

Pastor's Column

On Parental Responsibility, Ethical Pluralism,, and Medical Efficacy

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The judicial ruling was reported by the media and then replaced by other news. However, we need to pause and reflect on the implications of the case and the ruling.

In January 1996, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal by four Christian Scientists who, a lower court determined, should pay \$1.5 million as a wrongful-death award. They had reportedly allowed an eleven-year-old youth to die due to undiagnosed diabetes. Those involved had treated his illness with prayer and not medical help. A variety of denominations filed friend-of-the-court briefs on behalf of the Christian Scientists.

This ruling is more evidence that pluralism is an impossible stance. The justices' decision is one which Christians can readily support from Scripture. Medical practice is a Scripturally sound vocation. Paul referred to Doctor Luke as "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14). This same Luke was inspired to relate the incident of the woman whom physicians had not been able to help (Luke 8:43ff). Ultimately, healing comes from God. Many times God uses doctors to achieve this purpose, but physicians are powerless in their calling without God's intervention.

Thus, the Supreme Court took a position that is supported by Scripture, not by the religious position held by Christian Scientists. It is interesting that the Court would be anti-choice regarding a child's life in this situation, when their 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision was a clear pro-death position regarding a child's life, should the mother so choose. The so-called pluralistic belief that is currently touted is one that leaves society in limbo ethically. At one time the Court will side with one religion, at another time it will side with a different

religion. Whatever the decision, I doubt any verdict would be supported by every religion. Very often, one religious position will be taken at the expense of another or other religious positions. Law is always based on a religious premise.

Sadly, many Christians fail to realize this. While believing that Christ is the only way of salvation and the Lord of life, they have not been taught that Christianity must be the basis for all ethically proper laws. Thus, within the political structure, they see Christianity as not having a supreme influence.

Many have accepted the lie that the First Amendment permits religious plurality. The First Amendment states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." What the framers meant was that Congress could not establish a particular Christian denomination as the national church. Many colonists had emigrated from countries that had national churches. One reason for their coming to America was to have freedom to worship the true God, as they believed the Bible taught. Recognizing the existence of many Christian denominations is far different from approving the equality of many religions as being the status quo in the civil realm.

A number of those who approve of religious plurality in the civil realm find themselves in a corner. They have supported the Christian Scientists' position, even when that position resulted in a dead child. Yet they refused to support the religious tenets of humanists when those tenets result in the death of an unborn child. While opting for religious plurality, they are selective in the application of that belief. In this scenario, the Christian

Scientists' views are acceptable, but not the views of the humanists albeit in a slightly different context.

Christians must guard themselves from buying the "pottage" of religious pluralism. At our annual denomination meetings I have heard far too many pastors speak favorably of religious plurality. Thus it is little wonder that so many laity hold a similar belief. God's people must fearlessly and boldly proclaim that all equitable law must be rooted in Christianity. Such must provide the basis for the medical profession and medical ethics. Failure to stand on the supremacy of Biblical ethics, as foundational for civic law and life, is to deny Christ's lordship. The result is a pulling down of Christianity, the only true religion, to the level of all false religions. Religious pluralists who claim Christ as their Savior will often find themselves boxed into ethical corners from which they must somehow make an embarrassing exit.

Christians in the medical profession and in all walks of life need to hear the uncompromised Gospel proclaimed and applied to every realm of life. In so doing, the church can be of great help not only to those in the medical field but also to those in all walks of life.

Ed's Note

There is one serious limitation to Pastor Snapp's review. It is the question of efficacy of the medical treatment for which the courts judge the parents. In the case cited, modern medicine can control and prevent some of the complications of diabetes, especially the juvenile form. In that case, the parents were liable before the civil courts and liable morally before God's standards to preserve life.

However, where medical efficacy is less clear, the parents may be wrongly liable before civil courts and not liable before God's standards. For example, several years ago the courts prosecuted parents who failed to seek treatment for their child with a sarcoma of his leg. Effective treatment of most sarcomas is almost nil.

Thus, by the standards of medical science, a case could not be logically made that the parents caused any more harm or caused the death of their child than would have

happened had they allowed medical intervention. *In fact, by not seeking medical treatment, they may have actually extended the life of their child and almost certainly reduced his morbidity.* (The ministrations of medicine are not benign!) As has been demonstrated repeatedly on these pages and in other avenues, *proven efficacy* of modern medical treatments is rare indeed. Thus, from a purely scientific basis, prayer (or any other benign process) could not be proven to be more harmful than medical treatment.

"Medical practice is a Scripturally sound vocation." However, that principle does not mean that all treatments offered by, let alone legally coerced, are effective. Christians ought to have a great deal more skepticism about the practices of a profession that so easily embraces and defends abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide. Much discernment is needed much more than most civil judges and courts exercise in these days of confused thinking.

(Pastor Snapp is aware of and agreed with the general tenor of what I have stated here.)