

Commentary — From the Margins “*Speak What God Gives You!*” — NSE

In the delayed Jan/Feb 1999 issue of *Servants' News*, Norman Scott Edwards titled an article, “Speak What God Gives You!” He begins by writing, “I believe this matter is very important to independent ‘CoG’ believers. I hope you will take the time to **read this article from beginning to end before judging its content** [author’s emphasis]” (p. 17). I did. I read the article in its entirety before I began to reflect upon the subject matter. I had heard about the subject, but I had not before read how the matter began—the exposure of Jim Rector.

I do not know Jim Rector. I have never heard him speak. I have not knowingly read anything he has ever written. He was and is to me another ex-WCG pastor who practices precept-upon-precept exegesis as taught by Herbert Armstrong. Thus, even when encountering his name in context with others who have independent ministries, I haven’t been interested in hearing what he or they have to say. For through teaching precept-upon-precept the drunk priests of Ephraim caused a nation to stumble, fall backwards and be snared. This same reading strategy caused the Worldwide Church of God to stumble backwards, fall and be broken by a few clever arguments dredged up from early in the Reformation. I teach using [typological exegesis](#). Therefore, during the past few years as typology swept past where our Puritan Ancestors left it, I haven’t been particularly interested in those who teach using precept-upon-precept exegesis.

With the above qualifying paragraph stated perhaps more forcibly than necessary, and with Rector no longer being a timely subject matter (I hope Jim is again doing a work, that he learned and recovered from the mauling he received), I want to consider the perverseness of Edwards’ Matthew 18 action. Not of the action itself, which seemed to produce the fruit such an action is intended to have. Rector had done wrong, and he admitted having done wrong when confronted by Edwards, who was affected through having distributed Rector’s tapes. So Edwards had a justifiable reason for bringing Rector’s actions to Rector’s attention. So far, Edwards had not behaved as a Texas blowheart, this identifying phrase used for a person with the laws of God allegedly written on his heart, but a person who covers those laws with the condensation of his breath due to the coldness of his heart.

For those who are unfamiliar with the article, Mindy Diller sent an e-mail query to Edwards asking if Edwards would take on a living person who had plagiarized another’s works with the vigor with which Edwards was attacking Herbert Armstrong for plagiarism. Edwards answered her, and recommended that she begin a Matthew procedure with the person guilty of plagiarism. Mindy responded and said that the person would not actually admit plagiarism, and would only admit to utilizing the work of another. Mindy wasn’t sure whether she should drop the matter. She was concerned about speaking *lashon hara* against the person. Edwards then asked her for the name of the person, and she gave him Jim Rector’s name.

Edwards purchased the book Rector allegedly plagiarized, and asked Pam Dewey to read the book and compare it to Rector's tape series on the same subject. She determined that Rector was reading large passages from the book, "changing a word here and there, pausing to add commentary at times" (SN 19). Edwards then read the plagiarized book. He writes, "Before I even read any significant amount of Bevere's book, I realized my own Matthew 18 process must begin. I was offended that Jim was doing this" (20). Thus, on March 23, 1999, Edwards sent Rector an e-mail letter, asking that he, Rector, "be the first one to tell [his] mailing list the source [he] used in [his] teaching" (20). Edwards went on to write, "You should probably explain why you did not give the source to begin with, then explain that it was a mistake...we never have to fear doing what is right. Servants News lost some subscribers when I wrote about taking bread and wine more than once a year. More are discontinuing as a result of our writing about Herbert Armstrong. If it turns out that I need to look for something else to do to support my family other than Servants News, I will do it" (20). *If it turns out that I need to look for something else to do to support my family other than Servants News, I will do it*—this line needs remembered, for *Servants' News* failed to support Edwards, who then came up with the SEE program.

On March 28th, Rector sent Edwards an apology and a statement of repentance, which wasn't enough for Edwards. So Edwards "informed four of Jim's friends and supporters and they went to him privately" (SN 20). And here Edwards' Matthew 18 procedure seems to go awry. Rector had committed an actual crime. He had transgressed copyright law. And Edwards had not informed the copyright holder of this transgression. Rather, he sought to apply an in-house procedure to a criminal matter involving another, without informing the crime's victim of the crime. Edwards makes himself an accessory-after-the-fact to a real crime for which prison time is possible. He shows little love to the victim, the person who authored the plagiarized text, and the fact that Edwards felt offense is legally meaningless, and somewhat morally offensive in itself. Edwards places the offense he felt above the interests of John Bevere, author of *Victory in the Wilderness*. Said bluntly, Edwards' love for himself exceeds the love he has for Bevere, who should have been immediately informed of the plagiarism—and whose responsibility it was to bring a Matthew 18 (or criminal) proceeding against Rector.

Therein lies the taint of the Edwards/Rector affair. Edwards usurps Bevere's authorial rights. His love for himself and his righteousness exceeds the love he has for a personally unknown brother in Christ. Matthew 18 wasn't intended to be a horn blown by Texas blowhearts to boast about their own righteousness, and offenses taken to their sensibilities, but that is what the procedure seems to have become. The procedure outlined in Matthew 18 pertains to actual transgressions of the law, divine and/or civil, that occurs between two brothers in Christ. The procedure is not for "offenses" felt by third parties. Mindy correctly understood the problem: she went to Rector, who didn't really listen to her. Her option was now *lashon hara*, or directly contacting the plagiarized author, which should

have been done. It seems that human love for the author would have dictated contacting the author.

Rector's acknowledgement of his wrong-doing wasn't enough for Edwards, who seemed to smell blood and was going after it. He kept after Rector to tell his mailing list the "whole story." And on April 20, 1999, Jim Rector admitted reading from Bever's book and said that he would be contacting the publisher and author of the book concerning the incident. He admitted deception, and he wrote, "I was dead wrong in what I did, and I am absolutely resolved that it never happen again" (SN 21). The incident was over, almost. In actuality, the incident was just beginning for it wasn't Edwards' writings that Rector had plagiarized. Little more had been accomplished than if Mindy had contacted Bever, and had brought Rector's use of Bever's work to his attention. Bever would, most likely, have sent a letter to Rector addressing the problem with a cease and desist demand.

When is enough enough? This will be a question those of us here at Port Austin will have to address this spring of 2005. Although Edwards hasn't yet acknowledged wrong-doing, he daily comes closer to doing so. If a Texas blowheart hadn't become involved early, Edwards might now see the error of his ways instead of being only one court hearing away from arrest, which would do nothing to restore the losses incurred by the other three trustees. Perhaps the primary reason Edwards isn't today in jail is that avenue removes the possibility of him making financial restitution.

For Edwards, Jim Rector's public humiliation wasn't good enough. Edwards apparently wanted Rector to admit to every incident of plagiarism—and Edwards took what should have been a private proceeding public.

I am convinced that God remains involved in the affairs of His children even as these children mentally enter their spiritual teenage period. So I now find it curious that in a different matter I am doing to an unrepentant Edwards what Edwards did to a staggered Jim Rector. While it is not my intention to defend Rector—apparently what he did was as wrong as he said it was—every person out of love for the other person needs to allow the repentant sinner to save what face as can be saved. Once a person is beaten, a person needs to let the other up. None of us are so pure that we do not need mercy extended to us even after we repent.

Edwards knew what copyright law said about plagiarism this past summer when the music camp, with its intolerable behavior, used the songs of Elizabeth Drieman. He knew, but he used her songs anyway. However, my understanding is that since posting my commentary about Elizabeth, Edwards has offered to return all music and sound tracks to her. A late offer? Certainly, but better late than never. And for this he needs acknowledged.

What remains to be returned is about \$300,000 to the other three trustees. I suspect, though, that Edwards will plead some form of intentional vagueness about whether he really owes that much. Today, he owes his liberty to the charity of the other three trustees.

I do not have a great speaking voice; therefore, if Jim Rector wants to use material I have written in a tape series, I hereby extend permission to him to do so.

Matthew 18 is not about a third party to an action taking offense and thereby having hurt feelings. It is about maintaining the unity of faith against lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. The condition required of Matthew 18:15 is *if your brother sins against you*. Until Edwards provided me with the legal basis for having a complaint against him, I was not in a position to bring an accusation against him. And then, a Matthew 18 proceeding required that Edwards be a brother, a status he formally lost in September 2004. Here at Port Austin, Edwards has been one committed to Satan ever since October 31, 2004. Therefore, the affected party in a Matthew 18 procedure must be party to a real transgression that amounts to actual lawbreaking. Hurt feelings are not enough. So the procedure only properly applies between—in the Rector case—Bevere (and other authors) and Rector.

Third parties have very limited rights to become involved in Matthew 18 proceedings. If the wronged person doesn't pursue the matter once the matter has been brought to his or her attention, then no Matthew 18 proceeding can go forward. A third party should not initiate a proceeding on behalf of the victim, for the victim has the prerogative of silently suffering the wrong. Therefore, the Texas blowheart mocks God when he elevates his slighted feelings to the importance of them being bound or loosed on earth and in heaven through initiating a Matthew 18 proceeding.

The entirety of Edwards' right to become involved in Rector's plagiarism stems from the fact that Edwards was distributing Rector's tapes. Edwards could simply have declined distributing the tapes, while bringing Rector's use of Bevere's book to the author's attention. He could have then waited to see what course of action Bevere chose to take. Bevere might have given Rector permission to continue distributing the tapes on some sort of a fee basis. Instead, Edwards placed himself in the position of being wronged by Rector. Again, he usurped Bevere's authorial right—and this usurping of rights by third parties to create bogus Matthew 18 proceedings needs to stop.

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