

FORUM

Bob Bock: My Heart Goes Out to You ... and Your Past

Robert C. Bock was a student in a couple of classes I taught — in 1985-86 — at Winston Salem State University. I recall that Bob was never absent. He always sat in the first row in the first seat to my left — the hot seat — and he was most enthusiastic about his work. Quickly into the term, I became fond of Bob Bock.

Bob was very engaging with the subject matter, and quite often Bob offered his "advice," particularly to younger (male) students. When we'd debate some of the "darker" sides of popular culture issues, he would often comment, saying, "not from whether or not I

I knew was that they had served-out their time and were doing the best they could to turn around their former lives.

They were seeking a new start, asking society — to whom they had paid their debt, to give them a new chance. For us, it was an opportunity to do what we say we believe.

I had two reactions when I read last week that Bob was now the flash point in the controversy that erupted when some people found out that Bob had served time for murder. He counsels ex-offenders — in a tax-supported job — at a day-reporting center in Statesville, N.C.

First, I was not surprised to know that Bob had found the career he sought; and, neither was I astonished nor thunderstruck that some citizens, now aware of what he'd done, wished to have him expelled from his work, to extend his sentence, so to speak.

To me, Bob's — and our — situation cuts to the heart of what is required of a "Just people." While our hearts go out to the victim of his crime and her family, neither good-willed rational passion or "mob rule" should cancel out our dedication and conviction to justice. But, as the 16th century philosopher Baltasar Gracian asked, "Who can be this Phoenix of impartiality?"

Few of us who say we really believe in justice and praise her will follow her dictates when a situation like Bob Bock's appears. Politics will betray justice, who pays not a whit of attention to friendships or plausible rationalizations. Human fickleness may change like the seasons, but our loyalty to justice should not.

In the Christian tradition, Saul was forgiven for having persecuted the followers of Jesus.

Saul later became known throughout the Christian world as Paul the Apostle. He, like Bob Bock, openly admitted his past wrongs. In his epistle to the Galatians, he wrote, "... in time past in the Jews' religion, beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God."

I must wonder aloud who would be exposed if we went back and

rethought our feelings about those who persecuted others of God's people: holding them as slaves and selling and killing them at will?

When last I looked, Michael Milken, who robbed the public till in one of Wall Street's biggest scandals, was back at money making. There's a passel of folk from the Watergate crimes who, now forgiven, are now held in high esteem. One, Charles Colson, runs a lucrative prison ministry. Jeb McCruider runs a church in Lexington, Ky.

Oliver North, who may have done more than we'll ever know, pushes Rush Limbaugh for tops in the radio talk show and endorsement business. Jim and Tammy Baker are back in the hunt. We all know that our prisons have lots of people in them being held for murders for which there is no evidence to prove they committed. There are other hardened career criminals whom, I suppose, should never be let out of jail.

I can't do much about Bob Bock's situation beyond this feature. I don't have the power to forgive him. We certainly can't put this toothpaste — his parole — back in the tube. But, I can continue to pray for him and his family and for the family of his victim, who must be suffering the whole thing over again. I feel rather sorry for those who wish to judge Bob Bock, again.

Something good will come from Bob Bock's situation. We have so many Bob Bocks in prisons, people whom we claim to be rehabilitating and who will someday be released.

In a way, we are all serving time — borrowed time — and maybe we will find favor from Jesus' pardoning of his persecutors. Jesus, who suffered the greatest victimization, asked — from that old rugged cross — "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Whatever is done as Bob Bock's situation unfolds, I hope it is earthly right and just.

(Bill Turner is a freelance columnist for the Chronicle)



LIFT EVERY VOICE

By BILL TURNER

agree or disagree with what we've read or from what we're hearing or talking about, but from my own experiences ..."

Bob got As in the classes he took from me. He graduated with honors, and I wrote him a letter of recommendation for graduate studies at Appalachian State, where he did exceptionally well in taking his master's degree in counseling.

I invited Bob and another student from my class who shared some of Bob's background and qualities, along with a couple other students to our home for Thanksgiving dinner. That was 1986. We have practiced this for many years and continue to do so for students not going home for the Holidays, for whatever reason.

Even as I invited them, I knew that Bob — along with the other fellow — was finishing up a prison term. I also knew that both of them had been found guilty of capital offenses. I never asked "exactly" what either had done, although I later came to find out. All

You Be the Judge

A few seconds later a tall black man with a graying beard, dressed in a business suit, approached. His hand was extended, and his face wore a comforting smile. I recognized the chaplain with whom I had



ONE STEP BEYOND

By HELEN LOSSE

shared a brief conversation that afternoon. It seems that back in the 1960s, he had a girlfriend he visited in Winston-Salem. Sure, he'd visited our city since, but the recollection of the trips to visit that girl evoked a hearty laugh. Then he got serious. After all, we were sitting there — in the hall of the hospital because my father-in-law is critically ill (That was the day we'd received the call when he had stopped breathing.) Chaplains are hired by hospitals to minister to people who are facing difficult situations.

As he approached this time — at the 8 p.m. visiting slot — he spoke to me briefly. Then he continued toward the couple with whom I had been speaking (apparently he hadn't met them yet.) Our son Victor was wearing his usual outfit — a Dallas Cowboys' sweatshirt, which soon became the focal point of the conversation. The man, so poignant in his expression of dislike for black people a few minutes earlier, was

now engaging the black chaplain in a great story-telling contest. The obvious hero was the man's grandson who is probably NFL material according to the emerging legend. When it was my turn to visit Bill's dad, I left a congenial group behind. I will probably never see that couple again. I will probably not have another chance to speak up and set the record straight, so far as my commitment is concerned. I had my chance, and I chose not to use it. Should I (in that less-than-two-minute encounter before the chaplain arrived) have spoken clearly to the issue of racism? If white people don't educate ignorant, bigoted white people, who will? Black people have been speaking for centuries — their words falling on deaf ears.

It's time white people said something. Is it not? Should I have scolded them for their hatred? Should I have highlighted what seems so obvious to me?

Am I a coward because I chose to remain silent? Did I succumb to pressure?

Was it because I lacked adequate time to develop my idea? Was I embarrassed to speak out as the black chaplain came near? Or did I do the right thing as I heeded the warning: be careful about "casting pearls before swine"? These thoughts have trampled upon the wrinkles of my mind, goading me now and then since the incident occurred some three weeks ago. I made my decision, and now I must go on with my life.

Was I right? Was I wrong? (You be the judge.) Why is it we often falsely believe that every thing is black or white when clearly it just isn't so?

(Helen Losse is a student at Wake Forest University.)

Parents Need a TV Rating System That Makes Sense

What kind of TV shows do your children look at? Do you worry if their favorite shows contain violence, sex, or inappropriate language? If your children are like most children, they spend an average of four hours a day in front of the tube. One recent study found that children are bombarded with more than 2,000 television messages a day. And black children watch more TV than other children. Two-thirds of black fourth-graders watch four or more hours of TV a day, compared with one-third of white fourth-graders and a half of Hispanic fourth-graders. On average, a black household watches 72 hours of TV per week, 49 percent more than other households. With hundreds of channels to choose from, I think parents need help to make good choices about what their children should and shouldn't watch. And parents need to stop using TV as a babysitter.

Earlier this year, the Implementation Group for TV Ratings, headed by Motion Picture Association of America President Jack Valenti, introduced a rating system based on age, just like the movie system, that consists of six broad ratings. The ratings provide no information for parents about the content of television programs — no hints whether a show has a lot of violence, or sexual content, or both. Under the industry's rating system, Y represents programs suitable for children 2 to 6 years old, Y7 programs are for children 7 and older, G programs are suitable for all ages, PG suggests parental guidance, 14 means unsuitable for children under 14, and M programs are for mature audiences only.

I agree with the dozens of academic experts, child advocates, members of Congress, and parent, health, religious, and education groups across the country that parents would be better off with a rating system that describes content by using symbols such as "V" for vio-



CHILDWATCH

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

lence, "L" for language, and "S" for sex. A similar system has been used by Home Box Office and other premium cable television channels for the past decade, and we ought to have it on every channel.

"It is important to know what exactly is in the shows children are planning to watch," says psychologist Dale Kunkel, a leading researcher on the media's effect on children. "Research has shown that children learn behaviors by watching others, and TV presents a huge range of behaviors to learn from, including violence."

Violence in our communities and in our nation is caused by a com-

bination of factors, including easy availability of guns, poverty, and violence in the home. But TV violence increases children's risk of becoming violent, overly fearful, or numb to victims.

Parents say they want all the help they can get. A recent poll sponsored by the PTA found that four out of five parents polled preferred a rating system based on content and using letters to warn parents when violence, coarse language, and sexual content appear in programs, rather than a rating system based only on age.

Of course, no rating system can replace parental responsibility. In addition to being careful about the messages we allow into our homes, we should limit the amount of television our children watch. We need to read more to our children, to encourage them to read on their own, and to spend more time sharing our proud history and culture with them. And sometimes we need to watch television with our children. Television can be educational as well as entertaining, and we need to seek out and support positive programs.

You have until April 8, 1997, to urge the FCC to approve a ratings system that provides necessary information about the programs your children may watch. Make your opinion heard by calling the FCC toll-free at 1-888-CALL-FCC, or by sending an E-mail to vchip@fcc.gov.

(Marian Wright Edelman is the president of the Children's Defense Fund, and a leader of the Black Community Crusade for Children (BCCC), whose mission is to leave no child behind.)

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