

Boston opted for a more “liberal” strategy, based, writes Buntin, “on social service and neighborhood relations.” The number of homicides went down—from 152 in 1990 (on a per capita basis, about the same rate as New York’s) to 96 in 1995. In mid-1996, Boston added “focused deterrence” against gun violence by the “relatively small number of hard-core gang members . . . responsible for most of the carnage.” For example, “one notorious gangster found with a single bullet in his possession was sent to federal prison for 10 years,” Buntin notes. Murders dropped to 31 in 1999.

But the effects of “focused deterrence” seemed to tail off. By the spring of 2000, gunplay was increasing in the gang strongholds of Roxbury and Dorchester. The number of homicides that year increased to 40, and the next year to 66. “Rather than reinvigorating its efforts at ‘focused deterrence,’” says Buntin, “the Boston police department seems to be redoubling its efforts at building partnerships, expanding social services and involving the community in the fight against crime. . . . Meanwhile, in the first quarter of 2002, the homicide rate in New York City was down another 29 percent.”

Nursing’s Identity Crisis

“Where Have All the Nurses Gone?” by Ronald W. Dworkin, in *The Public Interest* (Summer 2002), 1112 16th St., N.W., Ste. 140, Washington, D.C. 20036; “Diagnosis: Shortage” by Carrie Conaway, in *Regional Review* (2001: 3rd quarter), Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, P.O. Box 2076, Boston, Mass. 02106–2076.

The nation’s registered nurses have been increasing in number every year but not fast enough to keep up with demand. Hospitals, which employ more than half of the nation’s 2.7 million RNs, have 11 percent of their positions vacant. Nursing homes, visiting nurse associations, and other employers of RNs are also hard-pressed.

What accounts for the nurse shortage? “The culprits,” writes Conaway, an associate editor at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston’s *Regional Review*, “are both long-term trends, such as expanded opportunities for working women and the aging of the population, and new factors like the effects of the cost-cutting imperatives of managed care.” Dworkin, an anesthesiologist at the Greater Baltimore Medical Center, acknowledges that there is “some truth” in such explanations, but finds more in the frustrations nurses now face because their profession has been “swept up in a cultural avalanche.”

From the time of Florence Nightingale, he argues, nursing “stood on two pillars”—feminine virtue (compassion and empathy) and medical science. But starting in the late 1970s, progressives, particularly feminists, sought to rid the nursing ideal of virtue and base it instead solely on its own distinct body

of scientific knowledge. In truth, contends Dworkin, nursing has no such independent body of knowledge. “Nurses are taught the same material as physicians, only less of it. When nursing tries to distinguish itself on the basis of scientific knowledge alone, nursing loses status among doctors and paraprofessionals.” And “bright young people,” he claims, now “see a nursing career as relatively undistinguished.” (Be that as it may, Conaway notes that nursing schools had to turn away 5,000 qualified applicants last year because of insufficient faculty and facilities.)

The change in the professional ideal of nursing also has meant frustration for husband-hunting nurses, Dworkin observes, as male doctors have come to pair off instead with female MDs. And nursing’s traditional appeal as a part-time job has meant little to the many single mothers in need of the income from a full-time job, who must work nights and weekends for that income. For various reasons, Dworkin says, nursing has become more difficult than ever, with “long hours, inadequate resources, demanding patients, and mediocre pay.” The frequent result is “burnout,” he asserts. Many frustrated, emotionally exhausted nurses quit.

One answer to the nurse shortage might be to offer nurses better pay. But, says Dworkin,

“tight health-care budgets prevent” hospitals from doing that. Conaway, however, reports a little progress along that line: “RN wages are starting to escalate after years of stagnation.”

Average inflation-adjusted weekly wages for full-time RNs, she notes, declined from \$819 in 1993 to \$762 in 1997, but then climbed to \$790 in 2000.

EXCERPT

A Monument in the Sky

The present wrangling between those who want the whole [World Trade Center] site to be a garden, and those who want commercial development, is itself miserable, and is reflected in the misery of the designs that have been proposed. In actual fact, there is a desperate futility in the project as presently conceived, because even if the whole site were turned into a memorial garden it would be in the wrong place. For most of the dead did not die there at all, but a thousand feet away, a sixth of a mile, directly above. Ancient epics and dramas—the Odyssey, the Aeneid, Antigone—tell of the unease and pollution of an improperly buried or unburied corpse; the present quarrel reflects that unease in 20th-century terms: our loss of courage in the marketplace, our baseless guilt at our prosperity, our secret qualms that maybe we deserved to be attacked. The rebuilding of Ground Zero must be a monument that will begin to heal those deep spiritual wounds and illnesses.

To be such a monument it must embody the future hopes of the nation, its resilience, its pride, and the peculiarly American technique for achieving its goals.

What is that “American technique”? There is an ancient saying, that you cannot serve God and Mammon. The Old World always took this saying as a simple command or prohibition, an injunction to make the right choice. The genius of the framers of the American Constitution is that they took it as a “koan,” so to speak. A koan in the Buddhist tradition is a paradoxical utterance whose form is that of a puzzle but whose solution is not an answer but a change in the answerer and thus a change in the conditions in which the puzzle itself exists.

If it is a simple and absolute choice, between the spiritual and the economic, then of course we should choose the spiritual. But if we do, rejecting any temptation to improve our economic lot, we should not be too surprised—as the national sponsors of radical Islamic terrorism have found—when it turns out that our economic decline into hideous squalor ends up compromising any possible spiritual goal of our society. In another saying Jesus hinted at something that did not imply that terrible choice, between the world and one’s soul: render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, he said of the coin of money he was shown, and unto God that which is God’s.

The solution to the problem that the American Framers found was simple and radical: Make Mammon serve God, and then to serve Mammon is to serve God. The free-market democratic republic that resulted has spent 200 years of fine-tuning the market so that it has become almost impossible to get rich without in the process enriching everyone else. . . .

The World Trade Center was a huge tool of that American solution. But its architecture in the context of its site said no more than that. It served Mammon, but did not express by its form that the Mammon it served served God. Its replacement must say triumphantly that the terrorists have been defeated not only in terms of wealth and power, but in terms of spiritual goodness and moral beauty as well.

—Frederick Turner, Founders Professor of Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas, on the website *TechCentralStation.com* (Aug. 1, 2002)