

A PREZ RELEASE from AGTS

Monthly commentary from the President of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

"I'm Sorry"...May Not Be Enough!

June 2003

William J. Bennett has been a favorite political figure of mine. As a writer, thinker, politician, he's just plain brilliant. I like public figures who actually have something between their ears that makes it out of their mouths. His Book of Virtues is a wonderful example of "wisdom literature" with moral fiber.

The recent admission by Bennett that he has been involved in legal gambling as a way to relax has brought out the naysayers big time. It seems as if Bennett's habit went far beyond an occasional roll of nickels in a slot machine while changing planes in Las Vegas. Some sources are saying his losses could be around \$8 million dollars. Left-leaning op-ed writers and political pundits are really hooting on this one. The "virtue czar" admits to a "questionable activity" thus nullifying his moral authority: that's big headlines and the stuff of which political "hay" is made. It's the sort of "tit for tat" game that is the reality regardless of where you place your mark on the political continuum.

The crux of this controversy cannot be contained in a discussion about gambling, illegal or legal. What is at stake here is a public figure, who is perceived to champion moral uprightness and who has publicly castigated the political and moral faux paux of the Clintons, now being evaluated by the same "high road" expectations that he has championed. Bennett's moral authority has taken a big-time hit. What has occurred is that his actions have cast a shadow on the moral foundations he has defended. His public platform has given him opportunity to achieve a level of influence that requires meticulous attention to practicing what you preach.

I am saddened by the admission of Bill Bennett. He remains no less articulate a voice for "virtue." However, his voice has been clearly muffled. This public figure, whose life and work have been so positive and spoken so clearly of the moral fiber of the Judeo-Christian tradition, now is struggling to extract himself from the mire of being viewed as just another one of those hypocritical voices for morality and traditional values. It reminds me, through the obvious pain Bill Bennett is presently experiencing, how crucial Christian leadership is today. The expectations are high and justifiably so, the consequence of slipping are monumental. I'm frankly humbled as I look at the huge price Bennett is paying and, in turn, the shadows being cast on Christianity and Jesus Himself.

The picture offered us in Hebrews 12:1-3 states the reality of what it takes to achieve and maintain moral authenticity. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:1-3 NIV)

To think that saying, "I'm sorry" followed by extreme caution, increased vigilance and other human attempts at "excellence" are our only weapons in this battle for moral authority would be truly tragic. The author-perfecter and sustainer of our faith is Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, His Life can be lived out through us and the simple fact is, that's the only hope of Christian leadership who wish to be examples of moral and spiritual authority.

Byron D. Klaus, President Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

Did you miss our latest Leadership Roundtable in Carlinville, Illinois? You will have another chance to hear Leonard Sweet at General Council 2003. Make plans to attend the "Ministry on the Edge: The Mission to Post-Christian America" on July 28 (6-9 p.m.) and July 29 (9 a.m. - 3 p.m.). Dr. Sweet, author of *Soul Tsunami* and *Carpe Manana*, will focus on developing and sustaining ministry for the changing culture for the new century. Graduate credit available. For further information or to register, call Randy Walls at 800-467-2487, ext 1044 or visit www.agseminary.edu Are you an alumnus/nae of AGTS? Join us for our alumni reception at General Council 2003-August 2 at 9:00 p.m. in Room 151B of the Washington Convention Center.