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Equal rights for children under the law

Guillermo and Luz Hernandez
Photo by Deb St. Louis, Lake City Reporter

End Timers charged in Florida for daughter's death

Guillermo and Luz Hernandez of Lake City, Florida, were indicted by a grand jury November 20 on manslaughter and felony child abuse charges in connection with the death of their 4-year-old daughter Sonia. The couple are members of End Time Ministries, which has lost several children because of its beliefs against medical care.

Sonia was born in 1986 with serious physical handicaps. She received extensive medical attention in the Chicago area until 1988 when her parents joined End Time Ministries. Thereafter, she was never taken to medical professionals despite evidence that she had ongoing medical problems.

The family later followed Reverend Charles Meade, the group leader, to Lake City, Florida.

On September 28, 1990, Sonia stopped breathing. The parents called the sheriff's office for a rescue squad. Sonia was dead in her mother's arms when paramedics arrived. She weighed only 14½ pounds, one pound more than the average skeleton of a 4-year-old child. According to medical journals, the average weight of a 4-year-old female is 30 to 35 pounds.

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Parents' testimony questioned

The parents told investigators Sonia had been medically diagnosed as having cystic fibrosis. Pathologist Dr. Margarita Arruza examined the body and concluded that the child's death was due to pneumonia caused by cystic fibrosis, a fatal disease. Her conclusion was based largely on the parents' statements, since the only way to diagnose cystic fibrosis is through a sweat chloride test conducted while a person is alive.

The autopsy report was forwarded to the sheriff's office, and investigators closed the case on the assumption that the child's death could not have been prevented.

In the summer of 1991, however, someone asked for another investigation into the case. Assistant State's Attorney Scott Cupp subpoenaed the child's medical records from Chicago. He found that she had been tested for cystic fibrosis and the test had shown that she did not have the disease. He also learned that she was of normal weight and height at age two, when she was last seen by physicians.

Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez are being represented by the public defender's office. Their two older children are Socorro, 20, and Sergio, 18. Their third surviving child is 8 years old and was placed in the custody of Florida Health and Rehabilitation Services.

Another case of serious neglect

About three weeks after the death of Sonia Hernandez, End Time members Charles and Marilee Myers rushed their 16-year-old son Will to North Florida Regional Hospital. He had been ill for three months with an undiagnosed heart tumor. He was unable to walk, and the parents kept his feet in buckets because of running sores. He could not retain food; his weight had fallen to 90 pounds.

After an operation and a two months' hospital stay, Will was released in good health.

His parents were charged with child neglect. They were sentenced to probation as part of a plea agreement.

ABC *20/20* aired a segment on End Time Ministries and religious exemption statutes March 6. It discussed several deaths of children due to medical neglect and also the hostility toward relatives outside the group. One couple drove from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to Lake City for a visit, but were allowed only to look through the window at their grandchildren for about twenty minutes. CHILD members Joni Clark, Chuck and Sandy Huber, and Ann Connor were interviewed.

Taken in part from *The Lake City Reporter*, 31 Oct. 1990, 4 and 29 Nov. 1991, and 4 Dec. 1991.

Faith Tabernacle parents guilty in son's death

On November 5, 1991, Dennis and Lori Nixon of Altoona, Pennsylvania, were found guilty of manslaughter and child endangerment in the death of their 8-year-old son Clayton.

The boy died January 6th of malnutrition and dehydration after contracting ear and sinus infections. The infections caused continuous vomiting of food and water. Forensic pathologist Harold Cottle reported that the boy had sunken eyes and large amounts of pus in his ears. He was 4'1" tall, but weighed only 32 pounds at his death.

His parents did not seek medical care for him because of their membership in the Faith Tabernacle church.

Law prevents examining siblings

Blair County Child Protection Services (CPS) sought a court order for medical examination of Clayton's nine siblings. Judge Hiram Carpenter declined to issue an order, in part because of Pennsylvania's religious exemption in the juvenile code.

Similar CPS efforts were rebuffed in 1980 when another Faith Tabernacle family, Roger and Dawn Winterborne, lost five children to untreated pneumonia in suburban Philadelphia. CPS attempted to obtain a court order for medical exams of the surviving siblings, but were turned down because of the religious exemption to child abuse and neglect.

Pennsylvania does not, however, have a

religious exemption in the criminal code, and its state courts upheld a manslaughter conviction against another Faith Tabernacle couple who withheld lifesaving medical care from their son. See *Commonwealth v. Barnhart*, 345 Pa. Super. Ct. 10, 497 A.2d 616 (1985), *cert. denied* U. S. (1988).

"Force feeding"

The Nixons entered into a plea agreement by which Judge Hiram Carpenter declared them guilty, fined them each $150, and sentenced them to two years' probation with 125 hours each of community service work in the pediatric ward of a local hospital.

Blair County District Attorney William Haberstroh requested the hospital service work so the Nixons would see that medicine heals diseases of children and carry the message back to the Faith Tabernacle congregation.

Haberstroh also requested a much larger fine and the maximum term of probation. He argued that the church would pay the fine and thereby be motivated to prevent future deaths of children.

Haberstroh publicly implored Rev. Charles Nixon, minister of the local Faith Tabernacle church and Clayton's paternal grandfather, to advise his parishioners to seek medical care for their children. But the elder Nixon sat stone-faced in the courtroom saying nothing.

A week later defense attorney Charles Wasovich reported that it may not be easy to find a hospital willing to have them working there and said he didn't think "force feeding of hospital community service" will do much to change the Nixons' views about medical care.

Parents believe they were right

In asking for leniency, defense attorney Charles Wasovich said, "They have to live with themselves, with their God, with their family knowing what happened, which is far more serious than what will happen here today."

His other comments about his clients, however, did not suggest to us that much soul-searching or self-examination is going on. He said the Nixons adamantly insist that their child's death is God's will. And, after the quite lenient sentence was handed down, Wasovich said, "They knew what they were doing. They believe in what they were doing and they are willing to accept the consequences." We wonder if anyone asked whether Clayton was willing to accept the consequences.

Since Clayton died, Mrs. Nixon has had another baby. Another Blair County death of a Faith Tabernacle child will come to trial March 30. Kathy and John Friedenberger of Altoona are charged with manslaughter and child endangerment for letting their 4½-month-old daughter Melinda Sue die of severe malnutrition and dehydration without seeking medical care.

Taken in part from the *Altoona Mirror*, November 5 and 11, 1991.

Abuse linked to Fundamentalist beliefs in Iowa

In two recent Dubuque County, Iowa, cases, parents have claimed a religious rationale for beating children. Reportedly, the parents in both cases were once affiliated with Iowa State University Bible Study, an evangelical group on the university campus in the late 1970s.

A central figure in the Iowa State University Bible Study hierarchy was Jim McCotter whose sermons were often tape recorded and sold at an Ames, Iowa, bookstore. One on discipline was based on Proverbs 20:30, which McCotter translates as, "Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts."

Need to wound with beating

McCotter says on the tape, "When you discipline, this verse indicates, as others do, that you want to do it so it wounds. Now, when you say 'wound,' it doesn't mean that you have a bloody mess on your hands necessarily. It doesn't mean that you have a child 'wounding' like he has a broken leg." But it does mean, he continues, that you have been severe enough to reverse the child's attitude.

"And he may be, and often will be, black and blue," he continues. "My children have been many times. And it cleans evil from them."

3-month-old beaten for crying

In the first Dubuque County case, Wendy and Patrick Burds were charged with child endangerment for beating their three-month-old son Benjamin in August, 1990, with an oak board 16" long, 1½" wide, and ¾" thick.

According to court minutes, testimony indicated that they hit their baby approximately twice a week "because he had a bad attitude" and because they needed "to teach him right from wrong." They had started with a wooden spatula, but had then begun using the board or "rod" as they called it, which they purchased from a lumberyard for the purpose.

Leta Hosier, a Department of Human Services (DHS) investigator, testified that the Burds "did not believe in using their hand to discipline; that they hit Benjamin with this rod several times a week; they had been disciplining him in this manner since he was about three months old; that they hit him for 'Benjie crying;' Hosier would testify that when questioned what 'Benjie crying' meant, Wendy Burds stated that this was crying 'for no real reason.'"

According to a relative, Burds said he "would have to hit Benjamin as many as 30 times with a stick to get a point across." Another relative said the Burds complained that Benjamin would "cry like a banshi" and that he intended to teach his son "not to cry like that" by hitting him.

Grandfather replaced oak with "soft" pine

After observing the beatings, the paternal grandfather "then made a soft piece of white pine to give to Patrick to use instead of an oak board." (Patrick made no promises to substitute the pine board for the oak one.)

At a Child In Need of Assistance hearing, the Burds testified that they were both medically trained and knew how to avoid inflicting permanent injury on Benjamin.

The parents pled no contest to the charge, said they had changed their disciplinary practices, and were placed on probation.

Beatings with boards not hands

In the second case, Timothy Mueller is charged with endangerment of his 11-year-old stepson, Jeremy Papin. The boy told DHS investigator Jean McClain that Mueller made him take off his pants, paddled him with a wooden board, and poured Coke over his head outside in front of other children. Jeremy also told the investigator that Mueller "hit him on the side area of the head hard enough that it made him cry; that his father was mad at him for crying, called him a baby, pulled him up and hit him again on the side of the head; this time hard enough to make him fall to the ground."

Jeremy gave a police detective a Bible in which Mueller had highlighted verses advocating corporal punishment, such as, "He who spares the rod hates his son but he who loves him disciplines him promptly."

The Muellers told McClain that their disciplinary methods advocated punishment with "rods" or other wooden implements, but not with the hand, so that the child will regard the hand as "a loving instrument." When McClain told them she was going to found a child abuse report, the Muellers said they would continue using their method of discipline because it is based on religious beliefs.

Taken from *The Des Moines Sunday Register*, 26 Nov. 1978 and from trial information.

Discipline causes starvation death of Texas child

Mr. and Mrs. Jay Hill of White Settlement, Texas, have been charged in the starvation death of their 13-year-old son Stephen. Police say he was starved for months in his parents' trailer home as a disciplinary measure and was kept chained to prevent him from reaching the refrigerator.

On November 3, authorities found the boy unconscious on the floor of the family trailer after a tip from an anonymous 911 caller. He weighed 55 pounds, while the normal weight of a 13-year-old boy is about 105 pounds. He remained comatose at the Cook-Ft. Worth Children's Medical Center until he died on November 16.

His younger brother Douglas has been placed

in foster care. Relatives on both sides of the family have asked to care for the boy.

Their well-fed parents have been charged with injury to a child. Withholding food does not meet the legal criteria for a homicide charge in Texas. Jay Hill has also been charged with aggravated kidnapping.

Hill's attorney Larry Moore said his client "was thoroughly convinced that God was not going to let Stephen die. He was absolutely certain that was God's plan and that Stephen would make a recovery."

Private Mormon funeral services were held for Stephen.

Taken from the *Dallas Morning News*, 17 and 19 November 1991.

Investigation into Christian Science child's death stopped

On August 21, 1990, 13-year-old John Burgett died at his home in Town and Country, Missouri, without any medical attention. His parents are Christian Scientists. Their affluent St. Louis suburb is the location of the Principia boarding and day schools for Christian Science children, which their son attended.

The cause of death was Burkitt's lymphoma. County Medical Examiner Dr. Mary Case found a tumor the size of a grapefruit, cancer cells throughout the abdomen, and a bowel obstruction. She said the boy would have been in pain for a considerable time. He was 5'6" tall and weighed about 100 pounds. She described him as "very thin" and "chronically ill appearing."

The parents admitted to the police that their son had been sick for about ten days. Paramedics were called to the home on August 21. They were met in the front yard by the father, who was carrying his son's body.

Political decision on investigation?

The death was not ruled a homicide because the success of medical treatment for the disease was problematical. Some observers, however, thought the parents could have been charged with child endangerment, a misdemeanor in Missouri, or child neglect. The latter charge, though, has a religious exemption.

County Prosecuting Attorney George Westphal was then running for the office of county executive. According to a source, he asked the police not to investigate the death until after the election.

Westphal won the election, and Robert McCulloch took over as the new St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney. CHILD Inc. spoke with various child abuse prosecutors within the office and asked if the death would be investigated under the new Prosecuting Attorney. They said they could not take action because the police had not investigated it.

Death not investigated

CHILD Inc. then called the police and asked if they were going to investigate the death now that McCulloch was the County Attorney. The police expressed an intention to investigate. Several months later, though, a police officer told us that he had contacted the county prosecutor's office and the prosecutor "did not see any point to pursuing the Burgett case" and "did not want the case pursued given the circumstances."

"I think the real culprit is the lobbying done by the Christian Science church," the officer told us. He may have been referring to the exemption statute rather than any direct approach to the prosecutor.

Besides discouraging prosecution, Missouri's religious exemption to child neglect also discouraged investigation into the welfare of the surviving sibling. The officials who dealt with the case did not contact Missouri Department of Family Services about it because of the neglect exemption. As one explained, the Department is authorized to investigate suspected child abuse and neglect, but with a religious exemption to neglect in the statutes, the Department has no basis for action.

St. Louis County has recently formed a child death review team, which is empowered to investigate deaths of children under the age of 15 that occur from 1992 forward.

Christian Science parents withdraw appeal of conviction

On September 18, 1991, Mark and Susan Rippberger withdrew their petition to the California Supreme Court for a review of their conviction on felony child endangerment.

Both lifelong Christian Scientists, they withheld medical care when their eight-month-old daughter Natalie was sick with h-flu meningitis. For two weeks they retained Christian Science practitioners to pray for her recovery. A church "nurse" recorded that the baby had many "heavy convulsions," her eyes were out of focus and "rolling or jerking upward," her tongue flopped and jerked uncontrollably, her legs were "very rigid" and could not bend at the knees, and, in the final days, that she was turning blue and not responsive. The nurse gave Natalie several baths because of her perspiration and knew she felt hot, but did not take her temperature because Christian Science theology opposes "material" evaluation of disease. Natalie died December 9, 1984, at the family's home near Santa Rosa, California.

Conviction of parents upheld

On August 4, 1989, the parents were convicted of endangerment, but acquitted of involuntary manslaughter.

On July 5, 1991, their conviction was upheld by the First District California Court of Appeals. The defendants argued that their prosecution was unconstitutional under the free exercise of religion clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The appellate court rejected the argument, citing the United States Supreme Court's famous words in *Prince v. Massachusetts*:

> The right to practice religion freely does not include liberty to expose the community or child to communicable disease, or the latter to ill health or death. . . . Parents may be free to become martyrs themselves. But it does not follow they are free, in identical circumstances, to make martyrs of their children before they have reached the age of full and legal discretion when they can make that choice for themselves.

Legislative intent raised

The defendants further argued that the California legislature intended to allow Christian Scientists to withhold lifesaving medical care from children when it granted various religious exemptions. The California Supreme Court had already dealt with the same argument in another case of a Christian Scientist letting a child die with meningitis and had concluded that the exemptions did not carry over into the manslaughter and endangerment statutes. See *Walker v. Superior Court* (1988) 47 Cal.3d 112.

The Rippbergers, however, presented the trial court with purportedly "new factual information." It consisted of declarations made in June, 1989, by former Governor Jerry Brown (now running for President), former Senate Minority Leader Dennis Carpenter, a "legislative intent expert," and a Christian Science church official, all stating that the California legislature intended to exempt Christian Scientists from criminal liability.

The appellate court rejected the validity of declarations made "some thirteen years after the subject amendment was enacted." Furthermore, said the court, "we cannot accept the proposition that the Legislature intended to carve out an exception that would permit a small segment of our society, with impunity, to endanger the lives of infants who are helpless to act on their own behalf."

Change of standard rejected

The defendants attempted to raise a subjective standard for their actions, but the appellate court ruled that the standard was one of objective reasonableness:

> A finding of criminal negligence is made by the application of the *objective* test of whether a reasonable person in the defendant's position would have been aware of the risk involved. If the trier of fact determines that, on an objective analysis, a reasonable person in that position would have been aware of the risk, then the defendant is *presumed* to have had such an awareness. [*People v. Watson* (1981) 30 Cal.3d 290, 296] Criminal negligence may be found even when a defendant acts with a sincere good faith belief that his or her actions pose no risk.

Challenge to nurse's testimony rejected

The role of Christian Science nurse Therese Miller created an interesting legal issue. She left the Christian Science church after Natalie died and was the prosecution's only witness who had seen Natalie during her illness.

The Rippbergers' attorney, David Mackenroth, himself a Christian Scientist, argued that Miller's testimony should be excluded because she was an accomplice and the testimony of an accomplice must be corroborated by other witnesses.

Trial Judge Lloyd von der Mehden ruled that Miller was not an accomplice. He found she had no duty to provide medical care outside the scope of her training and profession as a Christian Science nurse and had not aided, abetted, advised or encouraged the Rippbergers in their course of action.

On appeal Mackenroth continued to charge that Miller was an accomplice. The appellate court refused to rule on the important issue of whether Christian Science nurses (and, by implication, faith healers) are accomplices to the crimes of parents who withhold medical care. Instead, the appellate court said Miller's testimony had essentially been corroborated by the state's medical experts and therefore it did not matter whether Miller was an accomplice or not.

Deputy District Attorney David Dunn

The Rippbergers are the first Christian Science couple in California to be convicted for withholding medical care from a child. Sonoma County Deputy District Attorney David Dunn deserves great credit for his masterful handling of the case.

Press coverage unbalanced

And, we ask, where is the press now? After the conviction in 1989, the press ran lengthy, glowing feature stories about Mackenroth. The *San Francisco Banner* spoke of his "passion," which drives him to defend members of minority religions even though such practice is "less than lucrative." He was invited to appear on talk shows, and Dunn was not. He told the press the conviction would be overturned on appeal because of "technical errors committed by the prosecutor" and said his inclination was to "jam" the case "all the way up to the U. S. Supreme Court."

When the Rippbergers decided to let their conviction stand and withdrew their petition to the California Supreme Court, we did not see a word of press coverage.

Court gives father right to sue Christian Science agents

On December 3, 1991, Hennepin County District Court Judge Sean Rice denied motions for dismissal of the wrongful death action brought by Douglass Lundman whose son Ian died of diabetes melitus in suburban Minneapolis. Ian, age 11, received no medical treatment because his mother and stepfather, Kathleen and William McKown, are members of the Christian Science church.

At the time Lundman was a professor of architecture at Kansas State University in Manhattan. He called his ex-wife the night of May 8, 1989, and inquired about his son's health. McKnown assured him Ian was fine. Six hours later Ian died in a diabetic coma.

The coroner ruled the death a homicide, and the state filed manslaughter charges. The courts,

however, dismissed the charges on the grounds that state law had given Christian Science parents the right to withhold lifesaving medical care from children.

In the civil lawsuit, Doug Lundman, as trustee for the next of kin of Ian Douglass Lundman, makes personal injury claims against the McKowns, a private school that Ian attended, the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts, and the following Church agents: Christian Science practitioner Mario Tosto, Christian Science nurse Quinna Lamb Giebelhaus, James Van Horn, who manages public relations for the church in Minnesota; and Clifton House, a nursing home for Christian Scientists.

Duty in common law

The defendants argued that they had no common law duty to provide Ian with medical care. Judge Rice responded as follows:

> The test for a duty in common law is based on the probability or foreseeability of injury to the plaintiff. *Hanson v. Christensen*, 275 Minn. 204, 145 N.W.2d 868 (1966).
>
> The standard of conduct in determining negligence is an objective standard based on the conduct of a reasonably prudent person under similar circumstances. *Olson v. Duluth*, 213 Minn. 106, 114-15, 5 N.W.2d 492, 496-7 (1942). Therefore, the defendants did not have to foresee Ian's death to have a duty. Rather, if a reasonably prudent person under the circumstances would have foreseen Ian's death, defendants would have a duty.
>
> In *Regan v. Stromberg*, 285 N.W.2d 97, 100 (Minn. 1979), the Minnesota Supreme Court set forth the following standard:
>
> Where one is in charge of another, or who being under no duty to do so takes charges of another, and who knows or in the exercise of reasonable care should know that the physical or mental condition of such person is such that it is reasonably foreseeable that such person would be exposed to injury, then the person in charge must use reasonable care to prevent such exposure. Failure to do so is negligence. . . .
>
> Where a special relationship exists between two parties, a legal duty arises which requires the party who voluntarily takes custody of another to protect the other against unreasonable risk of harm. This duty exists between parents and children.

Defense claims rejected

The defendants argued that Minnesota law gave them the right to withhold medical care and therefore they could not be either civilly or criminally liable. But Judge Rice cited appellate rulings indicating that even parties who meet statutory standards may still "be negligent if there is a failure in special circumstances to take additional precautions" and that such failure was a question for the jury to determine.

He also cited eloquent words from a 1928 ruling: "The risk reasonably to be perceived defines the duty to be obeyed." *Palsgraf v. Long Island R. Co.*, 248 N.Y. 339, 344, 162 N.E. 99, 100.

Finally, the defendants argued that the civil suit violated their constitutional rights to free exercise of religion. In response, Judge Rice stated that freedom to believe is absolute, but freedom to act out religious beliefs is limited by vital state interests. He cited the Minnesota Constitution, Article I, 16, that religious liberty "shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness or justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of the state."

Lundman's suit has won its main challenge. If it goes to trial, it will be the first civil suit for the death of a Christian Science child to do so.

U. S. Supreme Court lets dismissal stand in Christian Science death

On January 13, 1992, the U. S. Supreme Court denied *certiorari* for review of state court rulings dismissing charges against Christian Scientists who let a child die of untreated diabetes.

In 1989, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office filed manslaughter charges against Kathleen and William McKown of Independence, Minnesota, in the death of Kathleen's son, Ian Lundman, age 11.

The state courts, however, dismissed the charges on due process grounds. Minnesota has

a clause in its criminal child neglect statute calling prayer "health care" that parents have a right not only to "select," but also "depend upon."

Legislative intent

It also has tape recordings of the legislators' discussion of the law. Representative David Bishop said the intention of the bill was to prevent prosecution of Christian Scientists. And only nine days before Ian died, Senator Peterson brought up the death of Christian Science child Amy Hermanson because of untreated diabetes in Florida. Peterson asked what Minnesota would do about such a situation. Senator Allen Spear, chair of Senate Judiciary, replied that the legislature did not intend for Christian Scientists to be prosecuted and went on to claim that prosecution would violate their First Amendment rights.

In dismissing the charges, the trial court cited the comments by Bishop and Spear as evidence of legislative intent. The court of appeals and state Supreme Court upheld the dismissal of charges on due process grounds. The state cannot prosecute the McKowns, the courts ruled, because the legislature enacted a statute permitting them to withhold lifesaving medical care from a child.

Press misses point: law unconstitutional

The state Supreme Court commented that the statute calling prayer health care was religious privilege in violation of the Constitution's prohibition against establishing religion, but that they were not ruling on the issue because they had made their determination about the charges on due process grounds.

One might think the court rulings would dramatize the need for statutory reform, but the press coverage has been poor. Some publications implied that the rulings upheld a First Amendment right to withhold medical care. Many newspapers claimed that Minnesota had changed its laws since Ian died. Typical was *The Boston Globe*, which stated that the statute designating prayer as health care "has since been amended to require parents who rely on spiritual healing to notify state officials before a child's condition becomes life-threatening."

The statement is absolutely untrue. Minnesota's laws are as bad today as they were when Ian died.

Taken in part from *The Boston Globe*, January 14.

Christian Science school closes

In June, 1991, Daycroft School, a Christian Science boarding and day school, in Greenwich, Connecticut, was closed permanently. The campus has been sold.

Daycroft once had more than two hundred students enrolled in its elementary and secondary programs, but enrollments declined in recent years.

1972 polio epidemic recalled

Because Christian Science theology opposes immunizations, Daycroft had one of the largest polio epidemics since the development of the Salk vaccine. CHILD honorary member Dr. Stephen Barrett writes in his book *The New Health Robbers* that the first child became ill with polio on September 29, 1972, but the cases were not reported to the Connecticut State Department of Health until October 19 and then by a local physician rather than the school.

The Health Department ordered a quarantine and mass immunizations of students and faculty.

"Eleven youngsters," Barrett says, "suffered varying degrees of paralysis. Five of them were sent home—where they could expose others to this terrible disease. The other victims were sent to the school infirmary—where, it was explained to Dr. Andrews [of the Health Department]: 'A compound fracture can be healed with 30 minutes of prayer.'

"Dr. Andrews contacted another Christian Science school, Principia, in St. Louis, to discuss the possibility of a similar epidemic. He recalls: 'They wouldn't even discuss the subject.'"

Church promotes spiritual immunization

Instead, the Christian Science church published a number of articles on "spiritual immunization." Their typical argument was that understanding Christian Science provided "ultimate immunity from all disease," that good was contagious, and disease was not. "What are called 'children's diseases' are myths of matter. No child ever thought up one of them! Receptivity to good, irrepressible joy, and buoyancy are the childlike graces derived from Spirit that cannot be reversed into diseases of matter," wrote Marianne Sharp in "Scientific Immunization," *Christian Science Journal*, April 1974: 217-8.

James Rosebush, Daycroft Headmaster at the time of the epidemic, was equally sanguine. Later serving as Nancy Reagan's personal aide, he continued to write articles for Christian Science periodicals that encouraged other parents to withhold immunizations and medical treatment from children.

Medical neglect deaths reported at Daycroft

CHILD Inc. has received reports through the years of deaths of Daycroft students. One woman told us of going to Daycroft with her high school hockey team in 1956. She saw a 13 or 14 year old girl alone in her dorm room, reading Christian Science literature, and obviously in severe pain. She thought the girl had appendicitis, but Daycroft students told her the girl had "to clear her thinking." A year later she met Daycroft students for another hockey game and asked about the sick girl. They told her the girl "left in a box" and "didn't understand Christian Science at all."

A CHILD member who graduated from Daycroft reported that her roommate died of a medically untreated illness.

Louisiana jury acquits mother in faith death

On June 15, 1991, a 6-member jury in Amite, Louisiana, found Annetta Williamson innocent of negligent homicide in her son's death.

Five-year-old Loren Don Williamson died of leukemia on June 2, 1989. A member of the Oak Grove Church of God, Mrs. Williamson prayed, fasted, and anointed her son's forehead with oil during his illness, but did not seek medical help. Her congregation also held a prayer day for the boy at the church the week before his death.

Her recorded statement was played in court. "I have lived all my life trusting the Lord in times of sickness," she said. "This has been our way of life."

She said the child had discolored bruises and occasionally vomited. She observed that his gums were bleeding, his glands were enlarged, he was pale and tired and had a lump under his arm. However, she said he did not miss any school and did not appear to be gravely ill until hours before his death.

"I expected God to heal him, but there at the last it became apparent that God had other plans," she said.

She never considered taking him to a doctor

"Did you ever consider actually taking him to a doctor?" a sheriff's deputy asked.

"I never made any considerations to take him to the doctor," she replied.

She showed little emotion as the tape was played. A few months earlier she said on *Oprah Winfrey* that she had no regrets about what she had done.

Death could have been easily averted

Dr. Sheila Moore of the Louisiana State University School of Medicine testified that Loren's type of leukemia has a 90% cure rate. She said the symptoms include leg pains, anemia, spontaneous bleeding from the gums, blotches, and bruises. The latter are caused by explosion of blood vessels. Neighbors reported seeing bruises on the boy's body for several weeks before his death. The Tangipahoa Parish coroner testified that the boy looked "incredibly thin" and had numerous bruises.

Assistant District Attorney Jimmy Dukes told the jury the boy died a "painful and debilitative death" that could have easily been prevented.

Defense attorney Michael Thiel argued that the state could not guarantee the success of

medical treatment for the disease. He claimed that no observer thought the boy was seriously ill.

Thiel said the Church of God has some 50 to 60 congregations worldwide. "This isn't a cult of a handful of people," he said. "Their beliefs have remained constant for centuries."

The only defense witness, Rev. Ed Wilson, said seeking medical help damages the believer's walk with Christ. Taking Loren to a doctor would have been "a violent injustice" to Williamson's conscience and the wedding vows she made to her husband, he said. Loren was a fifth-generation member of the church and "all of his ancestors died the same way [without medical help]," Wilson testified.

Although church members began praying for Loren on May 14 and increased their prayers and fasting as he grew sicker, Wilson said he thought the child had the flu and was not seriously ill.

Care allowed in inexplicable cases

The only medical help acceptable in church doctrine, Wilson testified, was dental care, eyeglasses, stitching of wounds, and setting of broken bones.

Prosecutor James Dukes said he could not understand how the church allows Novocaine to deaden pain but not antibiotics to fight infection.

"I can't explain it so you can understand it," Wilson replied. He insisted that his church had "a superior way of healing" with "a better success rate" and the state was trying "to force something inferior" upon them.

Exemption laws critical

Louisiana's religious exemption laws were a central issue. In 1982, Frederick and Docia Ford, members of the Faith Temple Doctoral Church of God in Christ, were convicted of negligent homicide in Minden, Louisiana, for withholding medical care from their granddaughter Endrika when she had meningitis. Louisiana then had a religious exemption in its civil code, but not the criminal code.

Alarmed by the possibility of prosecution, the Christian Science church went to work on the legislature. In 1985, Louisiana passed a religious exemption to the cruelty to juveniles charge:

> The providing of treatment by a parent or tutor in accordance with the tenets of a well-recognized religious method of healing, in lieu of medical treatment, shall not for that reason alone be considered to be criminally negligent mistreatment or neglect of a child. The provisions of this Subsection shall be an affirmative defense to a prosecution under this Section. R.S. 14:93b

To obtain a conviction for negligent homicide, the prosecutor had to prove that cruelty to a juvenile had occurred.

In 1987 the Christian Science church joined with other denominations to get an exemption from reporting for "communications between an attorney and his client or any confession or other sacred communication between a priest, rabbi, duly ordained minister, or Christian Science practitioner and his communicant."

The same bill also provided in the civil code:

> Whenever, in lieu of medical care, a child is being provided treatment in accordance with the tenets of a well-recognized religious method of healing which has a reasonable proven record of success, the child shall not for that reason alone be considered to be neglected or abused. R.S. 14:403(5)

Louisiana thereby became the first state in the country to make an exemption contingent on the healing record of prayer. Texas and Colorado have since adopted exemptions with similar language.

In another section entitled "Preserving the Life of Children" is yet another exemption:

> No child who is being provided treatment in accordance with the tenets of a well-recognized religious method of healing in lieu of medical treatment shall for that reason alone be considered to be neglected under the provisions of this Part, unless the life of the child is substantially and seriously threatened due to the lack of traditional medical care. R.S. 40:1299.36.1e

Legislative intent considered

The defense called former state Senator Vincent Bella, Baton Rouge, and Christian Science Committee on Publications David Smith to testify about the legislature's intent with its penal code exemption. Outside the presence of the jury, Bella said, "The purpose of this law was to let Christian Scientists practice their religion."

"Was a further purpose of this law to let

children die?" Dukes asked.

Bella said it was not, but also insisted that the legislature intended to give parents "every opportunity" to practice religious healing and to prevent them from being prosecuted.

Smith and Bella testified that the limitations on the exemption in RS40:1299.36.1e did not apply to the criminal code. Smith said he himself wrote the criminal code exemption to prevent prosecutions.

Judge Bruce Bennett refused to let them testify before the jury. "I'm not convinced after hearing the testimony of a paid lobbyist and a misguided barber," he said. "I believe when a child's life is in danger, a parent can't hide behind a mask of religion."

Nevertheless, both the juvenile and penal code exemptions were given to the jury, which unanimously voted Annetta Williamson not guilty after three hours of deliberations.

She was previously tried for negligent homicide in November, 1990, when the jury deadlocked 5-1 for conviction.

Belief in faith healing strengthened

After her acquittal, she told the press that the ordeal had strengthened her belief in faith healing. Wilson said that he was ready to preach a great sermon on Sunday and that the congregation would continue to practice faith healing.

Dukes later said the presence of the religious exemption was the main reason for the jury's decision. CHILD had urged the district attorney's office to file pretrial motions arguing that the penal code exemption was not a defense to the charge. We pointed to the famous phrase "for that reason alone," which courts in other states have construed so as to preserve a parental duty to care for the child. The district attorney, however, accepted the view that the exemption was a defense to negligent homicide, but should be considered in conjunction with the civil code.

The district attorney's office hoped that trying the case twice would at least motivate the legislators to clarify the laws, but that has not happened either.

Taken in part from the *Hammond Daily Star*, 12, 13, 14, and 15 June 1991, and *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 15 June 1991.

Arkansas adds religious exemption to capital murder

In 1991 Arkansas added a new definition of capital murder and a religious exemption to the crime. Senate Bill 452, now Act 683, adds the following subsection to the definition of capital murder in Arkansas Code Annotated 5-10-101(a):

> Under circumstances manifesting extreme indifference to the value of human life, he knowingly causes the death of a person fourteen (14) years of age or younger at the time the murder was committed provided that the defendant was eighteen (18) years of age or older at the time the murder was committed. It shall be an affirmative defense to any prosecution under this Subsection (9) arising from the failure of the parent, guardian, or person standing in loco parentis to provide specified medical or surgical treatment, that the parent, guardian, or person standing in loco parentis relied solely on spiritual treatment through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of an established church or religious denomination of which he is a member.

Who needs a religious exemption to murder?

CHILD Inc. learned of this new law about eight months after its passage. We then wrote the six bill sponsors asking their reasons for supporting an exemption, but received no answer. We also wrote Governor Bill Clinton, who signed the bill into law after many deaths have been nationally publicized. Clinton is now running for President.

As always, we wonder if legislators cared. Why do Christian Scientists need a religious defense to capital murder? And why do legislators give them one?

Death of Arkansas child

On October 4, 1983, Christian Science girl Susan Fruland, 15, died of a kidney infection in Rogers, Arkansas, with no medical attention. Her parents, Richard and Betty Fruland, retained a Christian Science practitioner to pray for her recovery for 2⅓ weeks. She missed a week of school.

Dr. Bill Weil, a pediatric nephrologist and professor at Michigan State University, said that the "chronic pyelonephritis" listed as the cause of

death on her death certificate "refers to chronic disease of the kidney secondary to recurrent urinary tract infections."

He also said that children with chronic kidney disease who "die of kidney failure represent totally unnecessary deaths because of kidney dialysis and transplantation." He continued:

> These children are all symptomatic, long before they die. Pain is not a common symptom; however, anemia with pallor, weakness, loss of appetite, delayed growth (in a 15-year-old girl, sexual development would usually have been quite delayed), yellowish discoloration of the skin, [and] uremic smell to the breath would have been apparent for quite a number of months. These children also have polyuria (a large urine volume) and polydipsia (excessive thirst with a large intake of fluids), and rapid respirations associated with severe acidosis. Thus, it would be almost impossible for such a child to be asymptomatic prior to death. In the last few days prior to death, the child would be increasingly sleepy and would be in a coma or near-coma prior to death.

The parents, however, claimed they "had no reason to believe Susan was seriously ill."

"I can't have any remorse," Betty Fruland said. "She had made such beautiful prayers. She said God was taking care of her."

We doubt the Arkansas legislature has any remorse either.

Taken in part from *The Benton County Daily Democrat*, October 7, 1983.

Exemptions to autopsies sought

In 1990 an interim committee of the Kansas legislature drafted a bill to reform child death review procedures, which included a religious exemption added at the request of the Christian Science church. It stated:

> An investigation or autopsy shall not be required in any case where death occurs without the attendance of a licensed physician solely because the deceased was under treatment by spiritual means through prayer alone in accordance with a recognized religious method of healing permitted under the laws of this state. . . .
>
> A child who is furnished with spiritual treatment solely through prayer in accordance with a recognized religious method of healing permitted under the laws of this state in lieu of medical treatment shall not for this reason alone be considered to be abused or neglected.

Dr. Bill Bartholome

This bill became Senate bill 477 and was head in Senate Judiciary February 4. CHILD member Dr. Bill Bartholome, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Kansas University Medical Center, took the day off from his teaching duties to drive to Topeka and testify against the exemptions. He wrote vigorous protest letters to legislators. CHILD member Marian Kendall, a retired teacher in Ozawkie, Kansas, also made many calls to legislators and wrote letters.

Marian Kendall

We have been assured that the bill will die in committee.

Church Manual requires autopsies

The Christian Science church does not even have doctrinal grounds for an exemption from autopsies, let alone ethical grounds. Indeed, Mary Baker Eddy, the church founder, required autopsies in certain situations. In Article 9, section 2, of her *Manual*, which remains the church's governing document, Eddy directed: "If a member of The Mother Church shall decease suddenly, without previous injury or illness, and the cause thereof be unknown, an autopsy shall be made by qualified experts. When it is possible the body of a female shall be prepared for burial by *one of her own sex*. (emphasis in the original)

In the 1881 edition of the church textbook, *Science and Health*, Eddy had written: "A metaphysician never gives medicine, recommends or trusts in hygiene, or believes in the ocular or the post-mortem examination of patients." But in 1882 her third husband, Asa Gilbert Eddy, died. Mrs. Eddy was convinced that his illness was caused by arsenic poison mentally administered by malicious animal magnetism emanating from a hostile former student. Breaking her own rules, she summoned medical doctor Rufus Noyes to Asa's bedside. Noyes diagnosed his problem as heart disease.

Determined to prove Noyes wrong, Mrs. Eddy requested that he autopsy her husband's body. Noyes showed her Asa's heart and the defective tissues that had caused his death.

Second autopsy made

Still Eddy refused to accept the diagnosis of heart disease. She asked for a second autopsy from "Doctor" Eastman, a director of her own Massachusetts Metaphys cal College. Eastman had no recognized medical degree. His private practice dealt largely in abortions. He had already been indicted at least once when Mrs. Eddy made him a director, and in 1893 he went to prison for five years.

She wrote a thousand-word letter to *The Boston Post* vindicating her control of her system of healing. Among other things she said:

> My husband's death was caused by malicious mesmerism. Dr. C. J. Eastman, who attended the case after it had taken an alarming turn, declares the symptoms to be the same as those of arsenical poisoning. . . . I know it was poison that killed him, not material poison, but mesmeric poison. My husband was in uniform health, but seldom complained of any kind of ailment. During his brief illness, just preceding his death, his continual cry was, "Only relieve me of this continual suggestion, through the mind, of poison, and I will recover. . . ."

Healed self but not husband

> There was such a case in New York. Every one at first declared poison to have been the cause of death, as the symptoms were all there; but an autopsy contradicted the belief, and it was shown that the victim had no opportunity for procuring poison. I afterwards learned that she had been very active in advocating the merits of our college. Oh, isn't it terrible, that this fiend of malpractice is in the land. . . ! Circumstances barred me taking hold of my husband's case. He declared himself perfectly capable of carrying himself through, and I was so entirely absorbed in business that I permitted him to try, and when I awakened to the danger it was too late. . . . Today I sent for one of the students whom my husband had helped liberally, and given some money, not knowing how unworthy he was. I wished him to come, that I might prove to him how, by metaphysics, I could show the cause of my husband's death. He was as pale as a ghost when he came to the door. . . . Within half an hour after he left I felt the same attack that my husband felt—the same that caused his death. I instantly gave myself the same treatment that I would use in a case of arsenical poison, and so I recovered, just the same as I could have caused my husband to recover had I taken the case in time. After a certain amount of mesmeric poison has been administered it cannot be averted. No power of mind can resist it. . . .

Eddy's stubborn and delusional self-righteousness about her third husband's death is the most likely explanation for her taking the prohibition against autopsies out of *Science and Health* and inserting a requirement that autopsies be performed in her governing *Manual*.

Watch for similar proposals

Child death review procedures are a focus of much public attention, sparked by last year's Pulitzer prize winning series in the Gannett papers. We expect considerable legislative

activity in this area. We would appreciate CHILD members watching for death review bills that may be introduced in other states and alerting us to them.

The information about Mary Baker Eddy is taken from Edwin Dakin's *Mary Baker Eddy: the Biography of a Virginal Mind*.

Michigan physician fights Christian Science exemptions and third-party payments

For several years Dr. Francis Horvath, an internist in Lansing, Michigan, and also a CHILD member, has led a fight to end religious exemptions from child health care laws and third-party payments to Christian Science practitioners and nurses.

In November, 1990, the American Society of Internal Medicine adopted a resolution calling upon the Internal Revenue Service to stop categorizing bills sent for prayers of Christian Science practitioners as tax-deductible medical expenses. The resolution also calls upon public and private insurers to stop reimbursing such bills.

In December, 1990, the American Medical Association adopted a similar resolution.

Thomas Black, Christian Science Committee on Publication for Michigan, said a growing number of insurance companies pay claims for care by Christian Science practitioners because it works, and Christian Scientists have been found to be good health risks.

A spokeswoman for the IRS in Michigan said it was highly unlikely the IRS would reverse its 1943 ruling which designates their prayers as medical expenses.

Are reimbursements for prayers constitutional?

State Representative Ilone Varga has worked with Horvath on several legislative initiatives. She asked Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelley for a ruling on whether the state's reimbursements for prayers by Christian Scientists through group health plans for public employees are constitutional.

Kelley issued a ruling, but could not decide whether they were constitutional or not because, he said, there were no court cases to guide him.

Varga and several other legislators then sponsored House resolutions calling upon the Department of Civil Service to take steps to prohibit the reimbursement of services rendered by Christian Science practitioners under the State Health Plan. The resolutions have been referred to the House Committee on Public Health.

Bills proposed to protect children

Varga has also introduced three bills to enhance protection for children associated with faith healing sects. One would repeal Michigan's religious exemption from child abuse and neglect charges. Another would make it a crime for a spiritual healer to advise a parent that a child does not need medical care if the lack of medical care could cause physical or mental harm. The third would end the religious exemption to the health licensing code for a spiritual healer who makes a false claim about possible healing or advises or persuades a parent against providing medical care for a child.

Dr. Bill Weil, Professor of Pediatrics at Michigan State University and a CHILD member, has worked with Horvath to win endorsements from many groups for these legislative efforts. Weil also wrote a column, "When Religion Hurts our Children," which appeared in *The Detroit News* on December 27, 1990.

The Flint, Michigan, newspaper recently ran an editorial supporting Varga's resolution, which is reprinted below. Also, the state of Massachusetts recently cancelled its reimbursements for Christian Science prayers and care by unlicensed church nurses that had been paid to public employees through their group health insurance.

Taken in part from the *Lansing State Journal*, 10 June 1991, and *Detroit News*, 12 June 1991.

No faith in licensing, liability

State Rep. Ilona Varga's resolution that would discontinue reimbursement of faith healing fees as a medical benefit for state workers of any denomination should be supported.

We are perplexed by the idea of placing a fee on faith and question how one determines a pay scale for prayers. That aside, we have other concerns.

Unlike medical and osteopathic doctors who undergo years of rigorous schooling and training before becoming licensed by the state, faith healers are not licensed and their training is from the "school of everyday experience and practical results from prayer," according to J. Thomas Black, a spokesman for the Church of Christ, Scientist in Michigan.

The state's health insurance plan currently considers Christian Science practitioners as physicians if they are listed in the current issue of *The Christian Science Journal*.

To be listed in the journal, practitioners must be approved by the church, go through two weeks of instruction and exhibit healing ability to church officials.

Black argues that the call to eliminate faith healing benefits raises the question of whether society will have a single system of care rather than a single standard of care.

We maintain, however, that faith healing does not meet the same standard of care as orthodox medicine.

In addition to not being licensed by the state, faith healers are free from liability under the state's public health code. No other health-care providers are exempt.

Three bills under consideration would make a faith healer liable for injury to a child denied medical care on his or her advice.

And while we unde stand Black's concern that a one-size shoe doesn't fit everyone, we would remind him that the call to drop coverage of faith healing is not tantamount to banning the practice.

For example, many health insurance plans do not cover chiropractic care, eye care, acupuncture. Some omit or only partially cover mental health treatment. And these are performed by state-licensed professionals.

Considering that Black says an average session runs $5 to $15 per treatment, the cost is hardly prohibitive. In fact, it's little more than what many people shoulder as an insurance co-payment.

We think it is only fair that faith healing be held to the same standards as orthodox medical care. Until it is regulated through licensing and liability, it should not be a covered medical expense.

Reprinted with permission from *The Flint Journal*, January 30, 1992

ACLU sets policy on withholding care

In June, 1991, at its biennial convention in Burlington, Vermont, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released Policy #271a entitled "The Right to have Medical Treatment Withheld or Withdrawn." The basic thrust of the statement dealt with when treatment, nutrition, hydration, and technological support may be withdrawn from competent and incompetent persons.

Of interest to CHILD Inc. is footnote 2:

> Nothing in this policy should be construed to suggest that parents or guardians can make medical decisions which are contrary to the wishes or best interests of minors. In particular the religious or other beliefs of parents or guardians cannot be permitted to result in treatment or lack of treatment which causes significant harm to the child.

This ACLU policy is consistent with comments made by Marcia Robinson Lowry, Director of the ACLU Children's Rights Project, on the *Donahue* television program May 17, 1988. "There cannot be in our view," she said, "a religious exemption no matter how sincere a parent's belief and whether it's based on religion, or that the stars told me today." She called upon the public to lobby against religious exemptions from parental duties of care.

In July, 1991, the National District Attorneys

Association also called for the repeal of these exemptions. (See the CHILD Inc. newsletter, 1991, #2.)

With both prosecutors and the ACLU against these exemptions, we wonder why legislators are so reluctant to remove them?

Wisconsin parents win right to refuse cancer treatment

In August, 1991, Fond du Lac County Circuit Judge Henry Buslee dismissed charges that would have required Carol and Roy Derksen of Brandon, Wisconsin, to bring their son Luke to the University of Wisconsin Hospital for medical treatment.

In the spring, Luke, age 10, was diagnosed with bone cancer. His parents refused consent for standard treatment recommendations of amputation and chemotherapy. Fond du Lac District Attorney Tom Storm filed a Child in need of Protective Services (CHIPS) petition asking the court to order medical care for their child. Fond du Lac County Circuit Judge Henry Buslee granted the order.

Carol Derksen, eight months pregnant with their seventh child, fled to Mexico with Luke. There he received "ozone treatment." Later they apparently went to Michigan for treatment with a substance called Cancell. Both treatments are dismissed by the federal government and the medical community as worthless.

Storm then filed contempt of court and criminal child abuse charges against the parents. Roy spent 12 days in jail.

CHIPS petition withdrawn

In August, however, Judge Buslee dismissed both charges and the CHIPS petition. Buslee said there was no legal basis for court intervention because of the parents's sincere concern for the child's welfare, even though he had earlier granted the CHIPS petition. Storm had retained expert witnesses to testify about the boy's prognosis with medical treatment and the lack of curative value with the treatments substituted by the parents. However, Buslee did not allow argument on those issues.

The Derksens did not raise a religious objection to medical treatment. Roy did identify himself as a conservative Christian who gave "glory to God for a victory" when the ruling was handed down. He also felt God led the family to the Cancell treatment. "We prayed to God, 'If there is a different way, show us,'" he said. Then the phone rang and his mother-in-law told him about Cancell, he reported.

He told the press that his son was doing well with Cancell and dietary treatment. "I have received information that he does not have pain now, and that there are signs that the cancer is being flushed from his body," he said. Such signs included "foamy urine" and a "stringy stool," according to Derksen.

Treatment labeled quackery

John Renner, a Kansas City physician affiliated with the National Council Against Health Fraud, called Cancell "out-and-out quackery." Its main ingredients are sulfuric acid and nitric acid.

Cancell was formulated by James Sheridan of Roseville, Michigan, and is dispensed by Edward Sopcek of Howell, Michigan. The government has barred Sopcek's clinic from selling the drug, but nothing prevents him from giving it away or prevents patients from making donations.

The Derksens were represented by lawyers from The Rutherford Institute, a conservative, non-profit group formed nine years ago to specialize in "the defense of religious freedom, the sanctity of human life, and family autonomy."

According to a source, the boy's condition quickly deteriorated after Buslee's ruling. His leg became very swollen, the parents returned to licensed medical care, and the boy's leg was amputated at the hip, much more extensive surgery than would have been needed at the time of diagnosis, the source said.

Taken in part from *The Milwaukee Journal*, 11 August 1991.

Book warns against clergy who discourage medication

A recent book entitled *Holding God Hostage* by Stan Schmidt and Tom Watson Jr. discusses injuries caused by clergy and other church leaders who discourage use of medicine. Published by Wolgemuth & Hyatt of Brentwood, Tennessee, the 1991 book tells about Schmidt's experiences as a diagnosed manic depressive.

In 1976 a psychiatrist placed him on lithium and his illness was stabilized for 10 years. Then he began attending a charismatic church where the preacher and several church members encouraged him to decrease and then stop his medication as a test of his faith in God.

The preacher took Schmidt to his house and showed him a "demon chart," illustrating how demons were responsible for his actions.

Reality vs. miracle

Schmidt was fine for almost nine months. He testified to a spiritual healing before the congregation, which believed a miracle had occurred. But Schmidt's chemical imbalance caught up with him, his mood swings returned, and he became suicidal.

Schmidt visited several faith healers across the nation, but none helped. At Oral Roberts' City of Faith, a now-defunct hospital in Oklahoma, he was put on lithium and Klonopin, which stabilized him again. Now he is taking his pills, keeping faith, and looking for a new church.

Scared off their medicine

"People are being scared off their medication like that all the time," said Peter Ross, executive director of the National Foundation for Depressive Illness in New York.

Calling himself a victim of "presumptuous faith," Schmidt says, "Sometimes we deny the miracle of healing [God] provides through medicine. That presumption almost cost me my life. . . . God doesn't want us to die of ignorance. Until a miracle comes, take your medicine."

Taken from *The Ledger* in Lakeland, Florida, July 27, 1991.

New twist on electronic church scandals

by Scott K. Sokol, M. D.

The news broke across the wire services like a thunderbolt. Scandal, the headlines proclaimed. Charges included misuse of pension funds, incipient bankruptcy, internal conflicts at the highest levels of management, failed media ventures, the possible financial collapse of the organization. What corporation, you ask, could now be in such trouble? IBM, General Motors, ATT? No, the answer is the Christian Science Church.

The facts of this latest scandal in the religious sector give one pause. The Mother Church's self-righteous condemnations of its critics pale in comparison to the behind the scenes shenanigans that threaten the very foundations of Christian Science. With this scandal, religion in the modern age once again has gone beyond the relative simplicity of Elmer Gantry-type misadventures.

Even the recent scandals that shook the foundations of media-based evangelical churches become less important. If a starry-eyed viewer responds to a TV preacher's call for donations, the only place it usually hurts is in the pocketbook.

As regular readers of this newsletter know, however, the viability of the Christian Science Church threatens not only the pocketbooks of the faithful, but the health and welfare of their children as well. Perhaps this new salvo at the Mother Church will open the eyes of many of the faithful and remove them and their children from harm's way. For once, we can all hope for continued publicity of this sordid scandal. Caveat Emptor indeed!

Sokol is a pediatrician in Floral Park, New York. He serves on the CHILD Inc. board of directors and writes regularly for the newsletter. We will carry more news of the turmoil at Christian Science headquarters in our next issue.