

**Some Notions
On
The Theological Implications
Of
Enlightened Litter Abatement
And Recycling Programs**

Robert S. Horton
Clean Houston
1981

Amended by Robert S. Horton, MS
Keep Irving Beautiful
2003

Foreword

The creation of "Some Notions on The Theological Implications of Enlightened Litter Abatement and Recycling Programs" would not have been possible had it not been for the singular genius of Richard N. Bolles, Director of the National Career Development Project of the United Ministries in Higher. I extend both the fullest of credit to Richard for his contribution to my processing and my fullest apologies for any exception he may have with my translation of his thoughts and ideas.

Throughout my involvement in the CCS Process/KAB System, it has been my steady purpose to go beyond the daily implementation and management of the program to: a) expand peoples' awareness of the program's very existence, b) seek simpler, deeper descriptions of the program as it is and c) be an active participant in the evolvement of the CCS/KABS into what it can and it will be. More than anything else, this paper is written and shared with that three-part purpose in mind.

***NOTE:** The "CCS" as referred to throughout this paper is the "Clean Community System" of Keep America Beautiful. The CCS was rolled out nationally in 1975 as "the nation's first systematic, behavior focused approach to improving community waste handling practices (on a sustainable basis)." The CCS was renamed "The Keep America Beautiful System" or "KABS" in the late 1980's.*

Introduction

This paper is intended to be an initial step in addressing an issue which has been of great interest to the writer and, hopefully, to suggest some perspectives on the near-religious fervor with which some support the Keep America Beautiful "Clean Community System Movement" and the underlying commonalities between the CCS Process/KAB System or program and selected elements of "Christian" theology.

The audience this paper attempts to appeal to and interest falls into a number of parts, without reference to whether an individual gives a great deal of time to the CCS/KABS or just a bit or whether the individual is rewarded in cash, the satisfaction of involvement and affiliation or simply in "working for the common weal". It audaciously attempts to provide some points of interest for the following:

1. Those "assigned" to work with or within the CCS/KABS simply as an outgrowth of their jobs, their elected office within a civic club, etc., who might gain from finding an underlying attraction to personal values that, when served, can offset the rather boring nature of serving corporate or other organizations goals "just because."
2. Those who understand that, surely, there must be some better way to involve interfaith groups than simply asking them to "clean up, recycle on *K.A.B.* Day and keep their garbage cans shut".
3. Those who want to explore what avenues national religious organizations and local, individual religious groups might take that would lead them to be more interested in and involved in the CCS/KABS Movement.
4. Those who want to know better what are the particular contributions that Christianity, generally, has to make to the CCS, i.e., litter abatement and recycling.
5. Those who hold religious beliefs, and are somehow involved with the CCS, and want some guidance in seeing how their faith relates to their program activities.
6. Those who do not necessarily hold any particular religious beliefs, but are concerned about fully communicating with and understanding those who do and with whom they interact on a regular basis.
7. Those who sense or believe that the essence of the successful implementation of CCS/KABS programs relies most heavily, in each case, on the program's ability to be comprehensive in its communications. That is, its ability to define and dialog with a multitude of "senses of community and community pride" within any given neighborhood, city, county, state..."community": In another way, this means that the CCS/KABS program must be committed to understanding "other languages" and "other thought worlds" of people, understanding that theology is one of those important "other languages". In this paper, the primary reference is to Christian-oriented precepts, but those whose sense of a 'higher power' and whose reference points are other-based, will hopefully be able to translate freely and easily.

One: Stewardship

The most important thing about litter abatement and recycling, i.e. enlightened solid waste management, from the view of Christian theology, is that it is intimately related to the concept of "Stewardship". In the New Testament (and the Old, for that matter), a steward was someone whom we would call today a manager (like an apartment house manager or a business manager) ...which is to say, someone who acts as the supervisor or administrator of property which actually belongs to another.

The Biblical view was, and is, that every man or woman is, by creation, essentially a steward or stewardess. And this, because each of us, from birth on, come to be to managers at however high or lower a level, and for, however, long or short a time, managers over a myriad of things which, though they are controlled by our minds and bodies and even though possessed by some other man -or woman, actually came from our Creator, God, and still belong to Him, now and in the eternal hereafter.

Two: Accountability

Stewardship, of course, is meaningless with its counterpart, Accountability. It shares this quality of being meaningless without a counterpart with many other "essential" notion- or word-pairs such as "Man and Woman", "Authority and Responsibility", "Love and Hate", etc.

The point is, of course, that we are stewards by His design, managers and not owners of the assets and gifts He brings our way, and that we are accountable to their true owner, i.e., Him, for the manner in which we have used, mis-used or not used them at all. That we are managers, in our lives, and that we are accountable, ultimately, to Him may be usefully called our "Stewardship".

There are, today, many different words for describing the cornucopia of assets and unique gifts over which we are set as managers from the time of our birth until the time of our death: aptitudes, skills, endowments, powers, properties, blessings, grants, funds, materials, knacks, faculties, facilities. But the favored theological word for these assets and gifts, especially as it relates to self-stewardship, self-accountability and self-as-a-conservancy in this life is simply, talents.

While there are other biblical reference points such as "thy body is my temple," and "God helps those who help themselves", among others, perhaps the most useful for this writing is derived from one particular parable of Jesus', which appears in two distinctly different forms in the New Testament, viz., The Gospel according to Luke, 19:11-27, and the Gospel according to Matthew, 25:14-30. In both versions, Jesus is talking about the responsibility of Man, and Woman, as stewards to God (and presumably all Men and all Women always), under the figure of servants who are left a sum of money while their master goes on a long trip.

But whereas in the Lukan version (certain to be preferred by Constitutional fundamentalists and leftists) there are ten servants involved, and each is left an equal amount of money (measured by a standard of weight called a mina or pound - and hence its name: "The Parable of the Pounds"), in Matthew's version of the parable there are only three servants involved, and they are each left different sums of money (measured by a standard of weight called a talent...in Greek, talanton; in Latin, talentum; in English, Talent...and hence its name in Matthew's version "The Parable of the Talents").

The significant point, in Matthew's version, was that these different sums of money were not arbitrarily decided upon. The sums were in 'proportion to the ability of each servant:

"to one he gave five talents, to another two,
to another one, to each according to his ability."

To this parable of Jesus', we owe the current meaning of the word talent as meaning skill, aptitude, ability, gift, whereas before Jesus it meant only a unit of weight, or an amount of money having that weight (equal, incidentally, to approximately fifteen years' wages for the average laborer in Jesus' day).

Notably, in expanding upon the meaning of the word 'talents', Jesus' thrust seems clearly to have been to seize upon a portrait of the role and importance of Stewardship that existed and carry it into matters of personal and individual concern and accountability. And stewardship, thereafter, became an issue of, at once, the manner in which one handled not only others' money, but, also, the manner in which one handled ones total abilities, gifts and responsibilities- although on Every Member Canvass Sunday, in a seemingly untoward number of Christian congregations, stewardship is preached as though money were still its ultimate test. Interesting what man does with the Word, sometimes, isn't it?

Current practices notwithstanding, Jesus' teaching in the Parable of the Talents was a lesson in stewardship. It teaches that good stewardship is demonstrated by those who:

1. Those who are determined to take whatever "talents" they may have and employ them, rather than simply letting them go unused.
2. Are willing to risk failure, in order to achieve success.

And the reward for good stewardship, Jesus taught, was that one's "talents" are multiplied and one's responsibilities are increased ("You have been faithful over little, I will set you over much.")

All of this is beginning to sound more and more like a theological treatment of the whole underlying theme and meaning and promise of Keep America Beautiful's classic "A Place to Begin" film now, isn't it? And, well it should because the point of all this is that "Litter Abatement" and "Recycling" and "Improved Solid Waste Management" are merely contemporary expressions of an essential part of Christian discipleship and Witnessing eternally, as Jesus taught it. Namely, we are stewards, and will be held accountable as such, over all the talents, gifts, abilities, etc., which He allows to come within our lives...as life-long managers.

Where "Litter Abatement" or "Recycling" or "Resource Management" is present in the Church's life and in the life of the individual Christian, it is present centrally (and not as some kind of discretionary option) to the whole theological understanding of what Man is and Woman is. Where this concern with Litter Abatement, by whatever name, is absent in the life of the Church or of any individual Christian, it is absent centrally- and hence the whole understanding of what a Christian is, become to that degree, incomplete and defective. And "Stewardship", at least to that degree, is reduced merely to a matter of how one spends one's money, and not of how one spends ones whole life under God, wherever this absence occurs.

When this concern is not merely present, but is given an appropriate name such as "Urban Christian Ecology" or perhaps "Witness! Recycle!" then we may (perhaps optimistically) see it as a concern which has become systematically organized for increased knowledge, for action and for further contemplation. And, while the specific organizations and systems and actions may vary, it is further appropriate that they are seen as cousins,

at least, to theology. For, in sharing an understanding that their proper implementation is important as an important act of responsible Christian behavior, they will tend strongly to have these goals in common ...reflections of the Parable of the Talents in action today:

- 1) Helping Men and Women get the facts about litter abatement, recycling, improved solid waste handling practices, etc., 'and thereby come to understand the opportunities for improvement, i.e., "their talents."
- 2) Helping Men and Women successfully involve and interact with others to make the most of their collective talents to identify and exploiting available opportunities.
- 3) Helping Men and Women learn to embrace risk-taking and plan systematically to maximize success.
- 4) Helping Men and Women focus primarily on positive results, keeping in mind that being set over...and thence gaining...even a small amount, is the first step toward being set over...and thence gaining...much more.
- 5) Helping Men and Women understand that contemporary awards and recognitions given and received are important and motivative in the here and now...a part of holding themselves accountable, finally, to no less than their Creator God, for how they use, abuse, misuse or fail to use the talents and opportunities they have been given.

Three: Perspectives-Theology Looked At In The Light Of Enlightened Litter Abatement

If it is important to look at Litter Abatement in the light of theology (which we have attempted in the preceding pages), it is equally important to look at Theology in the light of enlightened Litter Abatement as each can shed light upon the other.

When Litter Abatement looks at the concerns which Men and Women have about their lives, it discovers that these concerns tend to be readily divisible into four discreet categories or groups. To illustrate, let's assume that someone...let's further assume that it is You...awakes tomorrow not in you own bed but in the midst of a jungle. You would, in turn, have to begin to grapple with four sets of issues that, as it happens, typify those issues facing us all in our lives. To wit:

- 1) "What's Happening" or "How Can I Get the Facts About What's Happening" In all of life, as in litter abatement, there is a generally recognized need to "get the facts." Unfortunately, just as you are finding during your first few wakeful moments there in the jungle, getting the facts often presents an immediate quandary. First, you only think you're short on facts. The truth is that you are surrounded by facts, or at least data, virtually pouring into your sensory system through your eyes, your ears, your nose, etc. and thence into both sides of your brain; that is, the left or logic-oriented side which is trying to handle, process and sort information in a systematic manner, and the right side of your brain which is rapidly taking and developing non-verbal, non-numeric "pictures" of your jungle environment. So one of your real questions is "How do I decide what is pertinent data, sort out the non-pertinent data and begin systematically organizing my understandings (while dealing with a critical internal conflict dating back to Adam and Eve called 'Fight or Flight?')." And your second real question is "How do I separate the facts as they really are from the 'myths' lodged in my mind by all the Tarzan and Born Free movies I've seen?"
- 2) "How Can I Involve The People, Or At Least The Inhabitants, of This Jungle In Helping Me Survive?" Given the set of circumstances, and the environment, as I understand it, can I survive... physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually? If so, and even though I can't "talk" the animals and birds into

helping me out like Tarzan used to do, can I still "communicate" with them. The least I can do is to watch what they eat, where they drink, and where they sleep!

- 3) "How Can I Best Plan Systematically To Go Beyond Simply Surviving And Decide What To Spend My Time Doing or Accomplishing And How Best To Achieve Those Goals?"
- 4) "How Can I Best Measure the Positive Results Of My Efforts And Either Objectively or Subjectively Reflect Upon Them, Evaluate Them And Consider Alternatives?"
- 5) "When I Recognize That I Have Been Effective, How Can I Provide Myself With Some Reward That Will Motivate Me To Achieve And Then Achieve Again? "

Enlightened Litter Abatement discovers these five concerns or issues facing men and women, no matter their social position, place in the public and private community and almost totally without regard to their age, education, race or number of years in the community. It attempts, then, to react to these needs in a systematic, experiential/ involvement oriented manner, and in a variety of ways; but, as has been outlined and stated in so many publications and so many presentations since the national roll out of the Clean Community System in 1975, all of those ways need (based both on an understanding of the needs of people and on what has been proven to really work in achieving sustained litter abatement) to approach the five concerns in something like the following fashion:

- 1) What's Happening? The CCS/KABS offers individuals and communities of individuals help in realistically assessing the nature and causes of the litter problem in a way that is unique in our rather complex world because although the litter problem is much more page 14 - Theology complicated than most people think, and the CCS/KABS program very sophisticated, the solutions to the problem are quite straightforward and readily comprehended as compared to most more controversial, high-dollar community problems.
- 2) Survival or Winning Through Involving And Becoming Involved With Others The CCS/KABS first offers key community leaders in business, government and civic sectors how to form a "three-legged milk stool" of joint leadership to meet and beat back the litter problem on a sustained basis and then trains them or their representatives to organize the whole community behind them to reach a common objective ...a cleaner community from drying up litter at its many sources on a sustained basis rather than constantly "cleaning up". The keys to this process are: a) to assess the community's **litter problem** and assets for dealing with it, b) to come to understand what must be done to beat litter and c) to organize present assets, and acquire new assets (especially through the involvement of others) in a systematic way that produces measurable results.
- 3) Setting Realistic Goals and Planning Systematically. The CCS/KABS shows people not only how to set realistic goals in terms of changing other's solid waste handling attitudes and habits, it shows them how to bring those changes (and therefore a reduction in litter generation) in a systematic, step-by-step fashion that ultimately reaches out to the consciousness and life of every member of the community at one level or another.
- 4) Measuring and Highlighting Positive Results. Unlike essentially any other program ever before devised and implemented, the CCS/KABS shows people how to objectively measure the positive results of their collective efforts on a regular, scientific basis developed and field-proven by the American Public Works Association. In the process, signs pointing the way toward alternative courses of action, or greater emphasis on current courses of action, are developed.
- 5) Providing Recognition Of and Rewards for Effective Actions and Involvement. The CCS/KABS helps individuals and communities reflect upon the effectiveness of their pro- grams and the appropriateness of their chosen courses of action by not only requiring regular reporting, but by showing them how to

organize local awards and recognition functions and systems and then goes one step further by offering them the chance to compete for national recognition through a variety of means which spotlight the "winningest" programs and portions of programs and give the programs added recognition with the press and with major state and national officials.

Now, when we take these issues or concerns of Enlightened Litter Abatement firmly in hand, and then turn to look at theology, it becomes clear that this "queen of the sciences" (as it has been called) has four divisions or at least principle teachings contained within it which correspond to the basic issues or concerns of the CCS/KABS and of Man and Woman, viz:

The Concerns of Enlightened Litter
Abatement

Theology's Ultimate Answers to
Those Concerns

1. What's Happening?

THE GOSPEL. (Godspell, Good-Spell, Good News, News of What's Happening).

Here theology reminds Enlightened Litter Abatement and the CCS/KABS that any full survey of What's Happening must include not only what man is doing but also what God is doing, and...most of all ...what God is doing in Man (and Woman).

2. Survival.

SALVATION.

Here theology reminds Enlightened Litter Abatement that, regardless of the means we use ...such as involving and becoming involved with others, the ultimate thing from which we need to be saved (i.e., assured survival of or victory over) is not anything outside ourselves, including even our own bodies, but that which is within; our eternal spirit. .

3. Accomplishing by Planning In
a Systematic Manner.

DISCIPLESHIP, STEWARDSHIP,
MORAL THEOLOGY.

Here theology reminds Enlightened Litter Abatement that we are not in this world merely to set goals and work toward goals to please ourselves, but to seek to discover the Will of our Creator God, as that will has been written 'in our members', in the very fiber of our being.

4. Reflection Upon Results.

THEOLOGY, AND SELF-EXAMINATION. Here theology reminds Enlightened Litter Abatement that reflection is an essential complement to action, and that no reflection is adequate which merely changes our actions; it must also, ultimately, change our Selves.

5. Awards and Recognition.

MAN (AND WOMAN) ARE IMPERFECT.

Here theology reminds Enlightened Litter Abatement that man (and woman) is imperfect and that he requires temporal rewards and examples to follow if he is to receive heavenly rewards in the life hereafter.

From the foregoing we see that theology, looked at in the light of Enlightened Litter Abatement (or the Churches or Interfaith Committee as it relates to some CCS/KABS program organization chart), is not a compartment of man's knowledge and activity, which is set apart from the CCS Process/KAB System, for example, but is a response to precisely those issues and concerns which occupy the attention of any thinking human being who is trying to play out a part of a meaningful life through involvement in a CCS/KABS program ...regardless of how He or She might participate, voluntarily or by another's direction, with or without pay.

We further see that the relationship between Enlightened Litter Abatement, on the one hand, and Theology, on the other, might be aptly described in the following way: Enlightened Litter Abatement provides a man or a woman, albeit "experientially through involvement" rather than explicitly or pedagogically, with a way to identify what are the real issues of his or her life, and offers the opportunity to arrive at some opening answers to those issues. It remains for theology alone, in all its completeness, however, to give any closing (i.e., ultimate) answers to those issues and concerns. Enlightened Litter Abatement as a "Place to Begin ...and whatever may follow it in the life of individuals who become involved in it ...is to Theology as Appetizers and a Banquet are to the after-glow and feeling of peace and good will which follows; they whet the appetite, help to satiate immediate hunger and set the stage, and yet only suggest and help one along the way to what is still to come.

Four: Conclusion-The Opposite Of 'Steward' Is 'Victim'

In an important book published in 1975, called the "Search for Power", Harvard Professor David C. McClelland contends that there are four stages in the development of the individual to maturity:

- Stage #1: Power is perceived as coming from Others, but is directed toward ones self.
- Stage #2: Power is perceived as residing in oneself, and is used for the needs of the self.
- Stage #3: Power is perceived as residing within oneself, but is used for the sake of others.
- Stage #4: Power is perceived as residing outside, coming through the self, but used for the sake of others. This last stage, McClelland argues, is what religion is all about. And faith. And theology. And Jesus.

It is the task of Enlightened Litter Abatement to realize fully the role it can truly play in removing the last vestiges of Stage # 1 (wherein people feel and act like victims) ...at least in one small area ...from the lives of people and the communities where they reside. It must continue to strive to better learn to teach people that, even in the seemingly overwhelming world of achieving sustained litter abatement results, the power resides within them to help themselves and to help others help themselves to cleaner, healthier communities and a heightened quality of life. To a degree, at least, so long as Enlightened Litter Abatement does not effectively

work to enable and empower people to know or believe this, then, at least to that degree, theology may well beckon them in vain, to Stage #4.

And therefore, and finally, it is crucial that Enlightened Litter Abatement, i.e., the CCS, continue searching for ways that Theology-beginning at least with broadened, more thoughtfully set out activities within the 220+ "Churches Committees" and "Inter-faith Committees" that are `a part of the CCS/KABSprogram nationally... can better help us teach people that they are not victims through involvement in our local programs and, hence, that interfaith leaders who are concerned with Theology see us as an important part of their centuries-old efforts to teach people that they are Stewards resides within them to help themselves and to help others help themselves to cleaner, healthier communities and a heightened quality of life.' To a degree, at least, so long as Enlightened Litter Abatement does not effectively work to enable and empower people to know or believe this, then, at least to that degree, theology may well beckon them in vain, to Stage #4. And therefore, and finally, it is crucial that Enlightened Litter Abatement, i.e., the CCS, continue searching for ways that Theology-beginning at least with broadened, more thoughtfully set out activities within the 220+ "Churches Committees" and "Interfaith Committees" that are `a part of the CCS/KABSprogram nationally... can better help us teach people that they are not victims through involvement in our local programs and, hence, that interfaith leaders who are concerned with Theology see us as an important part of their centuries-old efforts to teach people that they are Stewards.