

THE COURAGE OF ONE'S
CONVICTIONS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 29, 1999

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I want to call my colleagues' attention to the incisive commentary on the moral and religious dimensions of the horrific tragedy in Littleton, Colorado by Charles W. Colson, who many believe is one of the greatest Christian leaders in the world.

The senseless killings at the Columbine High School are a direct challenge to human decency and powerfully underscore the consequences that can occur when the value of human life is eroded by our society and culture.

Below is the full text of Mr. Colson's analysis of the killings, with a special emphasis on the heroism and courage of Cassie Bernall, who was gunned down, point blank, for merely professing her faith in God publicly.

[BreakPoint Commentary, Apr. 26, 1999]

LITTLETON'S MARTYRS

(By Charles W. Colson)

It was a test all of us would hope to pass, but none of us really wants to take. A masked gunman points his weapon at a Christian and asks, "Do you believe in God?" She knows that if she says "yes," she'll pay with her life. But unfaithfulness to her Lord is unthinkable.

So, with what would be her last words, she calmly answers "yes, I believe in God."

What makes this story remarkable is that the gunman was no communist thug, nor was the martyr a Chinese pastor. As you may have guessed, the event I'm describing took place last Tuesday in Littleton, Colorado.

As the Washington Post reported, the two students who shot 13 people, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, did not choose their victims at random—they were acting out of a kaleidoscope of ugly prejudices.

Media coverage has centered on the killers' hostility toward racial minorities and athletes, but there was another group the pair hated every bit as much, if not more: Christians. And, there were plenty of them to hate at Columbine High School. According to some accounts eight Christians—four Evangelicals and four Catholics—were killed.

Among them was Cassie Bernall. And it was Cassie who made the dramatic decision I've just described—fitting for a person whose favorite movie was "Braveheart," in which the hero dies a martyr's death.

Cassie was a 17-year-old junior with long blond hair, hair she wanted to cut off and have made into wigs for cancer patients who had lost their hair through chemotherapy. She was active in her youth group at Westpool's Community Church and was known for carrying a Bible to school.

Cassie was in the school library reading her Bible when the two young killers burst in. According to witnesses, one of the killers pointed his gun at Cassie and asked, "do you believe in God?" Cassie paused and then answered, "Yes, I believe in God." "Why?" the gunman asked. Cassie did not have a chance to respond; the gunman had already shot her dead.

As her classmate Mickie Cain told Larry King on CNN, "She completely stood up for God. When the killers asked her if there was anyone who had faith in Christ, she spoke up and they shot her for it."

Cassie's martyrdom was even more remarkable when you consider that just a few years ago she had dabbled in the occult, including witchcraft. She had embraced the same darkness and nihilism that drove her killers to such despicable acts. But two years ago, Cassie dedicated her life to Christ, and turned her life around. Her friend, Craig Moon, called her a "light for Christ."

Well, this "light for Christ" became a rare American martyr of the 20th Century. According to the Boston Globe, on the night of her death, Cassie's brother Chris found a poem Cassie had written just two days prior to her death. It read:

Now I have given up on everything else
I have found it to be the only way
To really know Christ and to experience
The mighty power that brought
Him back to life again, and to find
Out what it means to suffer and to
Die with him. So, whatever it takes
I will be one who lives in the fresh
Newness of life of those who are
Alive from the dead.

The best way all of us can honor Cassie's memory is to embrace that same courageous commitment to our faith. For example, we should stand up to our kids when they want to play violent video games. We should be willing to stand up to community ridicule when we oppose access to Internet pornography at the local library.

For the families of these young martyrs, I can only offer deep personal sympathy and the hope that they might take strength from the words Jesus spoke to the woman who honored Him by pouring ointment on His head. "Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Matthew 26:13).

"Well done, good and faithful servant. Now enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:23).

CLEVELAND CATHOLIC BLIND
COMMUNITY'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 29, 1999

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Cleveland Catholic Blind Community for 50 years of providing support to the city's blind residents.

The Catholic Blind Community, an organization for blind and partially sighted Catholics, was founded in 1949 by Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Hoffman. Because Mr. Hoffman himself was blind and his wife was partially sighted, they clearly understood the needs and challenges faced by the visually impaired. According to Mr. Green, the first president of the Catholic Blind Community, the group represented an effort "to bring blind people into the Church and bring the Church closer to the blind." This mission was achieved with help from members of the St. Vincent de Paul society.

By the mid-1970s, the organization had grown significantly in size and began meeting

regularly at the St. Augustine Parish. The Catholic Blind Community soon joined in partnership with the parish and began working with the hunger center, the Deaf Community, and support groups established at the parish for those suffering from mental disabilities and illnesses. The blind quickly became integral members in the parish by singing in the choir, serving as lectors and Eucharistic ministers, serving on the parish council and planning parish activities.

In 1994 the Catholic Blind Community organized the Catholic Blind Association, a voluntary association that is Catholic in character but welcomes members of all faiths. This additional group was organized to provide greater service to the Blind Community. The Blind Community now boasts a membership of 225 blind individuals.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend Mr. Jim Green, the organization's first president who served for nine years and is honored by the group for his 50 years of volunteerism and leadership by voting him president in this anniversary year.

Through its dedicated efforts, the group has worked to improve the quality of life for the blind. On behalf of all those whose lives have been affected by the group, I offer my congratulations to the Cleveland Catholic Blind Community for 50 years of service.

TRIBUTE TO EDWARD BOELE

HON. GEORGE RADANOVICH

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 29, 1999

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Ed Boele for his dedicated loyalty to Electric Motor Shop for 53 years. Mr. Boele started working at the Electric Motor Shop on New Year's Day in 1946, and has been employed ever since.

Ed Boele is as enthusiastic today as he was on his first day back in 1946. Electric Motor Shop has been in Fresno since 1913. The need for electric motors flourished in Fresno and the San Joaquin Valley due to the agriculture. Ed Boele hasn't quite figured out what to call himself, he isn't an electrical technician, but he serves a vital purpose at the shop. Customer service is a large part of Boele's daily routine. He also purchases many of the electrical motors for the shop.

When Ed started, he didn't know a nut from a bolt, his knowledge of electrical motors comes from years of working at the shop, and he says he's not done learning. Ed never considered quitting his work at the shop and told Frank that he would give him a years notice when he was ready to retire. In January 1998, at the age of 68, Ed finally gave Frank his years notice.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Ed Boele on his retirement from Electric Motor Shop. Mr. Boele has been a dedicated employee from the first day he started. I urge my colleagues to join me in wishing Ed Boele happiness in his retirement.