

Perspective

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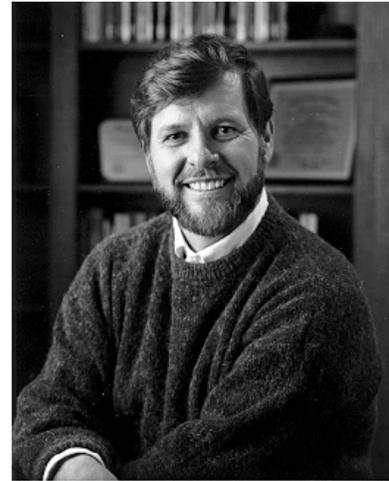
Growing Edges

January, 1994

At the start of a new year it is good to reflect on the social responsibility that a vital Christian faith engenders. Following Christ is necessarily tied to a concern for the poor and defenseless. Love of God and love of neighbor are two sides to the same door—we must do both to get through the door. And like the Samaritan we soon discover that our path often leads us to the broken and bleeding of humanity.

Anger and Abuse

This issue of the Perspective focuses on the Social Justice tradition, or the Compassionate Life. The issues in this aspect of life are always multi-layered and never easy, so we need the best thinking we can get to help us find our way. Donn Thomas, one of our RENOVARÉ team members, shares with us very personally about the problems of anger and abuse among African-American males. Donn, who is African-American himself, grew up in inner-city Cleveland. It is important for us all to enter the unique context of African-American males in this country and feel their pain with them. And as we do so, we will garner many insights for contexts that are other than African-American and male.



Chicago Declaration II

Twenty years ago a group of Evangelical leaders gathered in Chicago to draft a statement on social justice that came to be known as "Chicago Declaration". Over the past two decades this has been a vigorous and influential document in heightening the social awareness of many Christian groups. On the twentieth anniversary of that declaration a call went out for Evangelical leaders to gather, to take stock of where we have come, and to issue a second statement—"Chicago Declaration II: A Call for Evangelical Renewal." Donn Thomas and I were asked to be delegates to this important effort whose number included such well-known Christian leaders as Ron Sider, Roberta Hestenes, John Perkins, Gretchen Gaebelain Hull, Tony Campolo, and Samuel Escobar. Others gathered for a variety of workshops on social issues while the delegates—about eighty in number—struggled for two days to draft the declaration.

The process we went through to draft CDII was almost as important as the declaration itself. With complex issues and deeply-felt concerns it would have been easy for the whole process to have broken down and each leader to go his/her own way. However we stayed with each other and finally, after an all night drafting session, we joyfully and tearfully echoed the early Christian affirmation, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28).

The document that came from those days of intensive, prayer-filled effort—Chicago Declaration II—is, I believe, of immense significance, and we are printing the entire text in this Perspective. I would encourage you to use it for ongoing study and reflection in your spiritual formation group and other settings.

Peace and joy,

Richard J. Foster

Chicago Declaration II

Twenty years ago a group of evangelical Christians, committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and the full authority of Scripture, gathered in Chicago to offer a declaration of social concern. Today in 1993, evangelicals sharing these same concerns and convictions have gathered again in Chicago to reflect and reconsider what we should do in the midst of a worsening social and moral crisis.

We Give Thanks

We give thanks for the Christian communities that are living out the sacrificial and compassionate demonstration of the reconciling love of God. Their faithfulness encourages us to follow Christ more closely in the power of the Holy Spirit. While we acknowledge our weaknesses and confess our failures, we take heart from the love of God at work in their lives and communities.

We Weep and Dream

We weep for those who do not know and confess Jesus Christ, the hope of the world. We dream of a missionary church that, by its witness and love, draws people into a living relationship with our Lord.

We weep over the persistence of racism, the broken relationships and the barriers that divide races and ethnic groups. We dream of churches that demonstrate the reconciling Gospel of Christ, uniting believers from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

We weep over the growing disparity between the rich and the poor, the scandal of hunger, and the growing number of people who live in oppressive conditions, insecurity, and danger. We dream of churches that work for education, economic empowerment and justice, both at the personal and structural levels, and that address the causes and the symptoms of poverty.

We weep over escalating violence, abuse, disregard for the sanctity of human life, and addiction to weapons—in both nations and neighborhoods—that destroy lives and breed fear. We dream of faith communities that model loving ways of resolving conflict, and seek to be peacemakers rather than passive spectators, calling the nations to justice and righteousness.

We weep over the brokenness expressed in relationships between generations, between men and women, in families, in distorted sexualities, and in cruel judgementalism. We dream of faith communities that honor and protect both our elders and our children, foster a genuine partnership and mutual submission between men and women, nourish healthy families, affirm celibate singleness, work for healing and compassion for all, and for the keeping of marriage covenants.

We weep over the spiritual emptiness and alienation of modern secular society. We dream of a redemptive church that restores personal identity, provides loving community, offers purpose in life, and brings transcendent values and moral conscience to the public square.

We weep over our exploitive practices and consumerist lifestyles that destroy God's good creation. We dream of a Church that leads in caring for creation and calls Christians to serve as faithful partners of God in renewing and sustaining God's handiwork.

In all of these, we have fallen so far short of God's glory and awesome holiness, yet we rejoice that in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called by God to the obedience that comes from faith.

We Commit

Because of the hope we have in the Gospel, we dare to commit ourselves to the kingdom of God and oppose the demonic spiritual forces that seek to undermine the reign of God in this world. Because of our faith we dare to risk and seek the future that God has promised, and we give ourselves to works of love.

We recommit ourselves to grow in the knowledge and the love of God, drinking from the well of worship and praise, word and sacrament. We commit ourselves to sacrificial and loving engagement with God, with all other Christians, and with a needy world.

We commit ourselves to share the good news of Jesus Christ, by living and announcing the Gospel of the kingdom, so that all may come to know, love, and serve God.

Continued Below

African-American Men: Abuse, Anger & Healing Prayer

In a healthy, functional family, parents take the place of authority. This healthy authority allows parents to affirm their children's personhood; with wisdom giving "appropriate consequences for wrong behavior and teach(ing) and encourage(ing) right behavior."

Parents are human beings. In the process of meeting the needs of their children, they make mistakes. When parents use their authority to force children into performance, use harsh standards of judgment, or use their position of parental authority to satisfy their needs and desires for "importance, power, emotional or even sexual gratification," abuse occurs. Family is the child's place of safety; it should not be a place of fear. When a child's trust is violated emotionally, verbally, physically, or sexually by a parent or adult, abuse occurs and destructive forces are released within the child. These forces may only be healed by Christ himself and his healing community (2 Cor. 2:5-8).

My Experience of Abuse

I grew up with six older sisters and a twin brother in a northwestern city in Ohio. My mother was, and is, a deeply committed Christian woman in her local Church of God In Christ. She raised us up to fear and respect God (Prov. 1:7; 22:6), nurtured us and loved us with every bit of energy she had—and she had plenty. We sang songs and prayed together.

My mother prayed openly and constantly revealed her faith. I vividly recall her praying for us to have food in the house because my father had taken the money from his job and spent it on alcohol. I remember my mother praying and fasting for several days for the opportunity to purchase the house we were renting. On the last day of her fast while she was standing on the front porch, the owner drove up and gave my dear mother the deed to the house. On the spot, my mother worshipped and praised God for hearing her prayers (Ps. 113:9). We all praise God for her.

My family's problems of abuse started with the alcoholism of my father. Whenever people were around, he was full of mirth and humor. He loved

telling jokes and having people laugh. But there was a darker side to Dad. He would curse at Mom and us children often. He would become physically abusive and fight Mom. We saw this and were terrified, but tried to protect our mother by fighting back. Many times the police would come and take my father to jail. The abuse happened for many years.

Even though I was a very committed Christian, my early experiences caused my pain and anger to deepen. As a defense mechanism, I developed a "spirituality" which permitted denial. I buried my pain and anger for many years.

However, my pain and anger were real. I remember wanting my father to hold and hug me. Apparently, that was too difficult for him. One incident occurred during a separation between my parents. My father took me (I was six or seven years old) and hid me from my mother so that he could force a reconciliation. The police were called in and classified me as a missing child. On another occasion, when I was getting ready to go to university, my father gave me a dollar and laughed in my face. I became so enraged that throughout the thirty minute ride to school, I was unable to talk to my friends.

It was the grace of God that helped me through that quarter of school both financially and emotionally. In those days, I only acknowledged that Mr. Thomas birthed me; he was my biological father, nothing else. If anyone had asked if Mr. Thomas was my father, I would have given him a polite, matter-of-fact, "Yes," without elaboration.

I wanted to be loved by my father and received little to nothing in return. I began looking for a "father" in other men, particularly my pastor. God used my pastor to heal some of my pain and anger.

After university, I married my long-time friend. We developed a deep and abiding love and appreciation for one another. She had a beautiful healthy relationship with both her parents. Eleven years into our marriage, her father died. We were devastated. This incident inspired thoughts of my father. I began to think, "What would I do if my father died today?" After the funeral services, I was tormented with thoughts of my father dying and the abuse he had caused.

One day my wife and I were talking about having a family. She was disturbed by the emotional distance between my father and me. My wife wanted this to be healed so that when we had our family, our children wouldn't experience my pain and anger. Then she made the most piercing statement; it rendered me emotionally naked: "You hate your father!" No one had ever said this to me before. I had developed a spirituality that protected me from having to confront my father. This spirituality also made it next to impossible to be healed from my pain and anger.

I had no place to hide. I had no defense against this raw powerful truth coming from my wife. God used her to confront me with a sin that had debilitated me. I couldn't prevent any longer the disclosure of my hatred. After trying to protect myself by denying what was obvious to her, I surrendered both to the Lord and my wife; I went to the quietness of my office and fell on my knees, weeping and praying.

The Prayer That Heals Abuse

The Lord began to speak to my heart and said, "How can you love me whom you've never seen and hate your brother whom you see every day. You are a liar (cf 1 John 4:20). The ultimate of your brother is your father." I begged the Lord to forgive me for hating my father. I told him that I didn't have the ability to forgive after being so full of pain and anger for so long. The Lord told me that he would provide me with the grace to forgive my father.

I had a major surprise. The Lord then told me to get up and call my father and ask him to forgive me for my hatred towards him. I said, "No Lord, why don't you tell him to ask forgiveness for what he took our family through, particularly me?" Then the Lord spoke to my heart again, "I accepted you with all your sin and forgave you for all the offense against me and declared you righteous. You accept your father and ask him to forgive you for hating him."

I rose off my knees and sat in my desk chair. I picked up the phone and dialed. "Dad, how are you? How's the weather? What's Mom doing?" Usually when Dad and I talked, it was for two to three minutes at most, then I would ask to speak to Mom. But this time, I had to obey the Lord. I blurted out, "Dad, would you please forgive me? I

have hated you for many years." I began to weep. "You hurt me when you fought and abused Mom; you accused me of very ugly things that I didn't do. You hurt and shamed our family for too many years. When you laughed at me, while drunk, and gave me a dollar for four years of university that was very painful. My friends laughed at you." I said everything that I needed to say. Then I heard my father's faint crying over the telephone. I had never seen or heard him cry before in my life. In the midst of his crying, he asked me to forgive him for all the things he had done to me.

After I hung up the phone, I sat quietly. It was as if Jesus himself had begun to put his hand inside me and pull out hands full of pain, anger, and hatred. I didn't feel total freedom at that moment, but I knew that a great force of healing had occurred in me in depths that I would experience days, months, and even years later. As a matter of fact, this deep healing is still going on.

Dad has changed very little—but I have been changed for life because I confronted my sin of hatred. My family began to change its attitude toward Dad because of how I began to love and respect him.

How do African-American males, and for that matter females and other people, get healed from the devastation of family abuse of any kind? First by acknowledging that the abuse happened. For without this honesty, healing can never be experienced. Secondly, if possible, by confronting the person who is the cause of your pain and anger. The victim and the victimized are bound up together—it could be that the Lord would heal you both. Thirdly, knowing that we must always go to God in prayer about anything, including abuse, hatred, pain, and anger. We can hear him say, "Come here to me all of you who are working hard and carrying too much, and I will refresh you. Here, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and simple at heart, and you will experience refreshing deep down in your lives. You see, my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30 from Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*).

Donn Charles Thomas

(Permission to reprint given by Donn Charles Thomas, Senior Pastor at Resurrection Community Church, Stone Mountain, Georgia, song writer, and international worship leader.)

Chicago Declaration Continued

We repent of our complacency, our reliance on technique, and our complicity with the evils of the status quo. We repudiate the idolatries of nation and economic system, and zealously dedicate ourselves to Christ and his kingdom's values. We turn away from obsession with power, possessions, self-fulfillment, security and safety, and willingly risk discomfort and conflict as we live our dreams.

In 1973, we called evangelicals to social engagement: this call still stands. We are thankful that more social engagement is emerging, yet tragically it has frequently divided us along ideological lines. Too often recent evangelical political engagement has been uncivil and polarizing, has demonized opponents, and lacked careful analysis and biblical integrity.

Faithfulness to the full authority of the Scriptures transcends traditional categories of left and right.

The Gospel is not divided—it embraces both the call to conversion and the summons to justice. Obedience to Jesus' teaching and example demands congregations that integrate prayer, worship, evangelism, and social transformation.

We Pray

In the face of such complex and unremitting problems, we claim the promise of God to give wisdom to those who ask. Therefore we ask: Oh God, Giver and Sustainer of life, Holy Redeemer and Lord, comforting and empowering Spirit, teach us your ways, show us your will, give us your presence, and pour out your power. Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

November 21, 1993

Going Deeper

To continue our emphasis on Social Justice issues, we are featuring two books as a package. The first, *Freedom of Simplicity* by Richard Foster, articulates a creative, more human style of living and points the way for Christians to make their lives "models of simplicity." Richard provides a way to rethink our priorities and to "seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness." He shows us how to live in harmony with the rich complexity of life while stressing the relation of simplicity to prayer, solitude, and all the Christian Disciplines.

Accompanying *Freedom of Simplicity*, the *Leader's Guide* was developed in 1992 by HarperSanFrancisco. Designed for groups, it

provides step-by-step instructions, activities, suggestions, and discussion questions.

We are also featuring *The Journal of John Woolman* which stands alone as a classic among spiritual autobiographies—the typical literary expression of Quakerism in its first two centuries. Woolman's 18th-century writing brings us once again into contact with the unique Quaker culture that focused, as Howard H. Brinton put it, on "life itself in home, meeting and community." Its distinctive marks were not dogmas but practical testimonies for equality, simplicity, and peace. John Woolman reforges these testimonies, once revolutionary but becoming institutionalized, tempering them in the stream of love and converting them into instruments of revolution.

Going Places

January 3-9—Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.

January 21-22—RENOVARÉ Local Conference, First Presbyterian Church, Boulder, CO. Contact Gwen Brown at 303-442-3523.

January 23—First Presbyterian Church, Boulder, CO.

January 31—Evangelical Covenant Church Pastors, Chicago, IL.

February 1—North Park College, Chicago, IL.

February 4-5—RENOVARÉ Local Conference, Southland Baptist Church, San Angelo, TX. Contact Virginia Chase at 915-949-3205.

February 7—"Perspectives on the World Christian Movement" Class, Westlink Christian Church, Wichita, KS.

February 10-11—Day-Higginbotham Lectures, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX.

February 18-20—Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.

March 11-12—Trinity Forum, Denver, CO.

March 17-20—Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Westerville, OH.

March 31-April 28—Trip to England, Sweden, and Germany.

May 9-19—Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.

June 20-25—Southwest Yearly Meeting 100th Anniversary, Whittier, CA.

Growing Pains

We continue to receive many letters of appreciation and blessing. A network of people pray for us daily and for special needs when we call. **Be sure to return the form attached to the last pastoral letter from Richard Foster if you want to provide this vital support.**

Thank you for the wonderful interest in hosting Local Conferences. All of the dates through spring of 1995 have been filled, and we plan to set aside dates for fall 1995 soon. **If you or someone you know is interested in sponsoring a Local Conference, please call Lynda at 316-722-7044.**

Plans for the move to Castle Rock, Colorado, are progressing. Carolynn and Richard Foster and Lynda and Phil Graybeal visited the area the week after Thanksgiving, looking at personal and office housing. Then on December 16 Richard met with a group in Denver that will be working with us to secure the necessary money. We estimate that the move will cost about forty thousand dollars.

Richard recorded the first "Living Waters" radio programs on December 17. Morningstar Network will air the two-minute spots beginning January 1, and our contract is for six months, ending on June 30. We will evaluate the effectiveness of the spots in four months, deciding whether or not to continue them at that time.