The dual mission of the Church

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Back when I had just entered the ministry, I read something that has stayed with me through the years. I can't remember where I read it or who wrote it, and I'm sure it was not original: "The purpose of the Church is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable."

When it comes to comforting the afflicted, I think the Church has been reasonably pursuing that goal. In nearly every large city in this country one will find hospitals, named usually after the Christian denomination which constructed them. In those hospitals the Church has spent millions of dollars and millions of man-hours bringing comfort to the afflicted.

The Church has given millions, perhaps even billions, to help feed the hungry, clothe the needy, shelter those without. Few have ever questioned the role of the Church in comforting the afflicted.

In countless other ways the Church has been, and continues to be, comforting the afflicted.

However, when it comes to afflicting the comfortable, the Church has acquiesced its role in so many areas. In fact, often the local church has become numbered among the comfortable—unwilling, and sometimes even unable, to afflict the comfortable. Perhaps one reason for this is that it is the local church itself that needs to be afflicted.

I have often wondered—stood amazed—that in many churches the unsearchable riches of Christ can be preached Sunday after Sunday, the Bible can be studied week after week, prayers can be uttered continually, and it can all be done without relating the Gospel to the society immediately about us. Perhaps we have accepted a "live and let live" attitude.

But that attitude is contradictory to the very essence of the Church. The Church cannot be indifferent to the world about it and fulfill its mission, any more than it can ignore the afflicted about it and fulfill its mission.

Why has the Church failed to afflict the comfortable? One reason, and I think perhaps the main reason, is the fear of criticism. Too often our concern is more directed toward what those about us will say than what God has said.

I miss being the pastor of a local church. Having been out of the pastoral ministry for 10 years now, I have another perspective on the pastoral ministry. If I had the privilege of serving as the shepherd of a local flock once again, there are some things I would do differently. Of course I would try to comfort the afflicted. But I would, equally and in a spirit of love, try also to afflict the comfortable. A faith which does not disturb us as much as it comforts us is not Christian.

To comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. The two are not incompatible. They should be inseparable. Especially for a shephard who loves his sheep.

Don

Counselor says 35% of Hollywood entertainment industry addicted

More than a third of the people working in movies and television turn to drugs and alcohol to relieve stress and end up becoming addicted, a counselor for the industry estimates.

"It's out of control," said Tom Kenny, who heads Studio 12, the substance abuse program funded by the Motion Picture & Television Fund, a charitable division of the International Alliance of Theater and Stage Employees union.

Studio 12, named for the 12 precepts of Alcoholics Anonymous, receives $200,000 from the fund to treat drug and alcohol problems among members of the entertainment industry—and cannot keep up with the demand.

Kenny said his 35 percent estimate of people with drug and alcohol problems was based on his experience with the 600 people who have been through the Studio 12 program and his discussions with many times that number of people in the entertainment business.

Kenny's annual report on industry addiction said the 35 percent figure has held steady for three years, up from four years ago when 25 percent of the industry was believed to be addicted.

"I talk to thousands of people in this industry and most of them come up with a higher figure, especially for workers in the crafts," he said. "management, on the other hand, is lower—probably about 18 or 20 percent."

Cocaine is the prime culprit, Kenny said, but more powerful "crack" cocaine and heroin are in Hollywood, and alcohol has always been there.

"I would say probably 20 percent of the Screen Actors Guild has a problem with drugs or alcohol," Kenny said, citing the long hours and high pressures of making a movie or a TV series, and the psychological beating actors take.

"They think it (cocaine) will give them an edge."

In an industry with influential social cliques, some see cocaine as a key to power. "Hollywood is a party town," Kenny said. "A lot of people feel that it's a party all the time. There's a lot of pressure on people who go to parties to use.

"There's another side to it," he noted. "If you can turn someone on to freebasing cocaine, you control their lives. There are a lot of unscrupulous people out there who want to get them hooked."

The good news, he said, is an increasing willingness to seek help.

A handful of stars have gone public after kicking drug and alcohol habits at the Betty Ford Center in Rancho Mirage. Elizabeth Taylor, Chevy Chase and Mary Tyler Moore successfully completed the program.

In Hollywood, hundreds of show business figures attend star-studded chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous, a new organization.

"There are 130 CA meetings weekly in this town. That says something," Kenny said. "But there's a lot still using. For every one that's clean there are 10 or 12 more that need to be clean."

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NFD is a Christian organization promoting the Biblical ethic of decency in American society with primary emphasis on TV and other media.

Textbook publisher promises fair treatment of religion

With all the controversy surrounding the recent textbook case in Tennessee, more and more parents are starting to find out exactly what is, and what is not, in their children's school books.

Ms. Myrna M. Workman of Kansas City, Kansas wrote to one of the textbooks publishers in search of an answer. She wanted to know why Christianity failed to be mentioned as a force in the development of our nation.

Laidlaw Educational Publishers of River Forest, Illinois responded to Ms. Workman's letter with some interesting comments: "Some time ago you wrote...to express your concern about the way religion was treated (or not treated) in textbooks. You were particularly disturbed in the coverage of Christianity...

"Please be assured that Laidlaw Educational Publishers, the textbooks division of Doubleday Publishing Company, is currently working on the textbooks we will be publishing with the intention of putting the proper emphasis on religion, especially in our social studies textbooks for elementary and secondary-school students."

The letter from Herbert R. Adams, the chief executive officer at Laidlaw, went on to state: "You have my personal promise that there will be significant changes in the way Laidlaw covers the religious aspect of American life.

"You should know that I agree with those who have proclaimed that religion has been virtually left out of recent school books. We will change that."

It is good to see someone in Mr. Adams' position responsive to the general public and concerned that textbooks convey historical truth. Mr. Adams was straightforward and honest in his letter and says his company is going to make changes to correct this problem.

Please write Mr. Adams and tell him you appreciate his position and his vow to give religion fair coverage in his company's textbooks. His address is: Mr. Herbert R. Adams, Office of the President, Laidlaw Educational Publishers, Thatcher and Madison, River Forest, IL 60305.

SEND NFD RESPONSES

Please send NFD copies of replies you receive from advertisers or other companies. Also send news clippings on related issues. Your help provides an invaluable source of information for NFD.

Your Opinion Counts

Readers say no to school sex clinics

The Your Opinion Counts question for this month is: should parents (or representatives of parents) have input into the selection of social science textbooks used in local public schools, or should this be the responsibility solely of professional educators?

Respondents should check the appropriate item in the form below (or a facsimile thereof) and return to NFD. If you wish to comment on the issue, write your response (150 words or less) and send it with the form.

Respondents returned a resounding "No" to the November/December YOC question on sex clinics in public schools. The question read, "Should public schools provide a place for sex/family planning clinics to dispense free sex information and free contraceptives to school children?" Almost 800 readers from 48 states responded. One percent altered the "Yes" or "No" format to qualify their response; two percent said "Yes" and 97 percent said "No." Selected comments follow:

'No' to clinics

Lila Taylor, Fruitland, ID: The schools should not be allowed to have family planning clinics or dispense contraceptives to minors. They are taking the parents' responsibilities away...

Curt Audet, Vergennes, VT: I'm in high school, seeing first hand the immoral influences taught to the students.... Rather than preserve the Biblical and decent values of sex within the bonds of marriage only, they are spreading the message that sex is o.k. as long as nobody gets "hurt!"

Lewis Motley, Ogema, WI: This is a shoddy pose by the abortion agencies to demonstrate that they are concerned about unwanted teen pregnancies, when that is exactly what they want, because they are doing so well financially shedding the blood of those innocent babies.

Maureen Scagliotti, Fremont, CA: As an OB-GYN nurse I am opposed to free contraceptives given by clinics located in schools. Teenagers are not motivated, responsible enough, nor mature enough to use contraceptives effectively. More than that however, I am concerned for their sake about the health risks....

Bill Chidichimo, Nampa, ID: There are already enough places for teens to receive such information: doctors' offices; libraries (assuming the schools teach them how to read); etc.

Mrs. Robert E. Miller, Rayne, LA: What ever happened to the schools being concerned about self control instead of birth control? When my generation went to school we were taught good hygiene, self-control and discipline.

Walt Barbee, Lorton, VA: One of the latest studies re school based clinics (Olson & Weed, 1986) finds that 120 more pregnancies occur per 1000 girls age 15-19 using family planning services than occur per 1000 girls **not** using such services.

Michael Engler, Santa Barbara, CA: In the debate over school contraceptive "clinics," nearly everyone is overlooking a crucial point: by providing contraceptives to under-age girls, school districts are aiding and abetting thousands of felony statutory rapes.

Michael Harrington, Portland, OR: A few years ago some high schools in Portland, Oregon opened the "free contraceptives" clinics. The rate of sexual activity increased (according to a poll) and since that "service" was available many teenagers (out of adolescent curiosity) decided to try it out. To provide...opportunity and temptation is creating more promiscuity, sexual involvement, and adding problems to kids who already have enough to handle in this world.

'Yes', to clinics

Rev. Richard Kraus-Neale, Waterville, NY: There are some studies which show that the presence of such clinics contributes to the problem, others show a reduction of the problem. The evidence I have seen overwhelmingly supports the contention that school-based clinics reduce teen pregnancy rates....they teach students to say "no" and even encourage young people to communicate more openly with their parents.

YOUR OPINION COUNTS RESPONSE FORM

Should parents (or representatives of parents) have input into the selection of social science textbooks used in local schools, or should this be the responsibility solely of prefessional educators?

( ) Parents (or representatives of parents) should have input.
( ) This should be the function solely of professional educators.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State/Zip _____

Return to Your Opinion Counts, P.O. Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803