The Church on a Justice Mission

AMY L. SHERMAN

When he invited former strip-club dancer Harmony Dust to address Phoenix's Bethany Bible Church, outreach pastor Brad Pellow raised a few eyebrows. But Pellow had been learning some harsh truths about the commercial sex industry in Phoenix. He thought his flock should know about the despair the women behind the NUDE GIRLS' signs felt. That they would probably be horrified to know that the average age of prostitutes in Phoenix is 13—and that brutal pimps forcibly kept many in this lifestyle. He wanted his church to join him on a new mission into some dark and scary places.

In August 2007, Pellow had attended the simulcast of the annual Willow Creek Leadership Summit. There he heard Gary Haugen, founder and CEO of International Justice Mission (IJM), a Christian human rights agency, talk about combating the large-scale problem of sex trafficking and forced prostitution in south Asia. "It was the first I'd heard of it and I thought, 'OK, we will add them to our missionary support list and I'll feel better.'" Pellow admits sheepishly.

Within days, though, he received an email invitation from Food for the Hungry, a Christian relief and development organization headquartered in Phoenix, to attend a meeting with other church leaders about child rape for profit in the city. "I'm not such a simpleton that I could miss out on this one," Pellow laughs.

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What Are Universities For?

JERRY PATTENGALE

One of T. Harry Williams' many graduate stu-
dents recounted a cryptic event at which their
tenured professor garnered two unoffi-
cial awards: "The professor we learned the most from" and "The most boring professor." The same mixed compli-
ment could be given the editors' introduction to Debating
Moral Education: Rethinking the Role of the Modern University—a book with a methodically slow beginning, but one I've already recommended to the directors of three top graduate programs.

Editors Elisabeth Kim and J. Peter Euben admirably capture Duke University's working conference on moral education; this volume is the third in a series from the Kenan Institute for Ethics. Although it begins with a droning outline of lists and a barrage of questions, the introduction frames an important discussion on moral education. Kim and Euben set the stage well for a view of Stanley Fish's outspoken struggle against moral educa-
tion in the college curriculum. After standing aloof applauding his powerful presence, including his invited essay, they jump into the "debate" waters by countering his argument—though the book proves more a helpful descriptive dialogue than a debate. And like the third chapter of the late Bill Flaherty's Triune God, one chapter is worth the purchase all by itself.

Jerry Pattengale was recently named associate publisher for Christian Scholar's Review, visiting fellow at the Sagamore Institute, and a Writing Partner for Giant Impact. He is executive director of National Conversions and an assistant professor at Indiana Wesleyan University.

During a conversation with a friend while I was still in the midst of reading this collection of essays, I found myself pulling the book from my shelf and reading from Stanley Hauerwas' chapter, "The Pathos of the University: The Case of Stanley Fish." It's a provocative challenge to Christian institutions. Building on Alasdair MacIntyre's work, Hauerwas notes that America's non-religious universities lack an "educated public"—a dynamic of shared compo-
nents necessary for liberal arts' potency in addressing civic needs. However, it's different for the church-related col-
leges, or at least should be:

For at the very least Christianity names an ongoing argu-
ment across centuries of a tradition which has established why some texts must be read and read in relation to other texts. Christians, for all their shortcomings, still represent an ongoing educated public, which means that they must, as MacIntyre suggests any educated public must, have agreements that make their disagreements intelligible. . . . Christians should know what their universities are for: They are to shape people in the love of God.

Stanley Fish provided the debate that provides the point of departure for this volume with his lucid series of essays in the Chronicle of Higher Education and he contributes a rejoinder to Kim and Euben. Taking Fish on from a different angle, Hauerwas notes that faculty and administrators seldom ask two fundamental questions: "What are universities for?" and "Who do they serve?" The answers to these create an impasse for Fish, who ignores key aspects of the educational enterprise: keeping learning both meaningful and engaging, and exercising common sense about the funding side of critical inquiry. Yet Hauerwas also pays tribute to Fish's "marvelously candid" articles: "No one makes the case more clearly than Fish that the purpose and justification of the university is quite simply to support Stan-
ley Fish's work as a literary critic."

That's funny, but it's not just a smart remark. As Hauerwas observes, Fish's argument makes perfect sense in an academic set-
ting that no longer has any common judgments on what is true, good, and beautiful—a university that "can no longer be sustained or justified."

Julie Reuben's summary of "The Changing Context of Moral Education in American Colleges and Universi-
ties" provides a helpful backdrop for this riveting Kim/ Euben-Fish-Hauerwas exchange. Though Reuben takes a sharp jab at political conservatives like Bill Bennett for allegedly exploiting campus controversies on multicultural curriculum reform, she concedes that it "was at least partially true" that many of the universities since the 1970's "had been politicized by the left." Her comments here are informed by the larger argument of her book The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transforma-
tion and the Marginalization of Morality (1996). Like

Debating Moral Education

returning the rule of the modern University

EDITED BY ELSBETH KISS AND J. PETER EUBEN - DRIKE UNIV. PRESS, 2008
541 PP. $24.95, PAPER

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You could have heard a pin drop,” Pellissi recalls. “It was an amazing conversation.” They talked justice for a bit, and then she asked him about the reliability of the Bible—and then started questioning him about Jesus. “She brought it up!” Pellissi exclaims with wonder. “Now this isn’t the reason we’re doing this justice stuff, but I couldn’t believe how this conversation went from slammed-down shut to ‘If your church is doing that, then I want to know more.’ I’ll never forget it.”

Once again, this had been at the forefront of this learning. After spoofing the church to action with Good News About Injustice, Hangen published Just Courage in 2008 to describe what he was discovering about the spiritual effects of joining Jesus in his mission to set the captives free. He writes:

Churches are finding not only that their witness is strengthened through their justice work, but also that the effects of the justice mission can be as dramatic for the rescuer as for the rescued. Certainly the work of justice brings marvelous rescue and joy to the victims of injustice, but God wants His people to know that the work of justice benefits the people who do it as well. It is a means of rescue not only for the powerless but also for the powerful who otherwise waste away in a world of triviality and fear.

Hangen’s words rings true at Bethany Bible, Crossroads, and other congregations I’ve visited that have invested in the justice mission. Perhaps the best evidence is the innumerable prayer ministry at these churches, with more members—including teenagers—praying more and praying differently. These intercessors have been formed to learn that the justice mission requires deep courage because the evil being confronted actively fights back. Slave masters, princes, and brothel owners are making the wrong move to take away the power of the State Department, human trafficking is the world’s third largest criminal enterprise, after drugs and weapons. Violence and
deception deployed by perpetrators create unique challenges for justice-seekers. On this mission, God’s power, protection, and provision are indispensable; hence the urgent prayer.

Crossroads members who’ve traveled on the frontlines of the justice mission in Southeast Asia have lived this bigger-than-life high-low and know the inextricable role of prayer. Andrew Peters recalls a particularly intense 48-hour period from a recent trip. One afternoon he was in Cambodia researching aftercare models that offered potential lessons for the work in Mumbai. Local staff took him to a brothel from which girls had been rescued. Disbelieving, Peters stared through a 10-foot-wide pane of glass at some 70 young girls wearing black numbers on their skimpy clothing. From this “tubowl,” customers could select the girl they wished to enjoy and take her upstairs for sex for a few bucks.

The next day, haunted by all he’d witnessed, Peters reached India. That night he got word from the operatives that a rescue operation in process was not going well. Discouraged, but convinced of prayer’s efficacy, Peters quickly sent an email to the 600+ congregations who follow the church’s justice work closely, seeking fervent intercession. The next morning, he learned from the investigators that things had taken an inexplicable, but positive, turn in the operation—just after the time Peters had called for prayer.

In Just Courage, Hangen writes that Mother Teresa could not imagine doing her work for thirty minutes without prayer. He says that if the church isn’t doing work that requires such radical dependency on prayer, it’s probably not work relevant to Christ’s kingdom. But as individual Christians and whole congregations give themselves to “the things that matter to God,” spiritual health and dynamism follow. As Tim Seiff, director of outreach at Crossroads, says the justice mission is “like being a money-guy at a bank; we’re trying to make a deposit. It’s allowing us to do actually something about enacting the kingdom here and now.”

Anthony Korman in Education’s End (2009), Reinhart chronicles the supplanting of theory by “religious studies” and the eventual dominance of science in the curriculum. Academic freedom replaced reliance on authority, and by the 20th century the unity of knowledge was gone. In her sociological look at the history of moral education, she concludes that wrestling with life’s big questions became an elective, if that, pushed to the fringe of extra-curricular activities. Reinhart面孔 well the recent attempts of the Association of American Colleges and Universities to curricular reform, and the significant effort to increase students’ civic engagement through “service learning” by Campus Compact (founded in 1985 by college presidents) and the American Council on Education.

David Hoekema embraces this notion of moral education gaining ground among “extra-curricular” activities in his fluid chapters, Is There an Ethicist in the House? He finds three dominant influences on students’ thinking about moral choices. Though course content is important, professors’ conduct in and out of the classroom is more significant in shaping moral choice. The student life staff (including organizers of campus religious life) is a second group that usually has consistent “correct” interaction

1. As Lingard in The Big Questions (Boxer & Cultural, November/December 2007, p. 13), Korman offers a telling chronicle of this hero’s tale to acknowledge our real capacity to engage profound questions to the great questions of the human condition. For more on Korman and a host of related works on moral education, see the Ernest Commonback's Review (Summer 2016), titled to “Christian Higher Education in a Postmodern Culture” (Jono Stenhamrel’s lead biographer for recent work being heard in this subject. Secondary sources: Fish that if we were discerned clearly, things would be different” but we’re not, “feels help to balance the natural line, or what C.S. Lewis would call a “nurture vision.” And more generally, Stenhamrel’s concludes Fish’s notion that the professors don’t belong in the academy—“like it or not,” they consume at least half of the academy’s output. It can also be stated that, are often all, “is the service of some human good.”