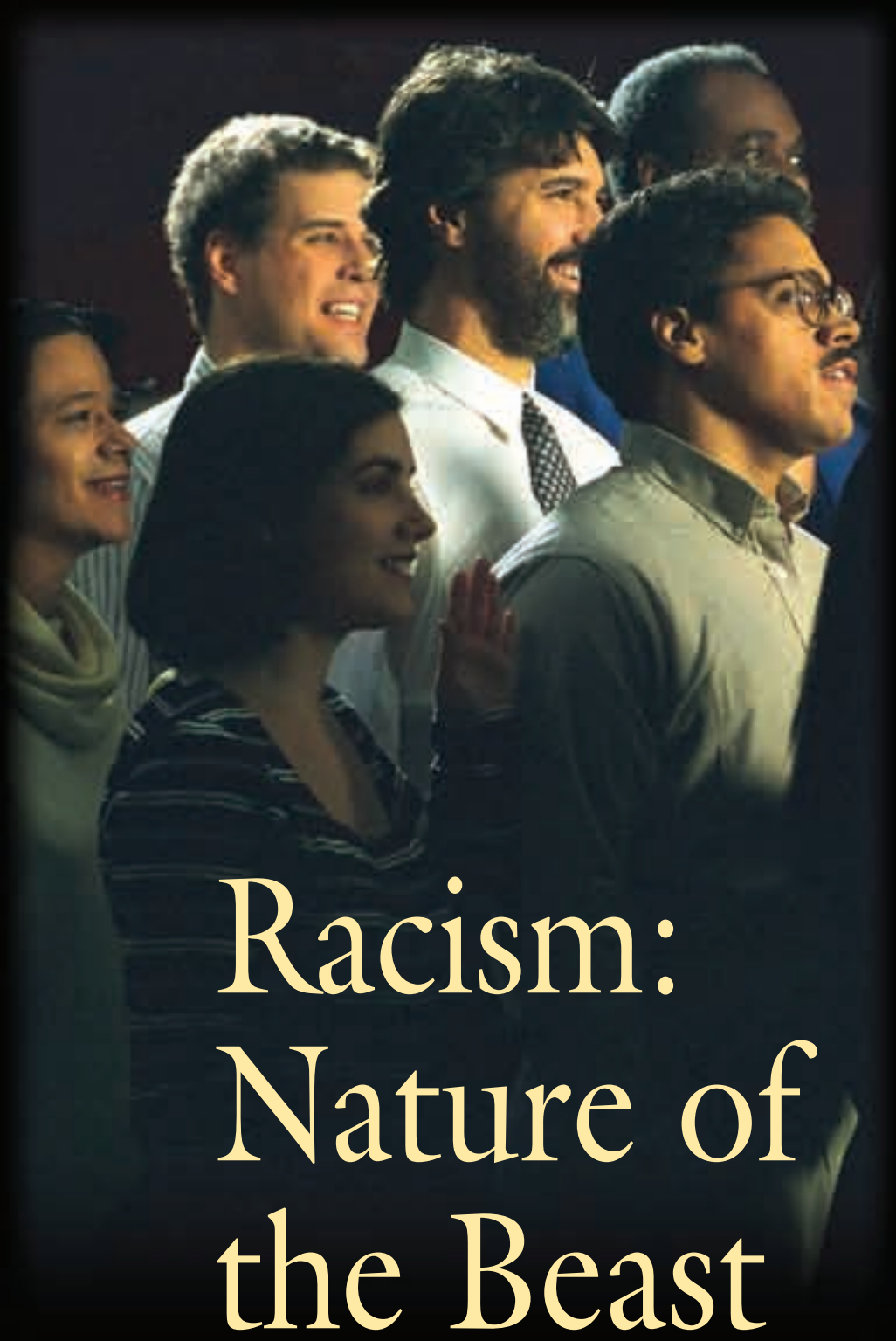
Dr. King's profound dedication to the Bible's principles of justice,
 freedom, and equality, and his remarkable courage to endure great
 hardship in securing their advance: These and time have succeeded
 to change many minds about the man. Through the Spirit, we have
 progressed toward impartiality in the Church. Let us move to eliminate
 any remaining racial or ethnic discrimination and thereby come to
 realize the full dignity and opportunity of every member. The cause for
 which Martin Luther King lived and died merits the support of every
 follower of Christ, and he deserves the admiration of every Christian
 American for blazing that trail for the rest of us.

What about abortion and the future of *Roe v. Wade*? Two new
 justices may tilt the Supreme Court of '06 toward the rights of the
 unborn. We shall see. Whether or not the fatally flawed ruling of
 '73 will be fully overturned, we have a God-given privilege and
 responsibility to speak out for the smallest and weakest members of
 our society: the elderly, the unborn, the widow, the orphan, the poor.
 As we support the causes of life and liberty for all people, we follow
 the example and teachings of our Lord, Jesus.

Welcome to the 2006 BA, with its themes of Christ and culture.
 We invite you to interact with us in the Denver office and with these
 public issues of faith and righteousness wherever you live.

— Calvin Burrell





Racism: Nature of the Beast

Red and yellow, black and white — are we equal in His sight? by Brian Knowles

Racism is the idea that race determines culture and that some cultures, because of their racial influence, are inferior or superior to others. It is the notion that people of some races are *intrinsically* inferior to others. This notion is then used to justify the oppression and subjugation of the supposedly inferior race.

Of course, these definitions are not entirely adequate. Races obviously have identifying characteristics; that's how we know they are races. Culture is not determined exclusively by race, however, but by an assortment of variables like climate, religion, politics, tradition, history, ethnicity, tribe, clan, leadership, geography, raw materials, and foods.

Race, in fact, may have very little to do with the characteristics of a culture. Economic factors bear heavily on it, as do wars of conquest. Cultures are formed over time by a wide range of influencing factors.

Bigotries

Closely related to racism is *ethnocentrism*, what the dictionary defines as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one’s own group and culture accompanied by a feeling of contempt for other groups and cultures” (*Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*).

In the same family of bigotries we find anti-Semitism and tribalism. Anti-Semitism is hostility toward, or prejudice against, Jews simply because they are Jews. Tribalism is akin to clannishness in which one’s own group is favored over others, or at the expense of others. In recent years,

we have seen attempted genocides in Africa based on tribal identity. Even people of the same religion, but of different races or tribes, persecute each other.

Bigotry is as old as humanity. We naturally prefer our own “kind” to another kind that we have difficulty identifying with. Some years back, someone described loneliness as “a yearning for kind.” *Kind* here is not used in the biblical sense of “after its kind.” It means someone who is like us rather than unlike us. This “likeness” can be based on race, language, ethnicity, gender, politics, religion, or other commonalities. We are simply more comfortable with people who view the world the way we view it and who share our values. Even Christians like to hang out with others of the same denomination.

All of this is simply the way people are. We tend to discriminate for, not against, our own human type.

A point exists, however, where our natural preference for commonality becomes harmful. That point is reached when a person is denied rights or opportunities because he or she is racially or ethnically inferior. At this point it is considered no longer an issue of comfort with one’s own kind; it is committing or permitting harm to another human thought to be of an inferior kind.

When people’s race is used to justify their harm, we’re talking racism and bigotry, pure and simple. This is unscriptural at every level. No follower of Christ can justify such racism on biblical, or any other, grounds. Throughout history racism has been one of the scourges of humanity. It has done enormous harm, snuffing out the potential of millions of

human beings. Let us, therefore, consider the biblical view.

Image and ancestors

Every human being on planet Earth, no matter his or her color, has common denominators with every other human being. One of them is listed in Genesis 1:26, 27:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule . . .” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Every human being — both men and women, regardless of race — bears equally the image of God. In this sense, no one is inferior or superior. When it comes to intrinsic human worth, we are all utterly equal. There is no such thing as a “master race.” All such notions are of the Devil, and they deserve to be plowed back into the deepest, darkest recesses of hell.

A second thing we humans share is human ancestry. Eve was “the mother of all living” (3:20), just as Adam was, in the human sense, the father of all living. As Paul explained to the Athenian philosophers, “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole

earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” (Acts 17:26).

In ancient times God distributed the early population over the planet — our common heritage. We were given dominion over portions of the earth and over its myriad creatures. Collectively, the human race has a responsibility of stewardship for the planet. That responsibility includes how we treat each other.

All of the human races came through Noah and his three sons and their wives. They, too, are common ancestors of us all.

Being a neighbor

Besides these scriptures, Jesus himself said something about interracial relations. In answer to the question “Who is my neighbor?” He shared the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).

A man was victimized by robbers and left in a ditch to die. A priest and a Levite “passed by on the other side” rather than risk helping him. But a Samaritan took pity on the man, medicating and binding his wounds and providing for his long-term care.

After telling the story, Jesus asked, “Which of these three do

When it comes to intrinsic human worth, we are all utterly equal. There is no such thing as a “master race.”

you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (v. 36).

A Torah scholar in the crowd replied correctly: "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus then instructed, "Go and do likewise" (v. 37). Being a neighbor, He said, involves more than physical proximity and feeling. We are neighbors in the way Christ taught when we meet the real needs of people regardless of race or ethnicity, political or financial status.

Paul wrote, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Romans 15:1, 2). Viewed on a global scale, Paul is saying what Jesus said, that it is the job of every Christian who can to build up, not tear down, those who are having difficulty — without regard to race or status. When we view others of any race and in any condition, we should first see in them the image of God.

Dehumanizing humans

A racist sees certain classes of people as inferior, as less-than-human, or even as untouchable. Throughout history a pattern has

existed of dehumanizing enemies or races and ethnicities to justify persecuting them. In America black slaves were once viewed as subhuman, and a similar, ugly phenomenon is now occurring in Africa, Japan, and India. Though slavery is illegal throughout the world, it is still practiced with impunity in some regions. Slavery itself is dehumanizing, for it reduces those created in God's image to mere chattel or commodities to be bought and sold, sexually abused, tortured, or even murdered.

The global slave trade is one of the great scandals of the twenty-first century. Those who wish to research this subject further may read *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, by Kevin Bales. He writes, "Slavery is an obscenity. It is not just stealing someone's labor; it is the theft of an entire life."¹

That sums it up. No human being has the right to steal another human life. Bales adds:

There are more slaves alive today than all the people stolen from Africa in the time of the transatlantic slave trade. Put another way, today's slave population is greater than the population of Canada, and six times greater than the population of Israel.²

Though slavery officially ended in the United States on January 1, 1863, some 10,000 people in this country are still forced to work against their will under threat of violence. Roughly half of these work in prostitution or the so-called sex industry. Nearly one-third are domestic workers, and one in ten labors in agriculture. Most of the victims of forced labor are from minorities — Chinese, Mexicans, and Vietnamese — but 38 different countries are represented in the forced labor market.³

Racism, with its attendant evils and abuses, continues to flourish because people with low values and great power make it happen. Racism, slavery, and "human trafficking" usually have an economic element. Those who force others to labor in their service without payment or personal freedom do not believe in the biblical principle "The worker deserves his wages" (1 Timothy 5:18). Racially based enslavement has as its basis the sin of covetousness. A close look at Exodus 20:17 may confirm this.

Equality and beauty

Racism denies the equality God granted every human individual created in His image. It often results in abuse, enslavement, and murder. When people learn to see all races and ethnicities as precise equals, it will be much more difficult to demean and dehumanize them. The more we see our commonalities, the less we'll focus on our differences.

When God looked upon the masterpiece of His creation — humanity — He saw that it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The

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Racism, with its attendant evils and abuses, continues to flourish because people with low values and great power make it happen.

Questions & Answers

I was told of a Bible story in which God commands His people to invade a country and kill every man, woman, and child. My wife says this could not be because of “Thou shalt not kill.” If the story exists, why would God require such a thing to be done?

We must begin our inquiry of such matters with the premise that God is sovereign, and we will not always understand His ways. God did, in fact, send Samuel to Saul with instructions to destroy Amalek – to kill all men, women, infants, nursing children, sheep, oxen, camels, and donkeys (1 Sam. 15:1-3). We say this is too harsh, but we see only as humans. God is in charge.

God knows the hearts of those He has condemned to destruction. We evaluate guilt or innocence based on what we know, not on what God knows. He sees inside and judges in truth (16:7). By His grace, He forgives sin and allows us to live.

– Elder Melvin Sweet

We tend to interpret “God is love” as meaning that He wouldn’t hurt anybody. Because He loved the world so much that He gave His Son to redeem humanity, God must be all kindness, without a speck of vengeance. God, however, reserves the field of vengeance for Himself (Rom. 12:19). His perfect knowledge of humanity’s evil potential qualifies Him to make preemptive strikes on occasion.

God knew the despicable practices of those populations, such as burning children in sacrifice to their god and temple prostitution that introduced sexual permissiveness to the children of Eli. He timed a nation’s worthiness of complete destruction by the measure of their depravity. When the Amorites’ iniquity became full, Israel entered the Promised Land with instructions to utterly destroy them (Gen. 15:16; Deut. 20:17).

Is God like that? Consider the Flood and what is yet to come against the wicked who reject God and His salvation (2 Peter 3:7, 9). Were they warned? Indeed they were – and could have repented in sackcloth and ashes as Nineveh did, had they been so minded.

God uses humanity to execute some judgments, as He used Assyria and Babylon to punish rebellious Israel. He still saw usefulness in Israel, or He would have destroyed her just as He instructed Israel to completely destroy certain cities. The basic concept was to clear out a little corner where God could “raise His children” without such evil examples to lead them astray. It was an effort to remove some temptation and control the environment.

– Elder Roy Marrs

This does seem out of character with a God of love, but God looks at the big picture. At times a nation or society becomes so wicked that, to protect the rest of humanity, it must be destroyed.

We understand this in other contexts. If one organ is filled with cancer, we remove it to save the rest of the body. Even if some of its cells are not cancerous, the whole organ is removed to insure the cancer spreads no further.

When a society is steeped in immorality, even the women and children are infected with perversion and wickedness. Evidently God, in His love and wisdom, decided that the whole city or society needed to be surgically removed for the good of the whole.

– Elder Carl Palmer

The story you ask about, in 1 Samuel 15 (esp. v. 3), has a similar command in Deuteronomy 20:16-18. This way of cleansing the land from evil is described more fully in Leviticus 18:20-30.

Admittedly, it is not easy to grasp the instruction to eradicate an entire people. Before we close

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The strength of convictions and the power to change.
by Phyllis Edgerly



Moral Courage

Not long ago, I was reminded of what a myth it is that people can't change, that generations of behaving a certain way only leads to more of the same.

Friends of ours, Ray and Deena, have made enormous efforts as a couple, and as a family, to help their neighborhood be a better place for kids. Once a thriving middle-class community to which the husband's grandparents immigrated, it has in recent decades fallen into sad decay with their city's economic depression. Little by little, the couple's home — the house his grandparents bought long ago — became a safe haven for the neighborhood kids, many of whom had little or no home life

or parents who didn't know how to get up from taking too many hits when they were already down.

Developing character

As Ray and Deena and their own three children watched their home evolve into an after-school club, one in which God was the ultimate "director," they decided to be intentional about it. They bought the house next door (affordable in a neighborhood where few choose to live) and installed a pool in the backyard. Over the next decade of summers, lots of children gathered around that pool. The warm welcome they received there included rules, limits, and a chance to develop self-discipline

that most of them would find nowhere else.

The organized fun that those kids experienced revolved around Ray and Deena's efforts to offer them the biggest possible service: a chance to develop what Dr. Martin Luther King once called "the content of their character" and to understand that this is the real purpose in life. Helping kids develop good character meant devoting their home to these activities every summer and offering scaled-down versions after school and during school vacations. It also meant being available at all hours and gradually assisting many of the children's parents, who came to trust them like family.

None of it was easy; the sacri-

fices were huge. But our friends say they can't imagine any other life and that their own marriage and family life are stronger because of it. Many of the kids who passed through their house, and a number of their parents, have found possibilities in life they might never have known or believed were possible.

Seeds of change

I thought I knew this couple's story until, while I visited them recently, Ray nodded toward a city bus stop as we drove past. "That's where it all began," he said.

Over dinner, the two of them continued the story that began with their courtship and decision to marry shortly after high school. As they were standing at that bus stop one day, star-struck with love and making big plans for their future, Ray said something offhandedly. A car of men with dark faces had driven by and, without thinking, he uttered a racial slur. It was something Ray had heard fairly frequently in his family, among his peers, and at that house his grandparents lived in.

"I'll never forget the look on her face," he told me as he eyed his wife beside him. "That look in Deena's eyes. It was a combination of disbelief and anger, disappointment and sadness." That look, he said, made the biggest impact on him of all, unleashing changes he could never have predicted.

Deena explained that she'd grown up with her family's foster son, whom she truly loved like a brother and who was black. The circle of her family's African-American friends was also wide.

Hearing her future husband say something like this seemed unthinkable and unacceptable. As Deena turned to him with a pained look that day, she told him, "I don't think I can be with you."

At the time, any remorse on Ray's part was motivated strictly by the desire not to lose Deena. "But I also didn't want to lose the love and trust and respect for me that I saw leave her eyes when I said that," he said. "And I also knew that I wanted the mother of my children to be someone who had the strength of conviction that she had. It was brave to take a stand like that, because she really loved me, and what I did must have been a big disappointment to her."

Epiphany

Like the efforts they later made to help their neighborhood's children, nothing came easily or overnight. But Ray did have a kind of epiphany that day. "I realized that I had more choice about what I could do and think and believe than I had understood. A lot of my actions and beliefs came out of the way my family and those I'd grown up with saw things, and it was my responsibility to recognize where I'd been influenced by that, and to decide for myself."

Standing at the bus stop that

day, Ray couldn't have imagined where such a willingness to change would lead him. Not only did his grandparents' house eventually become an interracial community center, but also his own friends and family — an ever-widening circle whose members he treasures — look so much different than they might have had he chosen a different path. That circle includes the kind, young black man who is his son-in-law and the three lively granddaughters he and his wife love so much.

Powerful momentum

The kind of change that moves away from blind imitation of the past is nearly always an act of real moral courage, however small it may appear at first. The smallest action or decision to change based on principle or new understanding can often be overlooked by others, seemingly invisible at the time. But as Ray and Deena and their many friends can testify, it initiates a quietly powerful momentum that, like the lever of Archimedes, can sometimes move the world.

BA

Phyllis Edgerly
writes from Exeter, NH.



Standing at the bus stop that day, Ray couldn't have imagined where such a willingness to change would lead him.

The Bible and Racism

by William E. Gilmore

How we view and interact with each other in tumultuous times is important to our relationship with the Lord, and racism is one of today's "hot button" issues in that interaction. This issue raises its head across the religious spectrum, demonstrated by the fact that we think in terms of black churches and white churches. While we may not hate or mistreat the other, the very fact that such polarization exists indicates a problem.

As a child, I was taught all human beings are created equal, that God loves everyone, and that I should show God's love to others. However, the subtle message was that when it came to *people of color*, we should not play with *them*, speak to *them*, or be around *them*. *They* needed to stay in their neighborhood and we in ours; attend their own school and we, ours; and have their own churches and we, ours.

As a ten-year-old, I tagged along on my dad's summer sales route. A black gentleman remarked to Dad that he had a fine son. Remembering my manners, I quickly replied, "Thank you, sir!"

Returning to the van, I received a hard lick to my bottom, with the instruction that "We never say 'sir' to *them*."

Should we treat one person with love and godly respect, while withholding it from another? Does God love one human soul more than another? Does

He show respect to one person and not another?

God wants us to be consistent in all we do. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). Hate all sin, not just part of it. Show love to all people, not just a preferred few. If we love those who love us and salute only our closest brethren, we are equal with all sinners (Matthew 5:46-48).

God loved all races and nationalities, not just some of them. If God loves *them*, we need to love *them*, too (John 3:16)!

Loving different races may be OK, but some draw a line at fellowship or worship with *them*. But Peter said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34, KJV), and Jesus taught that those who do the will of the Father in heaven are our brethren (Matthew 5:46-48). If Jesus could eat with the basest sort — prostitutes, thieves, cheats — and Peter could go to the Gentiles, who are we, black or white, to separate ourselves from *them*?

As a pastor in the Deep South, I can truthfully testify that coming together with others who are different from us brings better worship and a deeper walk with God. The Lord has blessed our congregation with black, white, Pakistani, and Indian saints — all saints of the Most High God!

I urge you: Break down the artificial barriers that humanity erects due to race, and see the Lord's blessing in ways you have never seen before! **BA**

Pastor William E. Gilmore serves the Mt. Zion Apostolic Church, a seventh-day congregation in Mobile, AL.

Racism: Nature of the Beast

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writer of Ecclesiastes acknowledged, "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Every race reflects the divine image. Each is uniquely beautiful. Each has its own aesthetic, its own giftings, and its own potential. God is not willing that any of us should ultimately perish.

Jesus died for the Arab, the Asian, the African, and the white man. He did not sacrifice Himself for a tribe, a race, or an ethnicity but for every human being. Racism has no place in the heart or life of any Christian. It is our duty to lift man, not to denigrate him. We are all neighbors on planet Earth. We all share God's resources. We live under His watchful gaze. How we treat each other matters to God. **BA**

Brian Knowles writes from Monrovia, CA. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.



References

1. Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, p. 7
2. *Ibid.*, p. 9
3. Associated Press, September 24, 2004

Back to the Word

by Richard A. Wiedenheft

One frequently hears that the world has more impact on the church than the church has on the world.

This is not a new problem for Christians. In the late A.D. 60s Paul warned Timothy about people who loved themselves, pleasure, and money, and who had a “form of godliness” but denied its power (2 Timothy 3:1-9, NIV). Later in the first century, the church at Thyatira was warned about accommodating a woman who encouraged people to indulge in sinful practices, probably so they could participate in the city’s trade guilds (Revelation 2:20-25). The church at Sardis was upbraided for being alive in name only (3:1). The Laodicean church was criticized for being lukewarm, for valuing physical wealth and security while being spiritually destitute (vv. 14-20).

And history reveals that worldly influences continued to affect the early church. By the fourth century, when the church was officially recognized by Emperor Constantine, it had admittedly changed the culture of the Greco-Roman world; however, in the process the church was also dramatically changed and bore little resemblance to that of the New Testament. Many pagan religious practices and Greek philosophical ideas had become part of mainstream church orthodoxy.

What defense do Christians

today have against being influenced in a similar way by the modern world?

First, we must recognize the ways in which the value system of Scripture is different from that of our culture. Some of these are fairly obvious. For example, the Bible clearly condemns homosexual activity, espouses lifelong marriage, upholds the sanctity of human life, and enjoins the worship of God alone. But some differences may not be so obvious. For example, Christians in the Western world seem to have embraced the idea that the individual and his personal happiness and dignity are of ultimate importance. Scripture, on the other hand, proclaims that God is at the center of the universe. His will, His priorities, His values are what really count — not personal self-direction and fulfillment.

In our culture money, possessions, and financial security are highly esteemed. Shopping is a favorite pastime, even an addiction, for many Christians. Our lives are cluttered with things. Borrowing and debt are a way of life even among those who claim to be followers of Jesus. In contrast, Scripture proclaims that life is about serving others and laying up treasures in heaven.

Like the world around us, we tend to view our bodies as ours to use as we see fit — for the pleasures of eating and drinking,

sex, and thrills. Consequently, alcoholism, obesity, and easily preventable diseases plague believers as well as unbelievers. Pornography and junk food are a steady diet for many in the church. In contrast, Scripture says our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, to be used in service for His honor and glory.

Which will dominate in our personal lives, in our homes, in our church: the culture of the world or the values of God?

The answer depends on what we choose for our mental diet. If our primary daily source of information and entertainment comes from the world, we and our children will gradually adopt its values. We must *not* let this happen!

If we want to remain true to the God who created us, we must intentionally choose to immerse ourselves regularly and deeply in His Word, allowing it to continually shape the way we look at life. Only then will we recognize and, with the help of God, avoid becoming shaped by the evils around us. Indeed, we will be in a position to demonstrate the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and share the unchanging message of the gospel — a message that can dramatically change the culture of our world one person at a time.

WWJD

What Would Jesus Do

About Racism?

WWJD (“What would Jesus do?”) is an important approach to major personal or social issues, like race. This question can help followers of Christ respond to the complex issues of inter-ethnic and inter-racial relations here in America and in other parts of the world.

Jesus was born of Hebrew ethnicity. Racially, He was a Jew from the tribe of Judah. What would He do if He lived, as do many of us, in a diverse culture with different nationalities, languages, colors, races, and tribes all sharing the same homeland?

Matter of fact, that’s exactly where Jesus lived!

First century Palestine was a melting pot of its own, the crossroads of three continents. Persons of Jewish-Hebrew heritage were the majority in and around

Jerusalem, but significant numbers of Greeks and Romans (mostly European), Samaritan crossbreeds, Asians and Arabians, Libyans and Cyrenians (African), Egyptians and Mesopotamians, Cretans and Canaanites traveled this land from lower Judea north to Galilee — or called it home.

So let’s see how Jesus responded to this mix of races and nations, just from the **Gospel of Luke**.

- Jesus rejected the traditional idea of Jewish superiority and triumphalism (3:8). His inaugural sermon in Nazareth stressed that God had chosen non-Israelites also as recipients of His grace (4:25-27), a fact that led to His near-death at the hands of a prejudiced and provincial hometown crowd.
- Christ associated with and ministered to those who were either hated or considered social misfits and outcasts: lepers (5:12), publicans (v.

27), Roman soldiers (7:1ff), Gadarene madmen (8:26), and Samaritans (9:52; 17:16).

- Jesus spoke of some outside Israel’s racial heritage as more worthy of God’s kingdom than were many of the local Jews (10:13, 14; 11:32).
- In Jesus’ parables, a despised stranger was the hero of one story (10:30-37). In another, lowly outsiders became the ultimate objects of God’s grace (14:23, 24).
- In traveling to Jerusalem, Jesus deliberately passed through Samaria — land of half-breeds (17:11) — instead of detouring around it as His Jewish compatriots often did. One lone Samaritan returned to thank God for cleansing (vv. 12-19).
- Jesus dealt with all sorts of people in an even-handed way, as even His enemies admitted: “You do not show personal favoritism . . .” (20:21).

Think of this: Luke, the universal Gospel, says Jesus’ birth happened during registration of “all the world” and heralded “peace on earth.” That blessed event brought lowly, local shepherds to the same level as regal monarchs from the east. And among His final words before departure to heaven, Christ assigned His followers to take the gospel of repentance and remission of sins “to all nations.”

Questions

1. What forms of racial prejudice and discrimination might Jesus have commonly seen in Nazareth? Capernaum? Jerusalem?
2. Based on the texts given above, how do you feel He responded personally to people not of Jewish heritage, as He was?
3. Why, or why not, do you agree with this thesis: “Jesus was hated, rejected, and condemned, not so much because of His own race and ethnicity as because He was inclusive of all races and ethnicities”?



What Did Jesus Say About Life and Death?

The WWJD question would be merely hypothetical, and therefore useless, were it not for the inspired record of Scripture. In the Bible we learn not only what Jesus did and said while He was here on earth but also who He was in His divine-human person.

These three aspects of the Christ — His identity, His actions, His words — are of nearly equal rank and value in helping us decide what He would do now if He were to visit our modern cultures. Of this we may be sure: These three indicators from Scripture, and their implications for today, must all be consistent, for “He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13b).

Although Jesus never addressed abortion, euthanasia, suicide, or warfare as isolated topics, His words do reveal clear convictions concerning the value of personal existence and the potential God has invested in each human being. Examine these clues about Jesus’ relation and attitude to life, all taken from **John’s Gospel**.

- In Him [Christ] was life, the light of men (1:4; 8:12). Of the titles Jesus took to Himself, *life* is a central one. He said, “I am . . . the life” (11:25, 26; 14:6).
- God’s express purpose for giving His only begotten Son was that we might have life (3:16), and

the Son’s purpose for coming was that we might have this life more abundantly (10:10).

- Jesus represented Himself as the source and guarantor of life. When people received Christ and His message, what they drank was “living water,” and what they ate was “living bread” (4:10-14; 7:38; 6:35ff, esp. 51).
- As the Father has life in Himself, so has He given life to the Son (5:26). Thus, Christ could say to the man whose son had been sick unto death, “Your son lives” (4:50, 53).
- Jesus claimed that His words were spiritual life (6:63), and the disciples recognized those words as the source of eternal life (v. 68).
- Confronting those who claimed a capital case against a guilty woman, Christ insisted on mercy for that trusting soul (8:1-12). He had not come to condemn, to judge, or to kill (3:17; 8:11, 15; 10:10). Rather, He laid down His own life so that others should not perish.
- At the death of a close friend, Jesus vented deep sorrow: He wept (11:35). Before His own

death, He renounced the sword, fighting, and killing as ways of resisting the forces of evil in this world (18:10, 11, 36).

- The resurrection of Christ (ch. 20) became the supreme Christian evidence that life triumphs over death and must be preferred to it. Jesus will eventually defeat all the enemies of human life and welfare, including death itself.

Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus did not directly address issues like abortion, euthanasia, suicide, and warfare?
2. Does Jesus’ frequent use of the “life” motif in John’s Gospel directly relate to a Christian view of the life-and-death issues in Question 1? If so, how?
3. How do you think Christ would be involved in the current cultural debate over these issues?

Valuing Life

Before birth to after death, human life is God's top pick. It should be ours, too! **by Israel Steinmetz**

In recent years, the divide between Americans on life-and-death issues has grown wide. *Abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide* have become bywords in our culture, as heated debates grow hotter. On one side are those who champion the sanctity of human life and support a culture of life. On the other are those who defend what they call "free choice," "human rights," and "death with dignity."

As Christians, where should we stand on these complex issues? Let's look to the Bible and learn God's views on human life.

God's perspective

God is timeless. While we are confined within time, God is outside of it. He is not just *before* and *after* time; these are chronological terms. He simply exists; He *is*. Thus, the timeless God sees us before we were conceived, in the womb, at birth, throughout life, at death, and even after our death. The Bible testifies to this (Psalm 90:2; Ephesians 3:21).

God values us before we are conceived. Psalm 139:1-18 is a beautiful expression of God's daily concern for people from before conception and throughout life. He knew all about us before we were even formed in our mother's womb. David wrote,

"Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them" (v. 16).

How amazing: God was at work forming our bodies before our birth! Again, David said, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret . . ." (vv. 13, 15a).

God values us after we are born. God desires our lives to be abundant (John 10:10). Here He refers not only to *eternal* life yet to come but also to abundant life now. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus promises us provision, protection, guidance, and companionship.

God values us when we die. Read this incredible statement:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

Though many of the disciples would face death for their faith, Jesus was watching over them and would know what they were experiencing. Whereas others might take their earthly life, God

alone controls their eternal life (v. 28).

One of life's stark realities is that we, like sparrows, must die someday. What a blessing to know that God cares so much more for us that He knows the number of our hairs and watches over us at death.

God values us in eternity. When we die, we face Judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Thus, God earnestly desires that we accept His forgiveness and live for Him now so we will enjoy eternal life in His coming kingdom (John 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 3:9). Through the sacrifice of His Son, He made provision for us to spend eternity with Him. Jesus' death on the cross atones for sins of all time (Hebrews 10:1-10). God loved us in eternity before we were born, and He will love us in eternity after we die.

God values life. So it is that God loves and values human life from eternity to eternity! The entire Bible testifies to this truth (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:9, 10). To follow God's lead, we, too, must value life from eternity to eternity.

Because of God's great love for people, He is adamantly against taking life. Murder is condemned from the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 4:1-12) to the very end (Revelation 21:8) – and



Skjold Photographs

God made ten enduring statements that would express His desire for humanity to love Him and each other, He specifically outlawed murder (Exodus 20:13).

Jesus was also concerned about protecting life. In His Sermon on the Mount, He told us not to be angry without a cause or to curse others (Matthew 5:21, 22). These things lead to murder.

Rights?

Those who support abortion defend a woman's "right" to choose what happens with her body. Women do have the right of choice: They can choose not to engage in sexual intercourse and thus avoid unwanted pregnancy. But it is no woman's "right" to murder her baby, one to whom she personally gave life. Women who become pregnant from rape or incest need the love and compassion of the church in recovering from these terrible experiences, but murdering their babies should not be part of this

Those who defend doctor-assisted suicide are misled, thinking they are defending human dignity and a "right to die." Every person has a right to die and will exercise that right at some point. But no one has a biblical right to kill himself or herself. True dignity and human rights are not found in destroying the unborn, the elderly, or the terminally ill. Rather, they are found in relinquishing our rights and dignity to God and entrusting Him with our lives from start to finish.

Reaching out

While we take a firm stand against murder through abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide, we also value the lives of those who have shared in the guilt of those sins. Parents who have murdered their babies and doctors who have murdered their patients are some of the people Jesus would be seen eating and spending time with if He walked the earth today. The religious elite of Jesus' day criticized Him

often for socializing with sinners and people of low repute (Matthew 9:11; 11:19; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1, 2). Let us be guilty of the same charge as we seek to reconcile the world to Christ.

Since Jesus desires to see them come to repentance and be saved, we must reach out to them with His love and acceptance, offering His forgiveness and hope. Paul wrote, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15). Have we accepted this saying?

Taking a stand

When we face complex human life issues, let us remember God's love and the value He places on our lives. Remember that God sees our lives as a process that starts and either ends or continues forever in eternity. Before we are conceived, He knows what each day holds. He desires to save us from our sins and give us abundant life in this world and eternal life in the world to come.

With this in mind, we take a stand against anything that interrupts God-given life from the moment of conception or prematurely hastens the God-ordained process of dying at the end. ■■

Israel Steinmetz is a graduate seminary student living in Chesapeake, VA.





Life and

Life, the Intimate Friend

What is it to live? To live is to share the warm breath and blood of human beings, all of whom exist by the common love and daily grace of God. Living means sipping together at the universal beverage of time: When we run out of that, we are out of life. So let us not waste time, breath, or blood, for these are the stuff that life is made of.

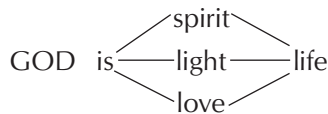
Life has great value — much more than the food and clothing that sustain it. Life's worth cannot be measured by material gain but by the potential and development of a whole person — the soul. A little child — just one small, needy version of humanity — illustrates the value of life in God's kingdom (Matt. 6:25; 10:31; 16:26; 18:1-6).

January 15-22, 2006, is Sanctity of Human Life Week. Visit beavoice.net, a Web site developed by Focus on the Family, for resources and information about this important observance.

For King David, the one thing better than life was the loving-kindness of God; for Paul, it was knowing Christ. In Him we live and move and have our being (Psa. 63:3; Phil. 1:21; 3:10; Acts 17:28).

Notice the biblical connection between deity and life. Three times the Bible reduces God's essence and nature to a single substance: He is *spirit*; He is *light*; and He is *love* (John 4:24; 1 John 1:5; 4:8, 16). The same three one-word descriptive definitions for God are also used as equivalent expressions for *life*: The *Spirit* is life and gives life (Eccl. 12:7; John 6:63). Life is *light* (John 1:4; 8:12). To be alive is to *love* (1 John 3:14).

The sum of these texts, in diagram form, is this:



The biblical and only correct view for Christians is that God is life and the author of it. Life originates in Him, and He gives it to whomever He will. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).

Death, the Final Enemy

Death is the opposite of life. As life is the beginning, so death is the end of what God created good — of breath and heartbeat, of joy and thought and celebration, of the warmth of life. Death is the end of time. To die is to give all this up, for there is no work or thought or wisdom or praise in the grave (*sheol*, *hades*), where we go at death. Short of resurrection, death is dark and dank nothingness.

Death is sin-related and sin-caused. It rises out of sin, is the sting of sin, and cannot be avoided by those who practice sin (Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:56; James 1:15). Death is universal; it comes upon us all. As surely as humans spring from Adam's seed, so we have all sinned and will surely die (Gen. 3; Rom. 5).

Since death is the Siamese twin of sin and results in the end of time and of all the good of life, death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). Death and the grave are, for now, under the Devil's power (Heb. 2:14). Death is not to be welcomed as a friend but resisted as a foe. An offense to humanity and God, death results

Death



in grief, not joy. When Lazarus died, Jesus wept! We may celebrate the life of many and be glad when sin and suffering have ceased. Even so, we should be slow to rejoice at anyone's death.

Death is everyman's appointment, leading to Judgment. Our archenemy the Devil had the power of death, but Christ defeated him at every turn, and He will soon destroy the last enemy as well. Death, thou shalt die (1 Cor. 15:20-26, 54-57; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 9:27)!

How is it we die? By natural, unavoidable, and non-deliberate causes:

- some of old age, like Moses at age 120 (Deut. 34:7)
- some by illness, like Jereboam's son (1 Kings 14:1-19)
- some by accident, as with a dangerous tool (Deut. 19:5, 6)
- some of natural disaster, as in floods and earthquakes

The Bible attaches no moral fault to deaths that occur by natural and unavoidable means. Accident and disease are not punishable, except where they might have been avoided by greater care for human health and welfare. Even natural disaster may be seen as one inevitable result of living under sin's domain.

By avoidable, deliberate human causes:

- homicide: Cain's murder of Abel (Gen. 4)
- genocide and mass murder: Abimelech's brethren (Judges 9:5)
- infanticide: child sacrifice (Deut. 12:31), abortion*, etc.
- suicide*: Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27:3-5)
- assisted suicide*: King Saul (2 Sam. 1:1-16)
- euthanasia*: Terri Schiavo (passive euthanasia)
- capital punishment**: Timothy McVeigh (Rom. 13:2-4)
- carnal warfare**: Iraqi conflict (2 Cor. 10:4)

With few exceptions, death that occurs from the willful action or neglect of human hands is a violation of moral law — the command against murder (Ex. 20:13). The ancient principle is that every man and beast pays for the human blood he sheds — with his own (Gen. 9:6).

In the Hebrew Scriptures, some killings were prescribed by Mosaic law or commanded by Yahweh, and thus not classified as murder. One example of a capital crime was murder, but the act of executing a murderer

was not itself a murder. Also, a military campaign undertaken at divine command required killing, but this could hardly be regarded as murder, since it was ordered by God himself (see "Questions & Answers," p. 7).

Our purpose here is to underscore the sacredness of all human life and to call for reduction in the number of deliberate deaths so common in our violent culture. "Jesus said, 'I am . . . the life. . . . I have come that they might have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.' . . . therefore, choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (John 14:6; 10:10; Deut. 30:19).

— Calvin Burrell

**Most conservative Bible students, including the author and the Church of God (Seventh Day), regard these deaths as murder — a violation of God's moral law.*

*** Conservative students differ here. The author and CoG7 regard carnal warfare as an illegitimate form of killing for Christians, but find sufficient biblical support for capital punishment.*

Stem Cell Research: Facts and Fiction



Basic information brings a clearer view of the current controversy. **by George Angelo**

What is your stand on stem cell research?

Supporters of embryonic stem cell research promise cures for such human afflictions as Parkinson's disease, diabetes, and spinal cord injuries. Opponents of this research believe that the human embryo is a human being that deserves protection from medical experimentation.

Developments and decisions in stem cell research are made daily. Any interested observer needs to stay informed in order to intelligently and ethically address the debate. Although the subject involves technical science, one doesn't need a background in molecular biology to understand it. Many resources on the Internet and in libraries explain the topic in layman terms.

Embryonic stem cells

More than twenty years ago, scientists discovered how to obtain stem cells from mouse embryos. In 1998 they learned how to isolate stem cells from human embryos and grow them in the laboratory.

Human embryos used in research are obtained from in vitro fertilization (IVF) clinics. In these clinics fertilization is achieved outside the body. Participants in IVF may choose to donate for research embryos they no longer need or want. As embryonic stem cell research progresses, clinics may begin soliciting embryos for research.

An embryo is a developing organism that forms at the time of fertilization, when egg and sperm unite. Embryos used in research are typically four or five days old when stem cells are extracted. At this stage the embryo is a hollow

microscopic ball of cells called the blastocyst. Embryonic stem cells are located in the inner cell mass of the blastocyst.

Embryonic stem cells have these general properties: They can divide and renew themselves for long periods, and they are undifferentiated — that is, they can give rise to specialized cell types like muscle cells, red blood cells, brain cells, or other cells. A stem cell is called *pluripotent* when it can develop into many different cell types. Scientists like Linda Demer, Ph.D., professor of medicine and physiology at UCLA Medical School, believe that embryonic stem cells are *totipotent* and can develop into all cell types of the body.

Some researchers believe that, in the future, embryonic stem cells may be used in cell-based therapies — procedures in which the cells are induced to develop into a specific cell type needed to repair damaged adult cells, or tissues, in the body. Researchers feel that if they can reliably direct the differentiation of embryonic stem cells into the desired cell types, they may use the resulting cells to treat diseases like diabetes and Parkinson's.

Obstacles and dilemmas

To date, no human being has undergone embryonic stem cell therapy. Despite the reported hope in embryonic stem cell research, obstacles exist that prevent its use in humans.

One of many hurdles is that experimental animals injected with embryonic stem cells often develop teratomas — tumors made up of disorganized cell masses that may lead to tissue destruction. Because this is a

form of transplant therapy, transplant rejection can occur when the patient's immune system attacks the foreign material introduced into the body.

The ethical dilemma, however, is even greater: In order to extract embryonic stem cells, the outer layer of the blastocyst must be ruptured. Once broken, the blastocyst can never develop into a viable fetus. The human embryo has been destroyed.

Human embryos

This is why opponents like Professor Robert P. George call this “destructive embryonic stem cell research.”

Professor George, member of the president's council on bioethics and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University, believes that a human embryo is a human being. He defines it as a stage of human development just as infancy, adolescence, and adulthood are stages in human development.

Says George: “A human embryo is a whole living member of the species *homo sapiens* in the earliest stage of his or her natural development. I use the personal pronouns here because sex is determined from the very beginning as humans. Every person began life as an embryo

which was human from the moment of existence. We were not potatoes who became human beings or pre-human beings. We were human beings at the early stage and now human beings at a much later stage.”

Although an advocate of Judeo-Christian morality, Professor George emphasizes that he does not refer to the Bible when detailing facts about human embryos. Instead, he uses information in basic embryology textbooks used in major medical schools.

First-year medical students learn that a human embryo is not a mere disposable part of something else. Rather, the uniting of sperm and egg generates a living thing that is admitted by every authority in the field to be a new, distinct, and enduring organism: an embryo.

Professor George attests: “The human embryo possesses all the genetic material needed to inform and organize its flow. The direction of its growth toward human maturity is not extrinsically determined but is in accord with the genetic material within . . . we know too much to say, ‘Gosh, when does life begin?’ Our friends in embryology and biology have solved that.”

Professor George believes there would be no objection to using pluripotent embryonic-type

“Every person began life as an embryo which was human from the moment of existence.”

“If we really cared about the patient, we would focus on adult stem cell research.”

cells if they could be derived from non-embryonic sources, like . . .

Adult stem cells

Adult stem cells are undifferentiated cells found among specialized cells in human tissues and organs. They can renew themselves and typically generate the same cell types of the tissue in which they reside. Adult stem cells are not harvested from human embryos or fetuses but are found in the developed human body. Also, stem cells are available from human placentas and the cord blood of newborn babies.

Supporters of embryonic stem cell research argue that adult stem cells, although a worthy field of study, are not as versatile as embryonic stem cells. Recent studies, however, have demonstrated that adult stem cells from one tissue may give rise to cell types of a completely different tissue, a phenomenon known as *plasticity*. Examples of such plasticity include blood cells becoming neurons and liver cells that can be made to produce insulin.

Recent studies demonstrating that certain adult stem cells are pluripotent have been published in the *Journal of Cell Science*, June 2004; *Journal of Experimental Medicine*, July 2004; and *The*

Journal of Clinical Investigation, February 2005. The advantages of using adult stem cells are that no transplant rejection is experienced when a patient undergoes therapy using his or her own stem cells, and *no embryos are destroyed in the process!*

David A. Prentice, Ph.D., senior fellow for Life Sciences, Center for Human Life Bioethics in Washington, D.C., founding member of Do No Harm, the Coalition of Americans for Research Ethics, and professor at Georgetown University, believes it makes scientific sense to focus on adult stem cell research. He says: “We often hear that embryonic stem cells have tremendous potential and possibility, yet the published science shows that it has not been very successful at all in making good on any of the promises that have been made over the years. Meanwhile, the published science of the last six years has shown that adult stem cells, including umbilical cord blood, are already treating patients successfully. For years we have heard that you could not find enough of these cells to make other tissues. That is simply old science, based on an old dogma. Hundreds of scientific papers show that that is an outdated idea.”

Dr. Prentice also says: “There are thousands of patients who

have been successfully treated and have benefited from adult stem cell research for conditions like Parkinson’s disease, spinal cord injury, heart therapy after heart attack, multiple sclerosis. The list goes on and on. If we really cared about the patient, we would focus on adult stem cell research.”

Entering the debate

One high-profile supporter of embryonic stem cell research was the late Christopher Reeve. John F. Kilner, Ph.D., professor of bioethics and contemporary culture at Trinity International University, believes that we can learn a lesson from Reeve’s death. “People are dying now, and we have to get them treatment now, and adult stem cell treatment is what is producing those treatments now. Many people don’t understand that.”

Dr. Kilner maintains that adult stem cell research is far ahead of embryonic stem cell research, so much so that many people could be saved today if every available resource were pledged toward adult stem cell research. He believes that the biggest problem is the way the research is presented in public discussion and media.

“The question posed to most people is, ‘Are you for or against stem cell research?’ When it’s reported that some people are against various practices going on in stem cell research, it’s as if, ‘Gee, can you imagine that there are these people out there who are against stem cell research? And this is such a wonderful area. How uncompassionate, how uncaring to be against stem cell research.’”

How can concerned people

affect this debate? Dr. Kilner explains: "People need to become informed. They need to understand what is going on. People need to know what makes a human being a human being and why an embryo is a human being at the earliest stage. So job one is to educate oneself."

Second, Dr. Kilner challenges people to communicate informed opinions to friends, relatives, and neighbors. Urge your church to start an adult education program and a youth education program.

Third, he urges people to communicate their views. If a local research institution is deciding how to prioritize its resources — toward adult stem cell work, embryonic stem cell work, or a combination of the two — Dr. Kilner suggests finding out who are the decision-makers in that institution and conveying your information and opinion. "Everyone has a responsibility to make sure that the people who are in decision-making roles at a low level or high level have the appropriate information and understand what our ethical concerns are. Those are very important steps to take."

The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity was founded, he explains, not only to give information on stem cell research but also to offer ideas on how to bring a Christian perspective into a pluralistic world and public arena.

Hope for the future

Stem cell research is a promising and exciting field of medicine. But as much hope as embryonic stem cells may offer those afflicted with disease or

handicaps, the truth is that the more than 58 different treatments successfully used in human patients have all used *adult* stem cells. None are embryonic.

Given time, money, and resources, scientists will someday discover treatments using embryonic stem cells. But the actual benefits of adult stem cell research are here today. A concerned and informed society can voice its support for adult stem cell research and further the actual scientific successes that have already benefited humankind.

A concerned society that believes a human embryo is a human being is called upon to echo, in the public arena, the words of William Temple, twentieth century spokesman for the Christian and social conscience:

The primary principle of Christian Ethics and Christian Politics must be respect for every person simply as a person. If each man and woman is a child of God, whom God loves and for whom Christ died, then there is in each a worth absolutely independent of all the usefulness to society. The person is primary, not the society; the State exists for the citizen, not the citizen for the State.

We conclude, then, that embryonic stem cell research results in the cessation of actual and viable human life. Adult stem cell research, on the other hand, draws from non-embryonic sources and does not demand that one human life be sacrificed for another. ■■

George Angelo writes from Marina de Rey, CA.

Questions & Answers

continued from page 7

our Bibles and decide God is not good, however, consider related teachings we have less problem with. The Bible teaches a God of judgment who will finally destroy all the wicked of the earth — forever. Previews of this final judgment include the water of Noah's flood and the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities of the Canaanites (Deut. 20) and the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15) are just two more illustrations of this truth.

God's capital punishment upon evil has happened in the past and will happen in the future to those who do not submit to His good pleasure. Some evil societies receive their punishment early, but it will eventually come upon all who refuse God's grace.

People of faith may view these visitations of divine wrath as true expressions of God's love. For those who die at God's hand, He gives them what they have always wanted: freedom from Himself. Those spared the destruction are then free from the deadly influence of evildoers — a much greater expression of love.

For God to kill evildoers in this fashion does not violate the sixth commandment, which means "Thou shalt not murder." There may be a time to kill (Eccl. 3:3), but other scriptures limit this to cases that God clearly authorizes.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Take a Stand!

by Israel Steinmetz

Tired of fake religion? As a teen in the church today, you probably know all about it. You can sniff out hypocrites, phonies, people who do things for the wrong reasons — the works.

You're tired of people who act all religious and moral but aren't real. You yawn through sermons and think *What does this have to do with me?* And you survive those really dull songs sung with no emotion or meaning.

Well, guess what? Jesus was tired of the same things when He lived on earth. OK, so He didn't yawn through sermons and songs. But He did lose His cool with religious leaders who looked religious on the outside but blew it in the heart department. He actually threw a bunch of moneychangers out of the temple because they wanted to buy and sell there instead of respecting it as a house of prayer. And He clashed with those who thought they were so holy when they were really just as sinful as everyone else. Check out these scriptures, and you'll see what I mean: Matthew 23:27, 28; Mark 11:15-17; Matthew 23:1-5.

You know what happened, right? Jesus took such a hard stand against fake religion that the religious leaders killed Him for it! But He taught His followers to be different. One of them — James — wrote a letter over 1,900 years ago that we can still read today. It's in the New Testament and one of my favorites in the Bible. It's an up-front, in-your-face kind of book because James comes down hard on religious phonies. Here's an example: "Religion that God accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans or

widows who need help, and keeping yourself free from the world's evil influence" (James 1:27, NCV).

Did you catch that? God is high on pure religion — the kind that looks out for those who are left out, left behind, and left alone. These are the people Jesus loved to spend time with: widows, orphans, illegitimate kids, prostitutes, drug addicts, losers, the poor, the needy, the outcasts, and the misfits. The whole Bible talks about God's love for the weak, the lonely, and the helpless.

Have you ever heard "God helps those who help themselves"? That may be partly true, but I know a better truth than that: God helps those who *can't* help themselves. And you know what? In our world those who can't help themselves are often killed because they're unwanted. Think about it. Who could be more helpless than an unborn baby? And yet helpless little babies are killed by the thousands every day, right here in America!

Or think about the elderly or the sick who are caused to die without proper care in some parts of Europe and even here in our country, in Oregon. I think God is disgusted by this kind of stuff. He loves the unloved and the terminally ill, and He wants us to love them, too.

So are you tired of fake religion? Then don't let yourself be stained by the world's evil influence. Stand up for the weak, the helpless, and the aged — those who don't have a voice. That's pure religion as far as God is concerned.

Our Newest Natural Resource



How far will we go to find a cure? by **Bob Hostetler**

In 1729 the people of Ireland were ravaged by poverty, and many were starving. To answer their desperate plight, Jonathan Swift, an Irish clergyman, put forth what he titled “A Modest Proposal For Preventing The Children of Poor People in Ireland From Being A Burden to Their Parents or Country, and For Making Them Beneficial to The Public.” In one of the most influential satires ever written, Swift proposed that a certain percentage of Irish babies be sold for food, simultaneously increasing the food supply and reducing the demand.

Swift’s proposal was largely successful in awakening many people to the dangers of moral utilitarianism, the view that a worthwhile end will justify an otherwise objectionable means. Despite Swift’s pretty, dignified prose, readers were repulsed by the suggestion that “a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food.” Such action would be repugnant, even if it saved adult lives.

But, of course, that was nearly three hundred years ago. Perhaps not even Jonathan Swift could move us today.

Modus operandi

The moral utilitarianism that Swift lampooned in 1729 has become the modus operandi for many of us. When apartment dwellers Jason Black and Frances Schroeder faced the prospect of a third child in the family (Schroeder was pregnant with a baby boy), they discussed creative ways to make enough money to buy a house. They eventually offered the baby’s name for auction on eBay and Yahoo, hoping that some company would pay as much as \$500,000 for the “naming rights” to their child. They were apparently prepared



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to name their child Microsoft or General Electric if it meant getting a new house out of the deal. (Black did, however, disqualify cigarette or gun manufacturers, stipulating that “My wife and I have standards.”) Call it “A Modest Proposal For Preventing The Children of Two People in America From Being Raised in an Apartment, and For Making The Youngest Child Beneficial to The Family Budget.”

So we’ve come to this: children as a natural resource. A way to make money. A way to make our lives better. A way to cure disease.

After all, that’s the principle at the core of the embryonic stem cell debate. Since the original cells of an unborn human baby in the earliest stages of development can develop into all the organs of an adult human, why not use those stem cells to benefit the public? The reasoning

seems especially attractive in the case of surplus embryos from fertility clinics, which would be destroyed anyway. Wouldn’t it be better to put those unwanted, unborn children to good use, utilizing them for medical research and for the treatment of Parkinson’s disease? Call it “A Modest Proposal For Preventing Unwanted, Unborn Children From Being Unnecessarily Wasted, and For Making Them Beneficial to The Public.” My, what a can of worms we have opened!

Symptom, consequence, warning

The current debate is simultaneously a symptom, a consequence, and a warning. It is a symptom of a culture that no longer has the benefit of a moral consensus. To paraphrase the psalmist, “Once the foundations have been destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3).

These ethical controversies are also a natural consequence of moral utilitarianism, the idea that the right or wrong of a thing depends upon whether it has a generally positive outcome. An increasing percentage of people in our society weigh difficult decisions by the credo “If it works, it’s right.”

But God’s standards have never been fluid. God’s perspective of reality says, “If it’s right, it will work” for if you “observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his

decrees and commands, his laws and requirements . . . [then] you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go” (1 Kings 2:3, NIV). Ours is a cause-and-effect world in which God communicated to us His ways that are based on universal — not utilitarian — standards.

And, finally, the debate over such issues as stem cell harvesting and cloning is also a warning. The primary argument in favor of embryonic stem cell harvesting and research is, of course, the potential good that may come; the end will justify the means. But God’s Word says, “Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him” (Psalm 127:3, NLT). Children — even unborn children — are not a natural resource to be harvested and used for beneficial ends; they are a gift, a heritage, a priceless trust from the hand of God.

Hard words

Those are hard words for our pragmatic culture to hear, because if the end justifies the means, then helping or curing one person — especially if it’s *you, your spouse, your parent, or your loved one* — makes all sorts of otherwise objectionable actions OK.

Which may seem attractive . . . until *you* become the means, and not the end. **BA**

Bob Hostetler writes from Hamilton, OH.



Mail Bag



A word of support

In a recent BA (October-November '05, p. 28) appeared a picture of 50 students at our school in Owosso, Michigan — a wonderful opportunity for them to mature into adulthood. Some are likely to become ministers. What better can parents expect for their children? The world and its glitter are after them. The tempter is after them. The Lord is after them (Matt. 11:28-30). I urge you: Support Spring Vale.

L. L. C.
Independence, MO

No compromise

As I read "When Brethren Battle" (October-November '05, p. 18), Mark 7:13 came to mind: "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered."

After referencing 1 Corinthians 6:1-6, which clearly forbids brother going to law with brother, the writer then asks: "Does this mean that Christians should never seek restitutions in secular courts? . . . Not necessarily." He goes on

to further justify brother going to court with brother!

The Scriptures teach that when a dispute cannot be reconciled, the two parties are to appear before the church (6:4). Not pastor, elders, or deacons are to be the judge, but the least esteemed in the church. If the guilty person will not submit to the church's judgment, should the innocent party go to a court of law? [According to 6:7,] they are to endure injustice [and] suffer wrong for Christ's sake! They are not to bring disputes to the world and bring reproach upon the church. That is the plain Word of God.

Does that let the guilty person off the hook? If the person is found wrong by the church but will not humble himself, it shows he is not led by the Spirit, and the church should move in due order, according to Matthew 18:17. The person will fall into the category of 1 Corinthians 5:11.

When a church has more of the world than of the Spirit, it will be powerless and have to rely upon the arm of flesh (government, courts, etc.) for support. Let's not compromise the Word of God so it will fit a compromised and evil society!

M. B.
Evarts KY

Reply from Professor Kevin Lewis, quoted in the article: In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul discusses the practice of bringing non-criminal (civil) cases before the non-Christian (Roman) courts, which were decided according to Roman standards of justice. These civil cases should be decided according to God's standard

of justice and, since Roman law permitted Jews to decide their own property cases, Christians should have at least one wise person among them who could justly decide such a case. The Bible does not forbid one to bring a civil case, but it strongly admonishes Christians to deal with it themselves.

Criminal cases are another matter. The church does not work out criminal cases on its own. Paul clearly designates the same Roman government as a "minister of God" that does not "bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13:1-7). Evildoers, beware: Paul does not tell us to take criminal matters to the church, but to the criminal authorities.

On several occasions the apostle Paul appealed to the Roman civil courts to establish his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-39; 22:25-29; 23:27; 24:10-21; 25:4-12). Clearly, the courts are not a "Christian-free zone" in Scripture.

Jews and Christians could petition the Roman civil courts to handle these matters themselves. And all things being equal, a competent Christian court is better than a court of infidels.

I cannot agree with M. B.'s conclusions. Frankly, too many Christian leaders are uneducated in the ways of remedial justice to wisely decide such cases. I have seen cases where "Christians" have defrauded people out of their life savings and left their "brother" in great need. This sort of sin and injustice must be remedied. In the end, it is better to have Christian arbitration solve the issue in a just manner, rather than a secular court.

A sunset over a mountain range with a large evergreen tree in the foreground. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by clouds, casting a warm glow over the scene. The sky transitions from a deep purple at the bottom to a bright yellow at the top. The mountains in the background are silhouetted against the bright sky.

**We are always looking for
evidence of God.**

**We need not search
any further.**

**His existence is like the sun:
It rises in the morning,
glorifies the earth during the day,
departing briefly at night,
only to remind us that He is always there,
although not seen.**

**Comes the dawn,
the sun rises in all its magnificence.**

**Therefore, let us allow the sun
to remind us of God's existence,
always to return to us,
again and again.**

Arthur Bounds



What's new with . . .

Publications

- Adult quarterly on "Who Is Jesus?" begins in January

National FYC

- New Web site: <http://fyc.cog7.org>

Spring Vale Academy

- Second Semester begins January 8, 9; 989-725-2391

Ministries Training System

- Regional classrooms resume in January; <http://mts.cog7.org>

All ministries

- Annual meetings in Denver January 22-24
- Annual Prayer Initiative February 4-25

LITES

- Apply for spring term by March 1

Spring Vale Academy

Training our teenagers for more than 55 years.

- An alternative for educating youth and keeping them in the faith
- The motivation that everyone needs to know Jesus Christ and have a growing relationship with God
- Spiritual leadership: praise team, ministry groups, and more
- Sports, cheerleading, music, drama, and other activities without Sabbath conflicts
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- Low student-teacher ratio; individualized attention
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Help continue the SVA legacy with your financial support.



SVA seniors of 2005-06



Spring Vale classroom (circa 1960)

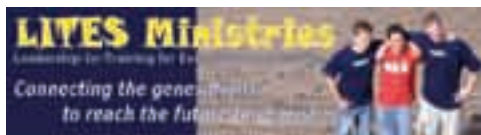
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A-OK MTS: Students and instructors of Ministries Training System in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, come from Oklahoma, too, suggesting the "A-OK" moniker for this regional classroom where Elder Richard Cress serves as coordinator. New course work begins here and in a score of other U.S. and Canada sites early in 2006. For one near you, visit www.mts.cog7.org or e-mail training@cog7.org.

Fall Festival in PA

Each autumn the Pleasant Hills Christian Church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, enjoys a Christ-centered celebration of the tabernacling (dwelling) of God with His creation — past, present, and future. October 18-25, 2005, brethren from several states came to join the daily Bible study, worship, fellowship, and recreation. Speakers on the theme "The Kingdom of God is at Hand" were pastors Bruce Chesney and Robert Wertz; Joe Kirkpatrick and Jerry McClenagan from Christian Church of God in Texas; Calvin Burrell, Bill Hicks, and Richard Wiedenheft. Contact the Harrisburg church at bchesney@paonline.com.



LITES is a discipling ministry that assists the body of Christ in bringing up spiritual sons and daughters with a heart for God, strength of character, and vision for the future. LITES serves single young adults (age 18+) who wish to glorify and worship Christ with all their being and who realize the dedication this requires.

Application deadline for spring term is March 1. Visit <http://lites.cog7.org> or contact LITES Ministries, P. O. Box 172, Stanberry, MO 64489; 660-783-9544; lites@cog7.org.

New Year, New Face

National FYC has a new and improved look online! With new features, lots of pictures, and downloadable information, just about anything you'd like to know about NFYC is here. Stop by at <http://fyc.cog7.org> and check us out!

— Kurt Lang
NFYC Director

Call to Confession

President Whaid Rose has announced that the annual General Conference Prayer Initiative is scheduled February 4-25, 2006. Prayer guides on the biblical theme of confession will be distributed through local churches, and all members are invited to participate.

Lord's Supper Service is scheduled in all congregations for Tuesday evening, April 11.

Death notice: Elder Samuel Wade, 88, of Winter Haven, Florida, a minister of the Church for many years, passed away on November 17.



Ribbon-Cutting for Kids

On October 22 the Marion, Oregon, church dedicated the remodeled and renamed Children's Ministry Center. Children's director Roy Roche thanked those involved in the project, and Pastor Dale Lawson led in prayer. The renovation committee included Candi Roche, Wes Stucker, Joram Cernava, and Craig and Debbie Hawkins. More than 55 children attend the Marion congregation.

Other uses of the refurbished space include the church's Samaritan Ministries (providing foods and household items for the needy) and the office of new associate pastor, Elder Nelson Caswell.



North American Women's Association

Interview with NAWM Director Mary Ling, Amherst, Ohio

BA: Is Women's Day scheduled in 2006? How does Women's Day assist women in serving the Lord?

ML: Women's

Day happens on March 4 or on another Sabbath that month. It allows churches to enjoy a program planned by women and gives women the opportunity to use their talents outside the traditional roles of singing, teaching, and potluck. As always, the program conforms to local convention. Working closely with others may also encourage women to find avenues for service outside the congregation.

BA: What NAWM programs are working in 2006?

ML: Our most publicized ministries in recent years have been *Afterglow* and the Medical Missions project. We are raising funds for another trip to Mexico or Central America with a medical team.

Our least active ministry is the Seeker's program. It is a vehicle for evangelizing age 9-12 youngsters not only in the Church but also in communities where there is need for after-school supervision. The badges earned are attractive, and the projects teach commitment to worthwhile goals.

BA: Why should women attend the National Retreat in April?

ML: Although women are nurturers, they also need nurturing. Perhaps I have benefited much from retreats because I have no biological



sisters and have found that the special bond shared among women of faith is strong and lasting. To experience this, women must try it with open minds and hearts. A retreat at this level gives women the opportunity to meet and worship with women from different locations (U.S. and Canada) and from different cultures.



North American Women's Ministries

Calls all women of faith to come apart and rest awhile at the National Women's Retreat
April 14-16, 2006

"Nurturing Mind, Body and Spirit"

Clarion Hotel, 3333 S. Glenstone
Springfield, MO 65804
417-883-6550 or 800-756-7318

Lodging, meals: \$126, due upon arrival at hotel. Free shuttle provided from local airport. Arrive before dinner on Friday and depart mid-morning on Sunday.

Registration: \$24 per person by February 14 to Mary Ling, P. O. Box 301
Amherst, OH 44001

Or contact

Mary Ling: 440-988-5278
Sylvia Corral: 209-869-0777

International Tour

Canada and United States

For missions work, seven world zones have been identified by G. C. Missions Ministries. Our 2006 tour will visit each zone, starting with Zone 1 – the U.S. and Canada.

Past at a glance

The Church of God (Seventh Day) began from efforts of zealous believers in Michigan and Iowa (1850s, 60s). Buoyed by their commitment to Christ, the Second Coming, the Sabbath, and biblical authority, they began to publish *The Hope of Israel* in 1863. As work spread to Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska, the General Conference was formed in 1884 and incorporated in 1899, with offices in Stanberry, Missouri. Elders Gilbert Cranmer of Michigan and Jacob Brinkerhoff of Iowa-Missouri were among the Church's faithful and effective servants in the nineteenth century.

Early in the twentieth century the Church, led by Elder A. N. Dugger and others, moved to expand its borders and unify its ranks. It grew from coast to coast and into other countries, starting with Canada and Mexico. A blow came in 1933 when a group of ministers and members separated to offices in Salem, West Virginia. The two groups



reunited in 1949, but effects of the Stanberry-Salem split still linger in some regions.

With offices in Denver, Colorado (1950), the "merger" Church began to regain momentum. Increasing success came with the leadership of Robert Coulter, General Conference president from 1963 to 1987. In this era the modern CoG7 was shaped and the International Ministerial Congress was launched. Under IMC all CoG7 conferences around the world became equal members, with Elder Coulter as first president.

Present facts and figures

Approximately 10,000 members in Canada and the U.S. meet in 200 affiliated congregations across seven G. C. districts. Nearly 140 ordained ministers compose the North American Ministerial Council. In his ninth year as Conference president, Elder Whaid Rose considers it a

privilege to serve here, where brethren of many nationalities form a culturally diverse church, unified in Christ.

Several G. C. Ministries are operated by the Conference:

- Publications, producing the *Bible Advocate* magazine (for 143 years) and other printed/online materials
- Ministries Training System, taking training to the people and preparing men for pastoral service
- Missions Ministries, serving in Home Missions, Missions Abroad, Church Planting, and Disaster Relief
- North American Women's Ministries, SWORD, National FYC, and Spring Vale Academy, serving the Church's women, young adults, and youth.

Prospects for the future

Presently, the Church is making concerted efforts to emerge as a Christ-centered, Bible-based, Spirit-filled, gospel-oriented, Sabbath-observing fellowship. We see the Church as part of God's family on earth, with an important role in the larger body of Christ.

To exalt and obey the Lord Jesus according to the Word, we join hands and hearts with our CoG7 brethren around the world. In this fellowship of grace and truth, it is our duty and privilege to serve in the gospel of Christ for the glory of God and the growth of His kingdom.

Courage and Conviction

Rosa Parks, the mother of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, died late last year. She grew up in the South where blacks were subjected to segregation laws, including entering public buses through the back door and sitting only in the section reserved for them in the back. Blacks would first enter at the front, pay their fare, get off, and then reenter through the back door. Rosa's arrest for refusing to surrender her seat to a white man on a municipal bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 sparked a 381-day bus boycott and ignited the most significant Civil Rights Movement in modern American history. It was led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and eventually resulted in Congress banning legally sanctioned discrimination and injustice against people of color.

Decades later, many in our society neither know Rosa's story nor relate to her struggle. That's why her recent death and a host of honors and tributes, which includes being the first woman to lie in state in the Capitol rotunda, awakened our collective consciences about the history of the struggle for racial equality and the task yet before us.

An Alabama native, Rosa began her ride to freedom at age eleven, when she moved to Montgomery because schools in her little town did not accept African-American students beyond the sixth grade. When she first registered to vote, Rosa was subjected to a literacy test, required only of African-Americans. She was told she would receive her voter registration card in the mail, but it never came. When she tried a second time, she was told she had failed the test, but she was never shown the test results. The third time Rosa tried, she hand-copied the questions and her answers so she could prove that she had passed. This time she received her card but could only vote if she paid a poll tax, not just for that year but for all the years she would be eligible to vote. She did pay the tax.

I share these details to show that Rosa's action on the bus that day was neither a chance encounter with fate nor the passive act of a tired woman on her way home from work. It's been said that Rosa was motivated by the accumulated indignities of bygone days and by the hope and aspiration of unborn generations. Through nonviolent, peaceful resistance, Rosa led an unlikely army in the fight to recover America's promise of liberty and justice for all. By sitting down on that bus, she moved us all closer to racial justice. By sitting where she sat, I now sit where I sit.

Rosa's story reminds me of a scripture: "From one man he [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26, NIV). It reminds me of the power of one voice, the possible impact of one life. Rosa's small stature and delicate features remind us that we don't have to carry a big stick to make a difference in the world. It is said that her strength lay in doing what everyone could do, but didn't. Her life tells us that more can be gained by a simple act of courage and conviction than from anger and hate.

The gospel leaves no room for racial injustice; therefore, Rosa Parks' cause should be every Christian's cause. Much good has been accomplished for racial justice and equality over the past fifty years, but more remains to be done. The bus still comes by every day, and our choices shape our lives, our future, and our culture. The world is a better place because Rosa Parks lived. As Dr. King once said:

If I can help somebody as I pass along,
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song,
If I can show somebody that he's traveling

wrong,

Then my living will not be in vain.

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*
General Conference President





Coming to your church soon . . .

THE SEVENTH DAY

Revelations from the Lost Pages of History

An up-to-date, professional documentary on the history of the weekly Sabbath is coming your way in 2006, compliments of the General Conference.

As an integral part of the Christian Sabbath community, CoG7 is pleased to distribute this five-part DVD to affirm our Sabbath tradition, provide information and training on the topic, and enhance our appreciation for the gift of Sabbath — both literal (each week) and spiritual (in Christ).

From LLT Productions, this impressive educational set is narrated in English by actor Hal Holbrook. Also available in Spanish, it is presented for congregational use as an ACTSeminar or for group Bible study. Contact your pastor concerning its use and availability.

—*Whaid Rose*
General Conference President

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