

The Charlotte Post

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Gerald O. Johnson
CEO/PUBLISHER

Robert Johnson
CO-PUBLISHER/
GENERAL MANAGER

Herbert L. White
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Spirituality is a force for good

William Raspberry



"We cannot allow spirituality to be the exclusive preserve of the politically conservative," Jeffrey Klein cautions in a lead editorial that is almost as striking for where it appears as for what it says.

Klein is president and editor in chief of Mother Jones, and my first thought, on seeing his piece in the November/December edition was: What is an investigative magazine (and a liberal one to boot) doing devoting nearly an entire issue to religion?

In truth, much of the content of the issue is a lot nearer the usual Mother Jones treatment: articles on sexually unfaithful priests, phony faith healing and religion as a virus, for instance. But it is Klein's lead essay that grabs.

"For too long," he says, "progressives and the establishment have ceded public discussion about morality to the religious right. That's a major reason Mother Jones has dared to step foot on this sacred ground. Still, we do this not just to counter the religious right. Spirituality, if approached with integrity and intelligence, is an effective force for the public good. Brave mainstream people of faith have made common cause with reformers at key moments in America's past - from abolitionism to the Progressive era, from the New Deal to the civil rights movement."

It is strange and marvelous stuff to hear from a liberal muckraker (the magazine is named for Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, 1830-1930, described in the masthead as "orator, union organizer and hell-raiser").



Maybe it strikes me as marvelous only because it expresses so much of what I've been trying to articulate. Klein even echoes my political fear that liberals and progressives, already having yielded patriotism and morality, are in danger of ceding yet another significant piece of ground - spirituality - to the right. I find almost painful, for example, the dismissive treatment by so many liberals of the Promise Keepers - on grounds hardly more substantial than that Pat Robertson finds the movement attractive.

Let the effort to address the spiritual hunger that I believe much of America is feeling become exclusive turf of the religious right, I keep warning my friends, and your fear of a Christian Right takeover could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"But," says Klein, "I'm much less worried about a theocratic takeover than about the lopsidedness of the American spirit. After all, the realm of the soul - real or imagined - is where

most of us make our most important moral decisions."

The great difficulty is in finding a proper place in public life for this "realm of the soul." Assuredly I do not want theologians - Bible-thumping or not - running the government. Nor do I want to see the government treat citizens as though they are merely physical beings. Maybe all one can hope for is some acknowledgment, in policies and in attitudes, that what people believe is important.

Isn't it of some account that 96 percent of us profess a belief in some universal spirit that transcends our physicality? Klein believes it is.

"Balanced spirituality can provide vision in times of crisis by placating the ego and pulling for both strength and humility..."

As we enter the 21st century, it becomes harder not to recognize the commonality of the human condition. Our societies are fragmenting as we continue to hyper-focus on personal consumption. Lip service has

replaced real service. How much longer can we afford to ignore the mutual responsibilities we bear for the health of our symbiotic web?"

Nothing in what he has written offers a clue as to how "religious" Klein is - nor should it. That would only invite arguments about the specifics of his religion, when his point is the importance of recognizing the near-universal belief in our common spirituality and of honoring the validity of one another's search for truth.

Klein believes that, whatever our doctrinal particulars, our desire to connect with some transcendent power or idea - with something bigger than ourselves - is deeper even than our drive for economic satisfaction. I believe it too - and I believe, moreover, that it is our societal failure to address that longing that tempts us into the nonspiritual excesses that threaten to bring us ruin. I just didn't expect to find it in Mother Jones.

WILLIAM RASPBERRY is a Washington Post columnist.

A chance to be heard: Vote Nov. 4

Charlotte-Mecklenburg voters have opportunity to make community-altering decisions



Leake



Cannon



Dunlap



McCrory



Rousso



Reid



Greene



Majeed

Next week's elections will be crucial for the future of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Voters will decide who will lead Charlotte city council and Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board, as well as decide on bond referendums for schools and jails.

After studying the position of candidates for each governing body as well as the pros and cons of both bond packages, the following are The Post's endorsements for election day. Regardless of how you cast your vote, we encourage every person eligible to do so. After all, it's our future.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education:

District 1 - Jim Puckett

District 2 - Vilma Leake

District 3 - George Dunlap

District 4 - Louise Woods

District 5 - Molly Griffin

District 6 - Malcolm Griggs

County-wide bonds

School bonds - Yes

Jail bonds - No

Community College bonds (CPCC) - Yes

City of Charlotte

Mayor
Pat McCrory

City Council At Large
Al Rousso
Joe White
Don Reid
Lynn Wheeler

City Council Districts

District 1 - Todd Capitano

District 2 - Malachi Greene

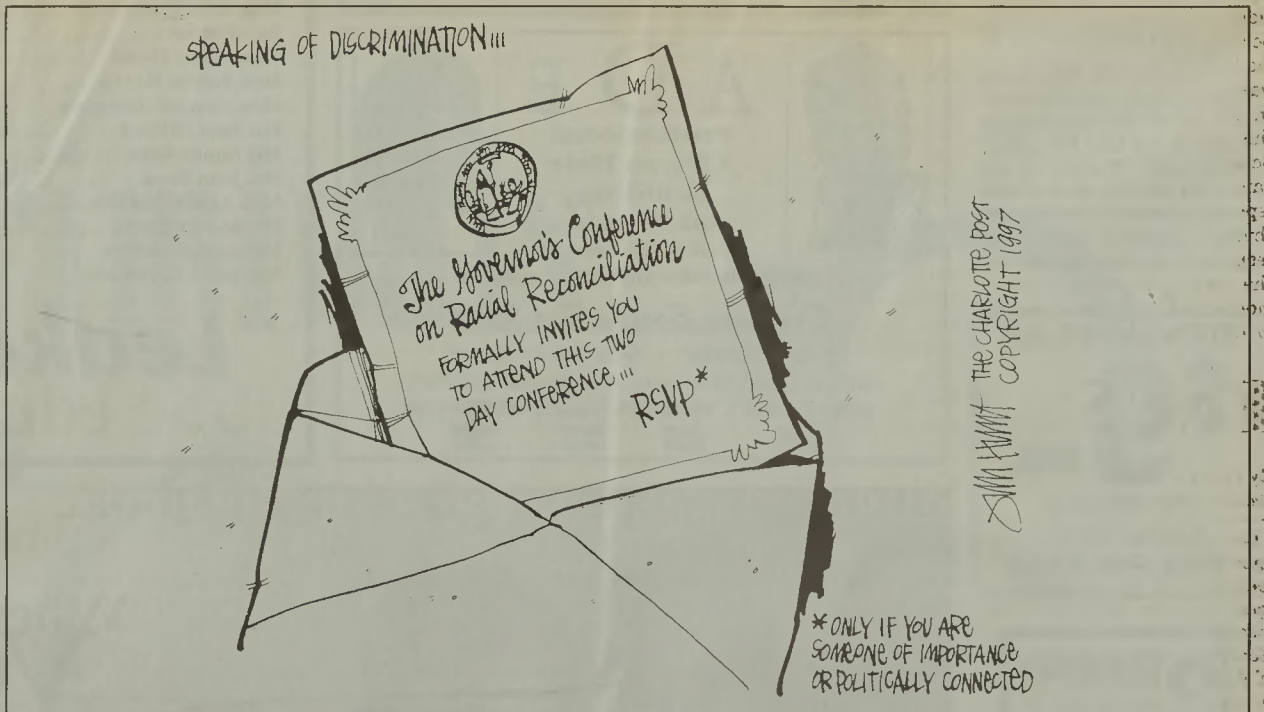
District 3 - Patrick Cannon

District 4 - Nasif Majeed

District 5 - Tim Sellers

District 6 - Charles Baker

District 7 - Mike Jackson



Medicine goes beyond our reach

By Gregory A. Antoine M.D.
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON - The late Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, prolonged her fight to survive burns over 75 percent of her body earlier this year because of the availability of artificial skin. Former star athlete Bo Jackson is not a cripple thanks to hip joint replacements.

And tens of thousands of other African Americans are today leading healthy, productive lives because of silicone-based medical innovations such as heart pacemakers, brain shunts and corneal implants.

The availability of medical implants that save and prolong life is nothing short of miraculous. But these miracles may soon be available only to those people with the time and

Life-saving breakthroughs may be found only outside U.S. because of lawsuits

money to travel to other countries to get them. Medical breakthroughs and the materials to make them are disappearing in the United States.

Why? Because product liability lawsuits and the escalating cost of insurance are making it too expensive for companies to continue to make them. And if the current legal climate continues, everything from birth control pills and heart pace makers to certain childhood immunizations could be affected.

Many suppliers of raw materials for these products are worried about the fast growing number of lawsuits being filed against manufacturers of medical devices. And their fears are causing them to

conduct their business differently.

Some companies are severely restricting the sale of raw materials to medical device manufacturers. Other companies are not willing to provide these materials to manufacturers at all.

And who can blame them? Look at what happened to the Dow Corning Corporation. Several years ago, thousands of lawsuits charged that Dow's silicone breast implants caused connective tissue disease. Defending against so many lawsuits forced the company into bankruptcy.

The whole affair has sent chills through companies whose products such as the lens implants that fight the

blinding effects of glaucoma are also made of silicone.

Healthcare in many poor and minority neighborhoods has historically been limited. Dollars are often limited for anything but emergency care; the choice of doctors is limited and opportunities to form a lasting doctor-patient relationship is often limited as well.

Now there may be limits on devices that address acute health problems in the African American community such as glaucoma, diabetes, breast and prostate cancer, and hypertension. And the result could further widen the gap between those who can afford the best medical services and those who can't.

GREGORY A. ANTOINE, M.D., is an adult and pediatric surgeon in Washington, D.C. who specializes in plastic and reconstructive surgery.