

**Guest Editorial**

**"Knowing" Ethics: Contentment with Discontent**

By Rabbi Marc Wilson

Until not too long ago, I thought I knew a lot about bio-medical ethics.

Then I had the good fortune to be asked to join Charlotte's Bioethics Resource Group. Through my association with BRG and the tutelage of UNCC Professor John Lincourt I have come to understand a critical distinction: I had indeed read a lot about ethical dicta and prescriptions. I still knew woefully little about bioethics because I had yet to learn to ask the questions and debate the issues that lead to conscientious ethical decisions and sensitive ethical guidance.

In our arrogance and/or naivete, we frequently assume that ethics are cut-and-dried absolutes to be categorically imposed on human situations. The reality of ethical decision-making is the frustrating awareness that we are usually questing for answers to inherently unanswerable questions and grappling with issues that can be argued with equal credibility from diametrically opposite perspectives.

One's expertise in dealing with ethical dilemmas does not come from an ability to cite a particular dictum that "solves" a particular situation. It comes from knowing how to ponder, not blurt. It comes from asking countless hard questions and knowing the role of devil's advocate.

We must be wary of those who are too sure that they are the final repository of truth, that they have the definitive answer to any ethical dilemma. We must be equally wary of those who are too eager or smug in coming forth with absolute moral pronouncements. The Catch-22 of real expertise in ethical decision-making is that those men and women who deal most thoughtfully with these concerns never enter into the process with relish or arrogance and are always the first to deny that they are "experts."

Consider the complex ethical issues surrounding the problem of AIDS. Can a sensible person honestly maintain that any of these issues can be resolved by the imposition of pat answers, be they religious or secular in nature? All indications are that the concerns will intensify, as will the passion that surrounds them. As we delve deeper, we realize that at stake in our discussion of AIDS is not just AIDS, but critical questions that go to the very core of society's ethical disposition.

The issue of patient confidentiality is a particularly compelling case in point: Under what circumstances, if any, is a physician obliged to divulge information about an AIDS carrier, even against the patient's will?

A plausible case can be made for the physician sharing such confidential information with an immediately endangered party (a fiance, for example) and others who are likely to have jeopardizing — although not necessarily sexual — contact with the carrier. Society does, after all, function on the principle that the liberty of an individual to pursue personal goals and choices may be limited when others will be harmed by those activities.

An equally plausible case can be made for protecting the AIDS carrier's absolute confidentiality. The reasonable premise of such an argument is that high-risk individuals will be less and less forthcoming for voluntary testing if they believe that their confidentiality will be violated. Thus, by divulging information about a particular AIDS carrier, we may save an individual life here and there, but the larger societal goal of protecting and preventing a disease of epidemic proportion may be thwarted.

What deeper issues of social conscience hang in the balance?

When should individual liberties be surrendered for the sake of society's better interests? How do we draw the line, and who should be empowered to draw it?

Are society's better interests served by protecting individuals one-by-one, as they find themselves immediately imperiled? Or, are society's better interests served by setting and striving for long-range goals, even if an innocent individual is occasionally injured in the process?

What is society prepared to do to deal justly with those who will inevitably suffer psychological trauma, personal upheaval, grief and possible physical harm, whether it be the carrier, his/her unsuspecting partner, or family and friends? Is there a "trade off" to be made when individual liberties are curtailed for the sake of higher societal objectives? Do we simply close the issue, as Jimmy Carter did the issue of inequity in the availability of abortion, by proclaiming that "life's not always fair?"

We live in a society that likes to see everything tied up in neat little packages. That will probably never be the case in the domain of ethical decision-making. We need be cautious of giving too much credibility to those spokesmen, religious or secular, who are overly cocky about the absolute rightness of their position. We must realize that a truly credible process of arriving at ethical decisions will always leave us riddled with doubt. Grappling with ethical dilemmas may be one area of life in which we will simply have to learn to be content with discontent.

**Focus on Federation — Part I**

By Rita C. Mond

This is the first of a series of articles about The Charlotte Jewish Federation and its constituent agencies.

The Jewish Federation is the American institutional expression of thousands of years of Jewish communal history. There is no other institution quite like it, in or out of Jewish life; it has been shaped by a myriad of factors which have permeated the Jewish historical experience. Crucial to that experience is a system of ethical values which have been found in such sacred writings as the Bible and Talmud as well as in a vast selection of secular literature. Among these values are: The importance of ethical conduct; love thy neighbor, be he Jew or non-Jew; the sanctity of life; the dignity of man; the importance of charity, social justice and community.

The Hebrew work "Tzedakah" which is translated as charity, righteousness and justice is a basic concept to Judaism and to Federations — to be charitable is to be righteous and to be just. Closely related to the concept of Tzedakah in Judaism is the principle that aid to one's fellow man is not an individual act, but a group responsibility.

The concept of a "Community Chest" existed more than 2,000 years ago, when it was a requirement that communal leaders take responsibility for collections and disbursement of charity funds. By the Middle Ages, Jewish self-governing communities had reinforced these trends.

In the late 19th and early

20th Centuries there was a mass immigration of Jews to this country. With it was brought the institutional forms which existed in Europe and what was to become the foundation of American Jewish community organization. By the end of the 19th Century there were literally thousands of Jewish philanthropic associations along the Eastern Seaboard, more than 3,000 in New York City alone. The last decade of the 19th Century witnessed a tremendous increase in Jewish immigration and with it an unprecedented increase in the need for charitable aid. It was this need that led to the creation of the Jewish Federation.

The fundamental fact about Jewish Federations and the programs they sponsor is that they help us to express our sense of Jewish identity through a program of Jewish action.

**What is Federation?**

The word "Federation" is used to denote a central Jewish community organization which carries out the following community-wide functions for a number of agencies: financing, budgeting, planning and coordination, leadership development and renewal. In a very real sense, Federation is a trusteeship which acts on behalf of a group of contributors. These

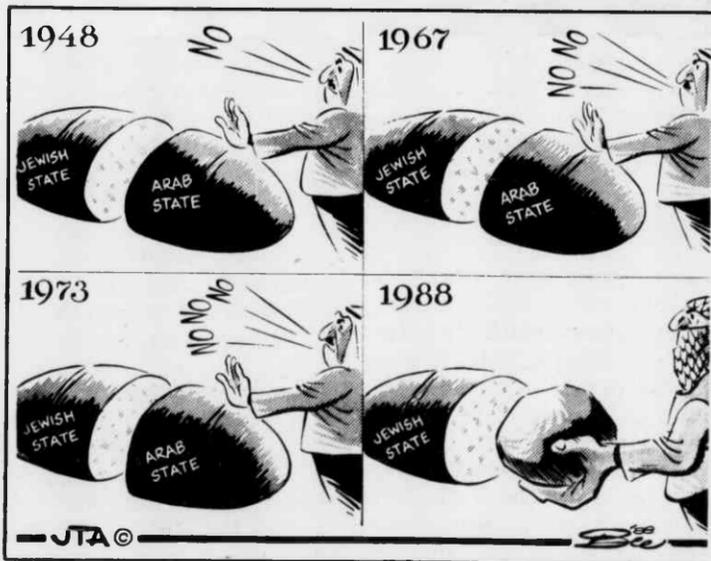
contributors represent a broad spectrum of Jewish interests and, therefore, our Federation supports a wide range of causes and programs. Federation is the only Jewish institution in this country which has been able to develop a program of service to the entire Jewish community. It is a voluntary organization. It represents and speaks for its constituents when authorized to do so, but is not the "official voice" of American Jewry on many issues and has never taken the position that it should do so.

The Federation is deeply concerned with a number of fundamental issues which affects the future of our communal life. Among them are: Jewish identity and the Jewish family; the elderly, Federation-Synagogue relations; Jewish education; social justice for all people.

The Charlotte Jewish Federation has been in existence for over 50 years (earlier it was known as the Charlotte Federation of Jewish Charities). As the years have gone by, more and more constituent agencies have come under its "umbrella." Along with this the corresponding financial needs have increased. These needs are local, national and international. Though much of the money goes to such agencies as our own Federation, Foundation, JCC, Jewish Family Service, Hebrew Cemetery, Jewish Day School, Lubavitch, BYO, ADL, Hillel, Blumenthal Home, over 60% goes to UJA. Funds that come to the UJA from our local campaign are transmitted to Israel primarily through the United Israel Appeal (UIA), Inc., which monitors and controls their appropriate and effective expenditure on programs that qualify under American tax laws.

In the months that follow there will be an in-depth report about the constituent agencies as to what they do and how much money is allocated to them. Also in future articles more information will be given on the programs we support in Israel, in Europe and nationally.

Federation needs everyone's support financially, but it also needs volunteers to work on Campaign and to help on various committees, such as the Community Relations Committee (CRC), Missions, Leadership Development, Public Relations, Marketing, Shalom Y'all, Education, etc.



**Holocaust to be Remembered**

On April 17, at 7 p.m. there will be a commemoration of the Holocaust at Pease Auditorium at Central Piedmont Community College. Cosponsored by CPCC, the Charlotte Jewish Federation, The National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Charlotte Area Clergy Association, the program is entitled "In Memory of the Holocaust — Then and Now — There and Here."

Guest speakers will be Ira Gissen, director of the VA/NC

Region of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, and Harvey Gantt, former mayor of Charlotte. Emphasis will be made on the manifestations of prejudice, especially in relation to minority groups.

There is no charge for this event and the entire community is encouraged to attend.

We encourage our readers' viewpoints. Letters should be submitted typewritten and double-spaced and signed. Please include your address and phone number. We reserve the right to edit.

**THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS**

Published monthly by:

- Charlotte Jewish Federation.....Michael L. Minkin, Director
- Foundation of Charlotte Jewish Community & Jewish Community Center.....Barry Hantman, Director
- Charlotte Jewish Day School.....Berta Straz, Principal
- Lubavitch of N.C.....Rabbi Yossi Groner, Director
- Editor.....Rita Mond
- Advertising.....Blanche Yarus

Copy deadline the 10th of each month  
P.O. Box 13369, Charlotte, N.C. 28211

The appearance of advertising in The News does not constitute a kashruth endorsement.