

10A

## RELIGION

## Do religious practices help or hinder America's social problems?

By Andrea R. Richards  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

A recent study conducted by the Heritage Foundation concluded that religion can help solve many of society's ills. Nearly every major study on the impact of religion shows a positive impact on a

host of social problems, said Patrick Fagan, an expert in family and social issues at the Washington, D.C.-based Heritage Foundation. "Religion is the resource that most powerfully addresses the major social problems confronting the nation," Fagan said.

The Rev. L. Bryant Parker, pastor of Davidson Presbyterian Church (USA), agreed.

"It's been my experience that people who have some type of religious upbringing tend to be people with

more of a sense of morality."

Being reared in the church does not always mean a professed Christian will be a productive member of society. Parker acknowledged that there are preachers and church-goers who are criminals.

"Because one is a religious person, he or she is not immune to failures; however, if the person has had some type of exposure to religion and practices his or her faith then the person may tend to be more conscious or compassionate

of others," Parker said.

"For instance, if a young person who was raised in the church decides to rob a store, then he may experience guilt for his unethical behavior."

An earlier study, conducted first in the 1920s then again in the 1980s, found that church-going members were more likely to be married, remain married, and to be highly

satisfied with their marriages, Fagan said of a sociological research project titled Middletown.

Another study, conducted in the 1970s and 1980s by two University of Nebraska professors, found 84 percent of families identified religion as an important contributor to the strength of their families.

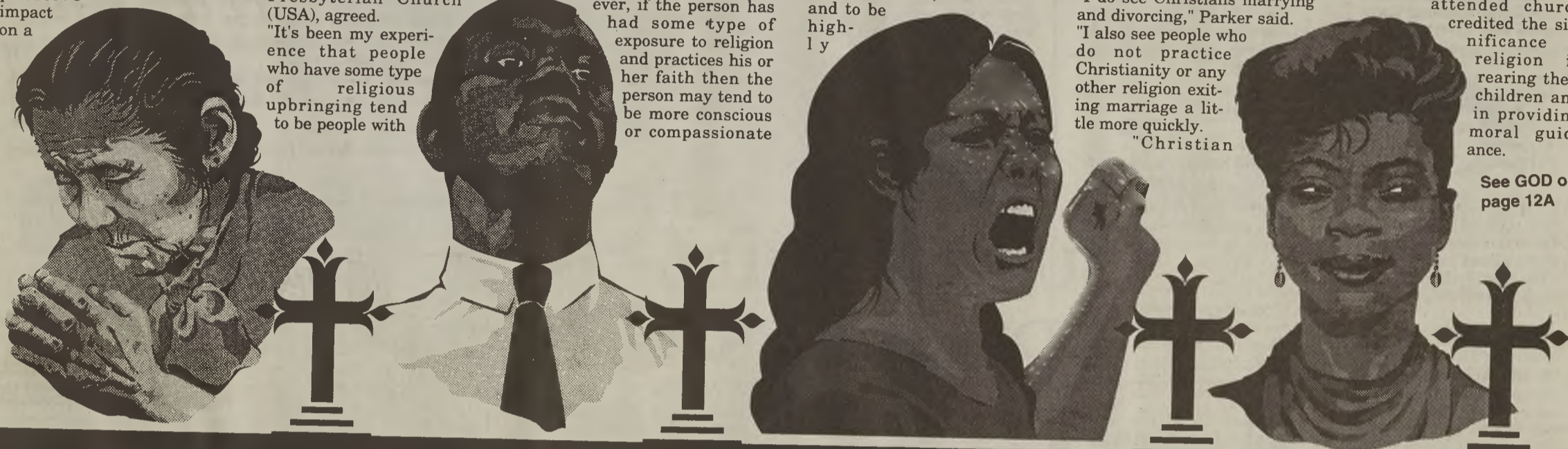
"I do see Christians marrying and divorcing," Parker said. "I also see people who do not practice Christianity or any other religion exiting marriage a little more quickly."

"Christian

couples believe that marriage is a covenant more so than a contract. They may go through turbulence and hard times a little longer because they have an inner strength that makes them want to endure through the hardships."

The same study also pointed out that parents who often attended church credited the significance of religion in rearing their children and in providing moral guidance.

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## God Shows Mercy

## Sunday School Lesson

Devotional reading:

Genesis 18:20-33

Lesson scripture: Jonah 3,4

Printed text:

Jonah 3:1-5, 10;4:1-5, 11.

The text for this lesson emphasizes Jonah's attitude while carrying out and viewing the results of the mission God gave him. Jonah's attitude needed to be changed. Our study will reveal God's efforts that change in the prophet.

Perhaps Jonah felt this way because of wounded vanity, since he had predicted a destruction that was not going to be carried out. It may be that he felt like a traitor, since he had had a part in sparing Ninevah from destruction. Whatever the reason, he had much to learn about the kind of attitudes God wants His people to have in their hearts.

God's response to Jonah's fierce anger was tender kindness. His question called for Jonah to examine his own heart to see how graciously God had dealt with him. Couldn't Jonah see that that same grace and mercy could be extended to persons of another nationality or race as well?

In many instances, honest searching of our hearts reveals that the problems we attribute to God or others are actually in us.

A celebrated psychologist says, "Happy people are good people, and good people are happy people." Such a statement, of course, must be qualified by definition of terms. What is meant by happy? What is the connotation of good?

Jesus said, "Blessed (happy) are

the merciful" (Matthew 5:7). We can discern what He meant. In this instance, happy is "deeply content," "at peace with oneself." Merciful is "sensitive, kind, forgiving, understanding, patient."

We know it's true. This beatitude is verified by our personal experience. A satisfied mind is our reward when we behave mercifully, especially toward our enemies, those who have offended us in one way or another. Good people are happy people.

Jonah earned the truth of the negative corollary: unhappy are the unmerciful. Even when he finally preached in Ninevah, it seemed that he did so without compassion. It appears that he relished the destruction he foretold concerning the city. He was disappointed and unhappy when the citizens of Ninevah were saved - so unhappy in fact, he wished he could die.

The merciful obtain mercy. "Be ye kind...even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). That is our mission, just as Jonah's mission was to go to Ninevah. Christ's commission was intended for all his followers. We are to make known the Gospel; we are to spread the word of God's concern for all mankind. The message of the book of Jonah is that God's love knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries. It is inclusive. Let us do all we can to fulfill our mission, and rejoice when lost souls anywhere turn to him.

## Veneration of 'Miraculous' black Christ highlight for Pope

By Anita Snow  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ESQUIPULAS, Guatemala - Barefoot Indian women in brightly embroidered blouses and skirts join women in designer jeans and high heels at the silver altar of the Black Christ, the miraculous Lord of Esquipulas.

Pope John Paul II today will join the millions of people from throughout Central America who have knelt before the 3-foot image of a black Christ on a cross, carved more than 400 years ago from cedar by a Portuguese craftsman.

"This is a historic moment," said the Rev. Gregorio Robeau Carmouche, abbot of the whitewashed, colonial-style basilica that houses the image. "There are really no words for the emotion that we feel, knowing that the Holy Father is coming to see us and the Christ image."

The pontiff plans to visit the basilica after celebrating Mass before hundreds of thousands of people in a huge field just outside this town, 75 miles east of Guatemala City near Guatemala's borders with El Salvador and Honduras.

Riding in his popemobile, he will travel over the narrow cobblestone streets that lead to the basilica.

Workers on Monday attached greenery and flowers to the entrance to the shrine, which was completed in 1758 and decreed a basilica by the Vatican in 1961. Since 1959 it has been cared for by Benedictine monks and priests, under the direction of Robeau.

The current building replaced a small chapel built on the same site in 1578 by church leaders who prohibited the local Indian population from worshipping the idols of their ancestors. Tradition says local Maya Indians previously used the site for religious cere-

monies.

Esquipulas has always held "great historical, great spiritual significance" for the region's Mayan Indians, said German Curuchiche, an anthropologist at the private Center of Maya Cultural Studies in Guatemala City.

Long before their Spanish conquerors arrived here five centuries ago, tens of thousands of Mayans from across the region traveled to Esquipulas every spring to welcome the rains before planting their crops. The elaborate religious ceremonies continued for days.

That ritual continues today.

Curuchiche said that when he was a child growing up in a town in the province of Chimaltenango, scores of men from his community would attend the ceremonies in Esquipulas every year.

Annually, some 1.2 million people visit the shrine, many of them to venerate the Black Christ with the golden halo

and crown of thorns, surrounded by wooden images of Mary, Joseph and Mary Magdalene. Inside the basilica thousands of small silver plaques recount the many miracles believers attribute to the image.

"Gratitude to the Lord of Esquipulas for saving me after my operation," reads one. "Gratitude to the Lord of Esquipulas for having saved me from death during the accident I suffered in March 1962."

Maria Jose Duarte, 40, who sells pins and literature about the Black Christ just outside the basilica, said that 12 years ago the Black Christ granted her request to allow her cancer-stricken husband to come home and see their children before he died.

"He was in the hospital in Guatemala City and the Black Christ let him come back home," said Duarte. "My husband died three years later but at least he was able to say goodbye to the children."

## Teach more ethics, college president says

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. - There is a growing demand for classes in ethics and civics from students concerned about a decaying society, University of Colorado President John Buechner said Monday.

Speaking at a luncheon, Buechner said all religion classes at the university are full.

"Now students ask: 'Is this

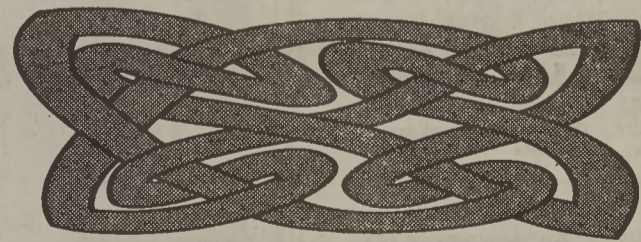
the way it should be,'" Buechner said.

He said the university also must work harder to keep up with technology or fall behind its students. "I'm amazed at the technology students bring to campus. It is part of their lives."

Buechner, 61, was serving as chancellor on the university's Denver campus before being appointed Nov. 16 to succeed Judith Albino as the university's president.

The Board of Regents is expected to decide by March 31 whether to make Buechner's appointment per-

manent, hire someone else from within the university, or begin a national search for a new president.



## Police assault charges dropped against N.Y. parishioners

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - Charges have been dropped against six parishioners of a Pentacostal church in Queens who were accused of assaulting police last summer.

"For the parishioners, their long ordeal has come to an end, and we suggest that the ordeal of the police officers has just begun," said Randolph Scott-McLaughlin of the Center for Constitutional

Rights, who represents some of those accused.

The lawyer announced Monday that notices of claim in a multimillion-dollar lawsuit against the city have been filed on behalf of 217 churchgoers who say they were brutalized by police during the incident at the Universal Calvary Church on Aug. 20.

Police had gone to the church after a retired officer, Clifford Warsop, complained he had been attacked and his

gun stolen when he tried to enter a revival tent to see his estranged wife and children.

According to police, the department responded in force after worshipers tried to stop officers from arresting a man Warsop had pointed out as having attacked him.

Warsop has since been charged with disrupting a religious service and menacing, misdemeanors punishable by up to a year in prison and a \$1,000 fine, said Mary

DeBourbon of the Queens district attorney's office. A hearing in his case is scheduled for Feb. 29.

Three parishioners, Horace Gordon, Nedley Walters and Michael Bennett, had been accused of stealing Warsop's gun, but those charges were dropped within days of the incident.

On Monday, at the request of the district attorney's office, Judge James Griffin in Queens Criminal Court

dropped assault and other remaining charges against Gordon, Walters and Bennett, as well as Cornelius Caliz, Keno Reefer and Woodrow Campbell.

An assault charge against a seventh churchgoer, a juvenile, is expected to be thrown out of Family Court, DeBourbon said.

Scott-McLaughlin said the city would be sued for "the brutality that these men and

217 others were subjected to, sprayed with tear gas, beaten and held hostage by the police for over eight hours."

The lawyer said parishioners provided the district attorney's office with a copy of a church-made videotape, "which clearly shows that a police riot was in full swing."

The district attorney's office is continuing to investigate all aspects of the case, including police behavior, DeBourbon said.