

Ethic in 'work ethic' raises a red flag



REV. RONALD P. BYARS

In the United States, a self-righteous, moralistic nation? That's the charge that Diane Johnson makes in the Sunday, New York Times for Jan. 6. Furthermore, we are "self-righteous" and "moralistic" because we "have allowed our economies to be tangled up with our (Judeo-Protestant?) ideas of morality," Johnson, who divides her time between Paris and San Francisco, is comparing life in France with life in the United States. The French have recently astonished the world by voting the political left back into power. The French, Johnson implies, don't care whether France can afford generous social benefits or not. They simply begin with the premise that life ought to be pleasant, and the government should help to make it so.

Much of the political conflict of the 20th century has centered on the issue of the creation and distribution of wealth. Socialist systems (in varying degrees) have placed the link on a more or less equal distribution of a nation's wealth. Free-market systems (again, in varying degrees) have placed the accent on the creation of wealth. Recent history seems to illustrate that equal distribution inhibits the incentives that create wealth. On the other hand, when the accent falls on the creation of wealth, there emerge economic and social inequalities that may do injury to some, and cause social instability for all.

At least since the publication of Max Weber's monumental work, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," Protestants—and particularly the heirs of John Calvin—have been either praised or blamed for the flowering of free-market capitalism. Critics of Weber's thesis have pointed out that capitalism had beginnings earlier than the Protestant Reformation, particularly in some of the city-states of what later became Italy. Nevertheless, it is true that historical circumstances linked with the early Protestant movement pro-

vided enormous energy for the development of free-market capitalism. Diane Johnson accuses Protestants of an linking morality and economic success that we have created a society in which we prefer to be "right" rather than safe. Somehow, we have equated wealth with righteousness, and poverty with immorality. No wonder she prefers the way of the French!

I think that Johnson is not altogether wrong—nor is she altogether right. What used to be called "the Protestant ethic" or even that there might be some other kind of ethic. We have been shaped from childhood to believe that it is a virtue to work hard, and that economic success should be pursued for its own sake. It's as though the system of ethics we're linked to long hours, high stress and money in the bank.

This "work ethic" only dimly resembles the original Protestant ethic. The Protestant vision located its work ethic in a broader system of ethics. Yes, a person was to work hard and honestly—for the sake of one's neighbor. What served the neighbor glorified God. To the surprise of the early Protestants, financial success often followed upon their diligence. Wealth was a blessing, but it was held in trust to be used for the good of the neighbor. Poverty, however, was not a sign of God's displeasure nor that the poor were blameworthy. In short, the "Protestant ethic" contributed to the formation of wealth, but also insisted on responsibility within a community. That ethic becomes something quite different when seen through its original theological roots. Jews, Roman Catholics and others approach questions of work, wealth and social responsibility from slightly different angles. All—at least, their best—insist that no ethical system can afford to neglect the well-being of the weaker members of society.

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BELIEFS Values

Christ Church dedicates refurbished organ

By RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

They were disassembled, wrapped and crated for shipment by sea to London, England. Once restored, they returned to Oakland County for repositioning, tuning and regulating.

Now that the 5,400 metal and wooden pipes have taken their rightful places in the sanctuary after an 18-month absence, Christ Church Cranbrook will again reverberate with the rich, mellow sounds that have traditionally accompanied the Episcopal worship experience.

On Sunday, June 22, the newly refurbished Skinner/Mander organ will be blessed during a 10 a.m. dedication service at the Bloomfield Hills church at Lone Pine and Cranbrook roads. Music Director Charles Raines of Royal Oak will begin the ceremony at 9:45 a.m., with an organ prelude featuring music by Bach, Mendelssohn and Vierne. The public is invited to join in the celebration, which will be followed by a reception.

"It's not only an organ for Christ Church Cranbrook parishioners, but a musical instrument for the whole community to be proud of, delight in and listen to," said the Rev. Edward Mullins of Bloomfield Hills. "It's a form of outreach."

The decision to spend \$1 million to restore one of only five existing Mander organs in the country was made six years ago in response to the aging instrument's malfunctions and frequent repairs.



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOPKINS

Fine tuned: The Rev. Edward Mullins (right) and music director Charles Raines stand among a segment of the 5,400 pipes that comprise Christ Church Cranbrook's newly refurbished Mander organ.

The original instrument, which dates back to 1927, was built by one of the world's finest organ builders, E. M. Skinner, said Raines, who has studied music since the age of 7. "The pipe work was of very fine quality, but by the early '90s all the mechanical and electrical components had deteriorated to unreliability ... We never knew when something would fail."

The massive restoration pro-

ject began in January 1996, when workers transformed the sanctuary into a temporary construction site during the six-week disassembling process.

The following January, the 46-foot scaffolding tower was re-oriented for the four-month installation process, which included the repositioning, tuning and regulating of each individual pipe. Two new turbine blowers that pump air through

the pipes at a comparable temperature and humidity level as the organ were mounted in the rear of the organ chamber. The original console, which now has four keyboards and a pedalboard, was rebuilt in the traditional English style to accommodate the 1,400 new pipes that were added to the instrument.

While the organ components were being restored in England

See PIPES, B5

Church members offer letters for hunger legislation

By RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

When the faithful leave the sanctuary at First United Methodist Church of Birmingham on June 22, they will be asked to make a unique "Offering of Letters" that could eventually feed hundreds of hungry mouths in the United States.

Following the one-hour worship services at 8:30 and 10 a.m.—which will include supportive sermons by the Rev. William Ritter, senior pastor—church members will gather in the fellowship hall to sign preprinted letters carrying Bred for the World's message to "Tell Congress: Hunger Has a Cure." The church, at 1689 W. Maple, welcomes members of the community to participate in this

national letter writing campaign. "I'm hoping to get 400 people to sign three letters each," said Leo Norris of Birmingham, the church's hunger coordinator. "The issue is that anybody that's hungry in the United States of America ought to have enough to eat."

The letters will be sent to members of Congress asking for the restoration of cuts in national nutrition programs and encouraging program improvements through the Hunger, Home & Care Act of 1997. The legislation includes food-stamp benefits for unemployed adults actively seeking jobs and for legal immigrants who are elderly, disabled or under age 18. A Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children is also part

of the legislation.

Founded in 1974 as an ecumenical, non-partisan Christian organization, Bread For the World mobilizes Congressional action by lobbying law makers to release the resources needed to fight poverty and world disasters. BFW publications enhance the goal of educating citizens by providing Bible studies and worship aids on the Christian response to world hunger. The group claims 44,000 members and thousands of churches.

The Birmingham church's involvement with BFW is in response to the resolution of the United Methodist Church to support the organization in its efforts to end hunger. Church member Harold

Stanton chairs the Conference Section on Hunger/United Methodist Commission on Overseas Relief. This is the first BFW event the Birmingham congregation has undertaken since becoming one of 75 Metro Detroit churches to enroll in the organization as a covenant church.

Last year's letter writing campaign drew national attention to childhood hunger, and 500 candidates committed to support federal legislation relating to the issue. Advocates are hoping similar attention will be given to the Hunger Has a Cure Act.

I have been given Bill Ritter's full support and believe that the people of First Methodist will come through again with great support," added Leo.



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