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President's Line

SMALL BEGINNINGS . . .

What makes a moment in history special? Every moment, however routine or mundane, becomes a moment in history once it passes. However, certain moments stand out from the seeming infiniteness of time and memory. The first National Conference for evangelists and spouses at Guelph, Ontario in June '92 was one such special moment in Canadian evangelism.

We made history by our coming together from across Canada -- participants from Victoria to Halifax. We came from diverse denominational and evangelistic ministry backgrounds. We discussed and listened to each other. We shared and prayed for each other. We interceded for believers and the lost.

It was a truly historic moment when we unanimously adopted the *Guelph Affirmation* which endorses the calling, role and ministry of the evangelist as biblical and relevant today. In order to facilitate this we adopted a Constitution for the Fellowship of Canadian Evangelists (FOCE) and elected its first Executive.

These are moments of small beginnings . . . but, with an important course! History is rich with examples of small beginnings that resulted in significant changes and consequences. Let us not forget that FOCE's small beginnings could affect the eternal destinies of many. Our prayerful evangelism is pivotal in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

T.V. Thomas

November, 1992

IS THERE ANY REAL RIGHT OR WRONG?

by Michael Horner

It's quite fashionable these days to suggest that ethics are relative- WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ONE PERSON IS NOT NECESSARILY RIGHT FOR ANOTHER.

In dealing with this moral relativism as Christians, there is a critical point I believe we constantly overlook. We fail to notice that everyone, including ethical relativists, live each day as if there was real right and wrong. That is, there are objective moral principles that everyone lives by whether they realize it or not.

It's very easy to say that there are no absolute moral principles, but it is much more difficult to live as if there are none. Our response to the way others treat us reveals what we really believe about morals regardless what we say we believe.

Let me illustrate. Most people cannot help believing that when they are wronged by someone else, the act is really wrong. If someone beats us up, takes our money, steals our car and smashes it up it will seem to us that the person has truly abused us. We could not accept the claim that the person who did it felt the actions were "right for him ". These actions were wrong and the person should have recognized this and regretted their actions. And even more telling -- the perpetrator would feel the same way if someone did it to him.

The Blue Folder

Consider the true story about a philosophy student who wrote a research paper arguing that there are no objective or absolute moral principles. Judged by its research, scholarship, documentation and argumentation, most would have agreed it was easily an "A" paper.

The professor, however, gave it an "F", stating "I do not like blue folders." The student stormed into the professor's office - "THIS IS NOT FAIR, THIS IS NOT JUST. I shouldn't be graded on the basis of the colour of my folder - but on the basis of the content of my paper." The professor asked if the student was referring to the paper which argued that there are no objective moral principles such as FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE. Student: "Yes, yes, that's the one!" Professor: "Well, then... I do not like blue folders. The grade will remain an "F". Immediately the face of the young man changed. Suddenly he understood that he really did believe in objective moral principles like fairness and justice. The lesson having been learned, the grade was changed from an "F" to an "A".¹

Not only moral relativists' response to the way they are treated but also their response to the way others are treated betrays their position. In actuality it reveals their DEEP-SEATED BELIEF THAT THERE IS A REAL RIGHT AND WRONG --that there are moral principles that are objectively true (i.e. whether someone thinks so or not) and thus morally binding and obligatory on all.

For example, we do believe that it was morally wrong for the Nazis to perform medical experiments on Jews. Not only do we think it is wrong though, we think everyone should think it is wrong. We think apartheid is unjust, that black South Africans should not be oppressed by white South Africans. But not only do we think it is unjust, we expect everyone to agree, especially white South Africans.

All of us believe that torturing babies and raping four-year old girls is morally reprehensible. And we also believe that everyone should agree that these acts are despicable.

Now if these actions are not really evil, then our sense that they are evil is an illusion. We are mistaken! There are no morally binding principles, which objectively condemn the perpetrators.

But which is more likely? – That there are objective moral principles like fairness and justice OR that killing Jews, oppressing blacks, torturing babies, is not really wrong.

Our sense goes deeper than socialization or social contract. Deep down, even ethical relativists know that these actions are morally outrageous, thus objectively evil.

Even though many people today claim that ethics are relative, I think it is clear, with just these examples, that people do not live consistent with these claims. Our daily actions, responses and judgments reveal our deep-seated sense that there is real right and wrong. There are obligatory ethical principles that are morally binding on each individual.

Most Common Objection

Since we find different moral principles in different cultures some people think that there cannot be objective moral principles binding on all cultures.

Response

1. When we study cultures we actually find that there are far more moral principles held in common than we are usually led to believe. The differences are a small minority.
2. It doesn't follow that just because there are differences in different cultures' morals, there are no objective moral principles. For example, if culture X says action A is wrong and culture Y says that action A is right it does not follow that A is either right or wrong. Relativity in moral beliefs does not entail relativity in moral truth.'
3. If ethics are culturally relative it would be impossible to evaluate cultures morally. One could not condemn as immoral what another approves even if that is racism, infanticide or wholesale genocide. But as we noted before, deep down we do believe there are moral principles that transcend cultures and allow us to condemn such occurrences as apartheid and Nazi atrocities!

ENDNOTES

Norman Geisler, "The Collapse of Modern Atheism" in Intellectuals Speak Out About God, edited by Roy Abraham Varghese, Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1984,p.147.

C. Stephen Evans, Philosophy of Religion --Thinking About Faith, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985, p. 70-71.

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