

Ethics and Eternity

William E. Stein, D.D.S.*

I had just finished reading for the third time the great interview Sue Miller had with our ethics guru, Jack Churchill. I had been suffering from a soggy head cold which really sapped my strength. Recently the Rush Limbaugh and Joe Southeray radio programs have appeared on a local Brainerd FM radio station. The only problem is, Rush goes to 2:00 and Joe starts at 1:00 so we miss the first hour of his "Garage Logic" show. I have learned to combat this by carrying both my FM radio to listen to Rush and if I feel the need to listen to the first hour of Joe, I have an app for that on my iPad.

As this was the day after the elections, I wanted to hear both Rush and Joe's take on the results. I stumbled to the bedroom and lay back listening to Joe, having turned off Rush. Soon I was fast asleep and "sawing logs", as Terry would attest. Then the phone rang. It was our MDA president, Dan Rose, with an important message. I tried my best to answer, but a glob of accumulated phlegm on my vocal chords turned "Hello" into "Glerp!" Then, shocked out of my reverie, I realized where I was and to whom I was speaking, and attempted to turn down the radio, only it wasn't the radio that was blaring, it was the iPad. I kept on trying to turn down the radio only to turn it up, change the station and even the language to French Canadian, all the while trying to make myself clear to President Dan.

I tried to salvage a shred of decorum, explaining that I was battling a severe bout of laryngitis. Dan was gracious as always, but I wonder what he must have been thinking. So much for my nap.

In this edition we have a powerful article, the interview with Jack Churchill I spoke of initially. Jack has been for ten years the moral and ethical compass of the Minnesota Dental Association. Jack points out that we are all subject to laws. Some we must obey, we have no choice; the Law of Gravity, for instance. But in the case

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of most laws, we have a choice, given by God as our gift of free will. We have our consciences to guide our choices, but our ability to depend on that little voice in our heads depends on how well our consciences have been formed: by our parents, who are our first teachers; our teachers in school; our religious leaders if any; and what we see and hear and read in the ever present media storm. It is certainly possible for a person following his or her conscience to make an absolutely immoral and unethical choice. I hope and observe that this type of person is in the vast minority of our sisters and brothers.

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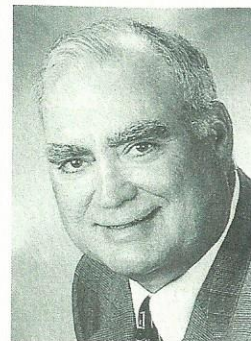
This reminded me of the advice I got years ago from a wise Jesuit priest: "Do you know the difference between guilt and shame? Guilt is when you say

to yourself, 'I shouldn't have done that.' Shame is 'I hope no one finds out that I did it!'"

Ethics are so important in a dental practice. Patients come to us for help, they trust us implicitly, and in most cases will accept any treatment we recommend. It is up to us to weigh our decisions based on what is best for the patients in their particular situations. By all means present the ideal, but if the patient, after careful explanation, cannot bear that financial burden, then offer the next best alternatives. This is not perfect. To quote Jack: "We're not perfect for sure. But in our ever changing world, there are actually things that don't change - the value of hard work, determination, persistence, commitment, integrity, transparency, honesty, altruism, capability, engagement, gratitude, responsibility, courage, discipline, respect, genuine concern for others, service, forgiveness, humility, faith, love, and God himself." Sage advice indeed.

As we are talking about ethics, a subject so near to my heart, I wanted this editorial to be as perfect as possible, so I revisited it many times to "tweak" it a bit. I must finish now lest all this "tweaking" turn into "twerking" — and I assure you, that would not be a pretty sight!

May God bless you all! ■



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