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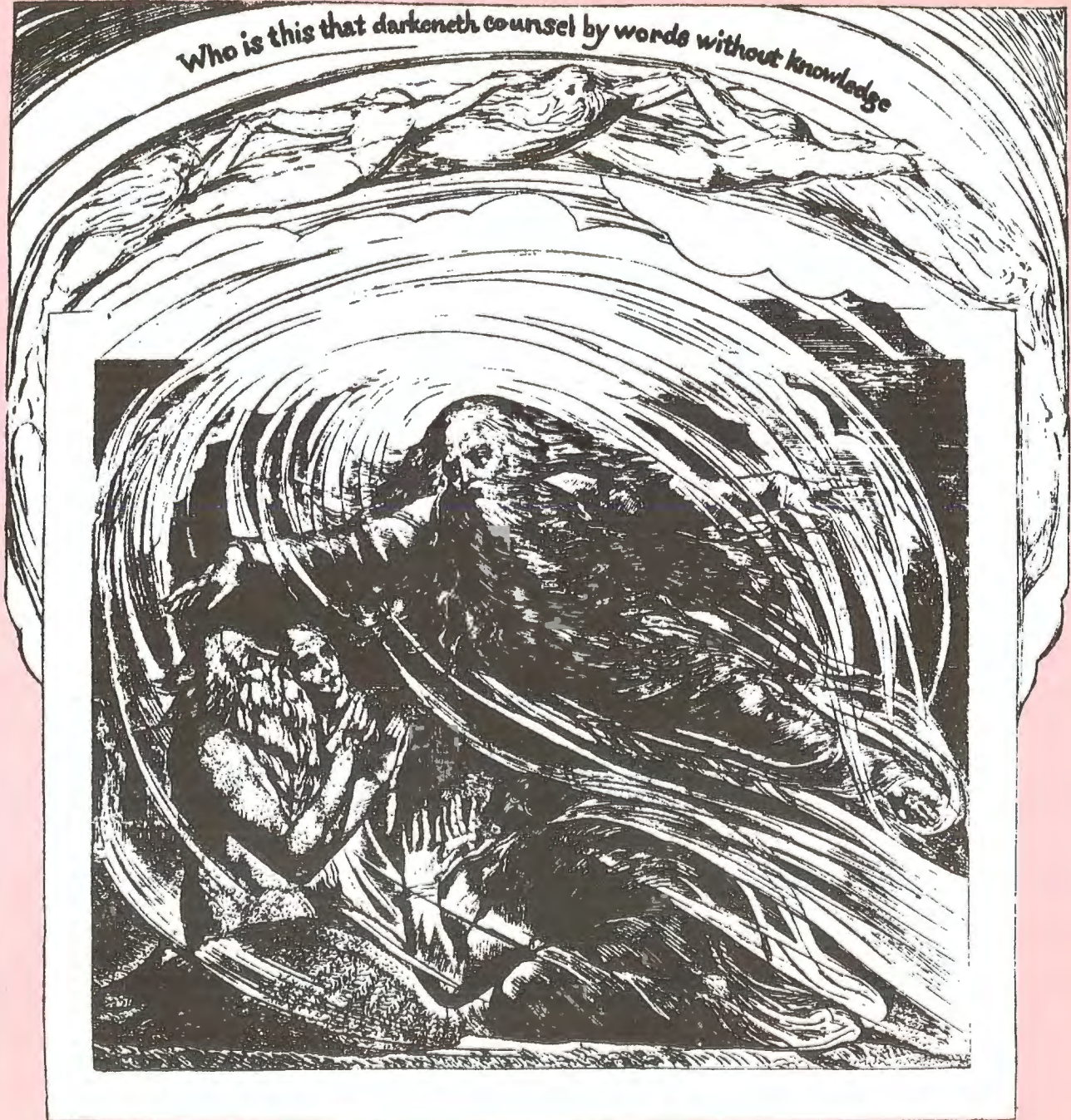
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MISSION

JUNE, 1987 JOURNAL



Then the Lord answered Job out of the Whirlwind

The Ambivalence of Belief

Robert Seymour

Job: The Struggle of Faith

Michael V. Houston

Looking To The Past
And To The Future

As I sit at my typewriter this morning, it is springtime in North Carolina. The azaleas are more glorious than in any other year of my remembrance. On some of my favorite bypaths the dogwood and redbud arch overhead in panopolies of color. It's always a time of thoughtfulness and intensity for me. If time and space permitted, there are many things of which I would write. The words would likely all be trite, but the connotations are rich and special.

The "feelings" of spring: renewal, regeneration, resurrection. Hope springs anew and our spirits are quickened after the cold, hard winter (for many). Having just celebrated Easter, we—in the words of minister Robert Seymour—"are all dressed up and places to go."

The bittersweetness of "turning sixty": reflections on the journey—the good and the bad, the joy and the sorrow, success and failure—and the look ahead. Much too much to deal with just now.

The pleasure of seeing Mission—with God's good grace—through its twentieth year of publication: gratitude for all of you—former editors, board members, writers past and present, readers, friends, critics, supporters—for all you've done to make the journal what it is; prayers for God's guidance in decisions for the future.

The contents of this issue, I believe, are pertinent to the thoughts expressed above: the ambivalence of belief, struggles with faith, seeking the eternally valid, affirming love, searching for unity, the worth of persons, Christian maturity, blessings, and an understanding of how our ways of thinking and lifestyles are changing. Surely this attests to an on-going commitment to our stated and original purposes: "to explore thoroughly the Scriptures and their meaning . . . to understand as fully as possible the world in which the Church lives and has her mission . . . to provide a vehicle for communicating the meaning of God's word to our contemporary world."

—The Editor



"TO EXPLORE THOROUGHLY THE SCRIPTURES AND THEIR MEANING . . . TO UNDERSTAND AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE THE WORLD IN WHICH THE CHURCH LIVES AND HAS HER MISSION . . . TO PROVIDE A VEHICLE FOR COMMUNICATING THE MEANING OF GOD'S WORD TO OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD."

— EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT, JULY, 1967

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Cover: From William Blake's
Illustrations of the Book of Job

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Both believer and nonbeliever
may be enveloped by the same darkness.

The Ambivalence Of Belief



By ROBERT SEYMOUR

They brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has he had this?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

Mark 9:20-24

The words of this anxious Father, agonizing for the well-being of his son and desperately hoping he will be healed, strikes a responsive chord in most of us. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Who of us does not know the feeling, the desire on the one hand to affirm our faith unequivocally but on the other hand feeling forced to acknowledge the stubborn persistence of doubt? We can identify with this man, for we have also experienced civil war within our souls, an inner tension that seldom seems resolved. Belief and unbelief thrive together within our beings and each doggedly contends for full possession.

It is probably inaccurate to think of people as being divided between believers and unbelievers. Though we may describe ourselves as either one or the other, it is probably more basically true that the division exists not so much between us as within us. For rare is the individual who is rid of all ambivalence with regard to belief or unbelief. We may feel pulled more strongly in one direction or the other, but if we are honest we will have to confess that whether we consider ourselves believers or nonbelievers, there remains within us a vestige of the opposite. Indeed the chasm separating the believer from the nonbeliever does not seem quite so wide as it once did. Often there exists a sympathetic understanding of the one for the other, as if each continues to feel within one's own heart the influence of

the opposite, pressing persuasively for recognition.

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." We hear in this man's ambivalence an authentic agony that each one of us knows well.

I

We might prefer to have done with doubt and to come down so firmly on the side of unbelief that we never feel this inner tension again, but to do so would have some unfortunate consequences. Though doubt may seem negative and threatening, it can ultimately serve a very positive purpose. One might even say it is indispensable. For if we expect our belief to grow and mature from elementary levels of understanding to something profound, we need to hear and answer the arguments of unbelief.

And so, with one side of our mind we say, "I believe in the goodness of God." But no sooner have we said it than we hear from the other side of our mind, "But how can God be good if God allows the innocent to suffer?" And thus begins an inner battle between belief and unbelief which sharpens our thinking and which refuses to let us be satisfied with an unexamined concept. Carl Michalson likens this process to a kind of intellectual ping pong with doubt as the contender. It is a process which will either worry weak ideas into exhaustion or exercise them into greater strength; or at various stages of the

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struggle it may leave us with only, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." We should be grateful for this ambivalence, for it protects us from "pollyanna" religion, from muddled theology, and from blinded bigotry. It is a catalyst to a faith worth striving for.

Year after year in this university town where I live, I see students who have come from very authoritative religious backgrounds forced to face questions of faith that for them have never risen before. Taught to give a proof text from Scripture for whatever they believe, they suddenly realize that the very basis of their authority is challenged and that many of the ready-made answers that once sufficed are not so

choosing. Instead of the strong ambivalence that would push us toward an "either-or," we prefer a rather vague tolerance that permits "both-and." Trying to engage an individual in a religious debate today, one is likely to discover that the person does not feel altogether comfortable when identified as a believer with the believers or as a nonbeliever with the atheists! They would rather remain in a kind of middle position, half-heartedly believing in God on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and half-heartedly disbelieving in God on Tuesdays and Thursdays! They are attracted in both directions and want to keep both options open.

We stand often between belief and unbelief, often veering toward the latter—not so much because we cannot believe but because we cannot bear the consequences of believing.

well tailored to life as they had seemed. When serious doubts begin to assail them, such students may be tempted to chuck the whole Christian faith. They realize that their houses of belief have been built with straw, and with a huff and a puff the winds of unbelief have blown them down. Tragically, some of these young people never realize that the house of faith can be built with anything else but straw, but others stick with it and struggle for new footing until finally they are able to build again the house of faith, and this time with bricks and mortar! We can mature out of our belief in God, but we can also mature *into* our belief in God.

There are ideas about God that ought to be doubted. There are theological concepts that should be questioned. There are religious practices that need to be set aside. To do so may be painful, and we may on occasion find ourselves perplexed to the point of being able only to admit our inner confusion as did the distraught father who wanted Jesus to heal his son. It is far more healthy, however, to admit our doubts than either to disavow faith prematurely or to affirm faith dishonestly.

II

In his book *The Modern Temper*, Joseph Wood Krutch writes of the inability of so many individuals to achieve either religious belief on the one hand or exultant atheism on the other. It is as if we wanted it both ways: to be believers and nonbelievers simultaneously. One has the impression that many people today would like to avoid the tension of

Perhaps this mood reflects our awareness that we are caught between two worlds. We are nostalgic for the view which interpreted everything from a religious frame of reference, and we are not yet adjusted to the new view of the world which approaches everything from a secular or scientific perspective. We want to be at home in both worlds, but we feel straddled between them and unable to let either go. The language of traditional religion seems strangely inappropriate outside the walls of the church, and the language of the world does not sound sufficiently sacred inside the sanctuary. And so we are caught halfway between a familiar world that may be fading and a new world in which we have not yet found our places. Right now our instincts tells us to play it both ways. Thus we indulge our ambivalence to delay the necessity for decision.

III

Our ambivalence is a convenient way to avoid the difficult demands of Christian discipleship. When we say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," we should examine carefully the occasion that calls for the response. For it is relatively easy to say "I believe" when we are reaping the benefits of faith and easier still to say "help thou mine unbelief" when pressed by the demands of faith. We call such persons "fair weather Christians," i.e., Christians who want all the comfort and encouragement God can give, but who are less sturdy in their convictions when God asks for suffering and sacrifice. When our believing coincides with that which is to our advan-

tage and our disbelieving coincides with that which seems threatening, we should suspect our motives. For our problem may be more one of self-

It is far more healthy to admit our doubts than either to disavow faith prematurely or to affirm faith dishonestly.

centeredness than the will to believe.

The novel *Barabbas*, written by the Scandinavian Par Lagerkvist, is the story of the robber whom the crucifying mob chose to release instead of Jesus, the man who escaped crucifixion and upon whose cross Christ was crucified instead. The novel follows Barabbas from that day and tells how he felt impelled to seek out the disciples of Jesus to learn more about Him. But Barabbas was not ready to give up his old life, and once more he committed highway robbery, which this time resulted in his being sold into slavery. He was befriended and comforted by a fellow-slave who confided that he was a Christian; and through the influence of this companion Barabbas finally became a Christian too.

Later in the novel when the companion, suspect because of his Christian faith, is taken off to be tried by the Romans, Barabbas is asked if he is a Christian too. Barabbas denies it; and as his friend is led off to be crucified, Barabbas suffers intense ambivalence between belief and unbelief as he sees his companion die on a cross that might once again have been his own.

Though we may describe ourselves as either believers or unbelievers, it is probably more basically true that the division exists not so much between us as within us.

Barabbas was ready to be a Christian when it seemed opportune and easy, but he denied Christ when faced with the prospect of torture and death. In reading the novel you realize that Lagerkvist was not simply telling the story of Barabbas but is telling my story and your story as well. We stand where Barabbas stood, caught between belief and unbelief, often veering toward the latter—not so much because we cannot believe but because we cannot bear the consequences of believing.

IV

The ambivalence of belief is never more intense than when we are engulfed by some great tragedy or sorrow and feel utterly helpless and forsaken in the face of it. It was out of this kind of circumstance that the father in the Scripture story cried out in desperation.

In Raphael's famous painting of the Transfiguration, one sees on the lower half of the canvas this same distraught father bringing his epileptic son to Christ in the dim hope that somehow he would be

When our believing coincides with that which is to our advantage and our disbelieving coincides with that which seems threatening, we should suspect our motives.

saved. The scene is in sharp contrast to the upper half of the canvas where we see Christ in all his glory in the company of the three disciples who stand in awe. The two scenes suggest that life is lived on two levels: there are those high moments when we feel lifted up and when belief comes easily, but there are also those experiences in the depths when nothing seems to penetrate the darkness and when belief is hard to come by.

In this life the believer and the nonbeliever may both be enveloped by the same darkness and neither of them see God. The difference does not lie in the darkness but in the ways we perceive it. God may remain hidden, but the believer insists that God is there. The nonbeliever, in the same darkness, finds no such indication. One is able to say "yes" and another says "no," while others of us continue to ex-

God may remain hidden, but the unbeliever insists that God is there. The nonbeliever, in the same darkness, finds no such indication.

claim, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!"

When we are caught on this agonizing see-saw between belief and unbelief, there is one thing we can do. Like the father in the story, we can ask for help: "help thou mine unbelief." And we can take comfort in the assurance that *with our Lord there is mercy not only for our sins; there is mercy also for our doubts.*

MISSION

The Wisdom Literature Of The Old Testament—Part III

Job: The Struggle of Faith

Encountering God



By MICHAEL V. HOUSTON

No amount of prose commentary can do justice to a chiefly poetic work such as the book of Job. It conveys the deepest dimensions of human experience and pathos. At the outset I confess my limitations; I am aware not only of the inadequacy of a prose article, but also of how much of the book still remains a mystery to me. The more I read it, the less sure I am that I have even begun to grasp its full meaning and implications. Perhaps the book is penetrable only by those who, like Job himself, have experienced the depths of suffering and questioning.

Christians often regard Job as a "model of patience" (James 5:10-11), a paragon of silent suffering and restraint in the face of enormous personal disaster. Yet if one reads beyond the second chapter of the book, this simplistic assessment is shattered, for this man is anything but sanguine toward his opponents or his fate. As the dialogue with his friends progresses, Job complains loudly and at times bitterly against his pain and his adversaries. Furthermore, he alternately perceives his God as either his Redeemer or his Tormenting Enemy.

The book begins with a narrative (chs. 1-2),

followed by a long poetic "dispute" or dialogue (3:1-42:6), differing from the first two chapters in style, vocabulary and focus.¹ The conclusion (42:7-17) returns to the narrative style and the major themes introduced at the beginning. There are significant differences between the narrative and poetic sections in their portrayal of Job and the "answers" given for his suffering. Consequently, the narrative and poetic portions of the book are often viewed as contradictory or unrelated to each other. I propose, however, that both the narrative and poetic sections of the book should be considered together. The juxtaposition of the two accounts has both a literary and a theological function. Therefore, I shall focus on the book of Job in its present canonical form and seek to explain how the respective accounts of Job's suffering and the "answers" he receives can be seen as complementary.

Although Job, a righteous man from Uz, is not an Israelite, his piety and zeal for purity are unmatched. His material prosperity seems to befit such a blameless man. After this initial portrait, however, the scene shifts suddenly to the heavenly court, where the Satan, i.e., "the Accuser," is challenged by God to consider the character of his servant Job:

Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. (1:8)²

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Answering, the Accuser impugns Job's motives for his unquestioned goodness: "Of course Job serves you well. Why shouldn't he, for serving you, God, has been quite profitable for him." Then he challenges: "Take away Job's prosperity and blessings, and his "faith" will be exposed for the self-serving nature it actually is." In response God grants the Accuser the power to take away all that Job holds dear, save life itself (1:12). Here the reader is struck by the first of many disturbing and unanswered questions: Is this a game between two "superpowers" in which Job is the pawn? Is such an arrangement fair to the man who has no say about his own participation?

Swiftly there follows Job's loss of possessions and children, intense physical suffering, and social humiliation. But Job remains faithful even in the face of his embittered wife's pleas to "curse God and die" (2:9). Job's rebuke is stern and his acceptance remarkable: "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble" (2:10). Job, it would certainly appear, measures up to the conventional image of the wise and "patient" sufferer.

Three friends enter the scene. Their initial shock at the sight of Job's pain and their inability to express their sentiments remind us of our loss for words when we attempt to comfort those who grieve. But, as often happens when we allow such persons to express their feelings, what is said next seems shocking and "out of character." The long period of silence before his friends is punctured with Job's self-curse:

*May the day of my birth perish,
and the night it was said,
"a boy is born!"
that day—may it turn to darkness:
may God above not care about it;
may no light shine upon it. (Job 3:3-4)*

It is not easy for the modern reader to understand fully how appalling such words would have been to Job's friends. Life is a God-given gift, and to curse the day of one's birth is to deny not only life but also the purposes of its author. His friends must not allow this to go unanswered. Their responses to Job are therefore not merely attempts to squelch ventilation of his emotions, but are designed to set Job right about God's purposes and designs.

Eliphaz takes the initiative in answering Job. According to this Temanite, Job can be sure that the innocent will never perish. Experience, he claims, substantiates this (4:7). Furthermore, Job needs only to appeal to God, and deliverance will be guaranteed (5:8-16). If the righteous are experiencing trials, this

is but God's "correction" which should not be despised (5:17). Job needs only to recognize these facts, hang in there, and await God's deliverance. Bildad and Zophar add little; they build upon the first argument made by their elder spokesman. God is just; therefore the righteous must ultimately emerge protected and rewarded for their goodness (8:3-7).

Yet Job's own experience runs contrary to these arguments. As he protests against their dogmatism, his friends become increasingly angry at Job and defensive about God's justice. Since the character of God demands that good people be awarded, Job's misfortune must be the result of some unconfessed sin he has committed. In fact, Zophar goes so far as to assert that Job does not merit what his sins actually deserve (11:6)! If only Job will acknowledge and confess whatever sin he has committed, he will receive God's merciful forgiveness and subsequent restoration (11:13-19). Later in the debate, even Eliphaz must assume that Job's suffering is the result of great sin. He and the other friends are so sure that God's ways demand this conclusion that they accuse Job of a catalog of sins:

*Is it for piety that he rebukes you
and brings charges against you?
Is not your wickedness great?
Are not your sins endless?
You demanded security from your brothers
for no reason;
you stripped men of their clothing,
leaving them naked.
You gave no water to the weary
and you withheld food from the hungry,
though you were a powerful man, owning land—
an honored man, living on it.
And you sent widows away empty-handed
and broke the strength of the fatherless.
That is why snares are all around you,
why sudden peril terrifies you. (22:4-10)³*

The logic of the friends of Job is flawless. If we set up the syllogism of their argument, it would run as follows:

God is just.
A just God will reward the righteous
and punish the sinner.
Therefore, a person who experiences
suffering must be a sinner.
Conclusion: Since Job suffers, he
must be guilty of sin.

It is important for the modern reader to realize that when the book of Job was written, the Israelites did not believe in an afterlife for the individual in which all injustice would be rectified. Thus neither Job nor his friends have an assurance that suffering in this life will receive compensation in heaven. Consequently,

if God is just, how can Job possibly be undeserving of the affliction he is bearing? Job's friends cannot question God's justice; therefore they conclude that Job must be at fault. However, Job (and the reader who knows of Job's integrity) cannot accept this analysis. Is one to conclude that the original premise, i.e., that God is just, is incorrect? Will Job be forced, through the logic of the situation, to impugn the integrity of his God?

Job's despairing self-curse, which began the dialogue with his friends, increasingly gives way to a more aggressive attack. Although Job longs for an end to his suffering, preferring even death (6:8-13), it is the perceived injustice of his pain which most disturbs him. His anger towards his friends centers on their inability to admit to the truth of his innocence (6:24-30). Their dogmatic blindness has prevented them from realizing that Job's experience does not fit their pat answers regarding God's treatment of the righteous and the wicked. As is often the case, Job's friends are so attached to their own theological conceptions that they will distort the truth and impugn their own friend's integrity rather than admit that their understanding of God's ways may be wrong. Job is even willing to admit that since all people are, in an absolute sense, sinners, conceivably God could be justified in punishing everyone (14:1-6). Yet obviously God is *not* punishing everyone; besides, Job's suffering is not proportional, since there are other people who are less righteous than he who suffer less or not at all (21:1-34).

It is with God, however, that Job experiences his greatest frustration. Job expresses intense anger toward God, feeling at times that He is the chief enemy:

*Surely, O God, you have worn me out;
you have devastated my entire household.
You have bound me and it has become a witness;
my gauntness rises up and testifies against me.
God assails me and tears me in his anger
and gnashes his teeth at me;
Men open their mouths to jeer at me;
they strike my cheek in scorn
and unite together against me.
God has turned me over to evil men
and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked.
All was well with me, but he shattered me;
he seized me by the neck and crushed me.
He has made me his target;
his archers surround me.
Without pity, he pierces my kidneys
and spills my gall on the ground.
Again and again he bursts upon me;
he rushes at me like a warrior. (16:7-14)*

God has used his power unfairly, and clearly He is not always just (9:17-24). It seems that He can destroy the good along with the wicked.

But what bothers Job the most is the *silence* of his God (19:7-8).

*Though I cry, "I've been wronged!"
I get no response;
though I call for help,
there is no justice.
He has blocked my way
so I cannot pass;
he has shrouded my paths in darkness.*

If he could ask God face-to-face the reason for his suffering, and receive an answer, it would be sufficient. Unlike his blind friends, Job knows God perceives his character correctly. Yet why does He remain silent when his people experience unmerited suffering? As a man who issues a legal summons, Job earnestly requests—no, *demand*s—a hearing before God. Only then can Job's integrity, and God's accountability for Job's unfair treatment, be determined (31:35-40).

Although Job longs for an end to his suffering, preferring even death, it is the perceived injustice of his pain which most disturbs him.

Job has demanded to know the hidden ways of God. He desperately wants to know the "why" behind his undeserved pain. The reader of the poem is likewise anxious: Will Job receive a satisfactory answer to the age-old question of how an all-powerful and just God can allow unmerited and seemingly purposeless suffering to occur? Are Job's friends right in their attempt to defend the ways of God? Or is Job correct in refusing to relinquish his integrity and reason, thereby seeming to accuse God of injustice.

Unlike most people who ask God for a hearing, Job is granted his request. The speeches of God from within the storm (38-41), however, turn the tables on Job. God does not really "answer" Job. Instead, God overwhelms Job with a barrage of questions pertaining to creation, nature and the cosmos, leaving Job speechless and humbled. It has been remarked by many that God seems to bully Job here and that He never really addresses Job's feelings or questions. At one point God demands of Job,

*Will the one who contends with the Almighty
correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him! (40:2)*

Job's reaction to God's onslaught of questions is surprising and climactic:

*My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.
Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes. (42:5-6)*

Job has been overwhelmed by the awesome presence of his God. He is not merely humbled; he is satisfied by this strange encounter. Yet not one of his (or the reader's) questions has been addressed. Nevertheless, Job's unexpected reaction concludes the poetic section of the book.

An epilogue relates how God was dissatisfied with Job's friends and affirms it is Job who has spoken correctly of God, not they. Job is ultimately restored to health, prosperity, and a good reputation (42:7-17). He has passed the test. He has been vindicated! Yet did Job ever come to know what the reader of the narrative could see?

The relationship of the narrative and the poetic sections is of decisive importance here. Although the reader is privy (from the narrative) to the larger purpose of Job's ordeal, Job never knows the "why" of his suffering. Nor does he receive an "answer" to the theological dilemma raised in the dialogue with his friends. Yet Job seems content. He attains a deeper "knowledge" of God, which does not depend on receiving the answers to his deepest, most anguished questions. All that Job can rely upon is the superior

It is important for the modern reader to realize that when the book of Job was written, the Israelites did not believe in an afterlife for the individual in which all injustice would be rectified.

might and wisdom of his God. As Paul would later express it, "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Thus Job finds that the ultimate "answer" to his suffering may never be fully known. This mysterious and awesome God is a sufficient grounds for continuing in knowledge and faith.

However, "refined" faith did not come easily. Wrestling with God concerning life's most difficult experiences demanded an honesty on Job's part, for he could never settle for the dogmatic answers of his

friends. Job could not deny what his reason and experience knew to be true. Neither would he give up on his God just because he had confronted an insoluble intellectual/faith problem. And it is in the struggle that we learn what *real* patience is: Job may be angry with God and vent his feelings openly with Him, but he never forsakes his God. His demands for a hearing presuppose this. Like the psalmists, Job at times appears to be on the brink of abandoning his faith; but then he suddenly experiences an assurance of faith and confidence in his Redeemer (13:15-16; 19:25-27; 23:8-12). This is *biblical* patience. It is neither fatalistic resignation nor dogmatic avoidance of the issues and experiences of the actual world. Rather, genuine patience is an endurance based upon faith in a God who is served even without prosperity

God does not really answer Job. Instead, God overwhelms him with a barrage of questions pertaining to creation, nature and the cosmos, leaving Job speechless and humbled.

(cf. 1:9-11) or the solutions to the intellect's (or the heart's) questions. It is this kind of patience/endurance which the New Testament has in mind when it describes Job as "a model of patience."

MISSION

NOTES

¹This is not the place to discuss the abundant scholarly literature which attempts to assign a specific literary genre to the book. Although the poetic section closely resembles the form of a lawsuit with Job as defendant, his friends as witnesses/prosecutors, and God as judge, the presence of other literary elements, as well as its placement in the narrative story, make the book of Job a literary *sui generis*.

²All Scripture quotations are from *The New International Version*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978.

³The listing here of these onerous sins reminds one of the "Confessions" found in Egyptian literature in which a person facing death professes to the gods all he has done, thereby meriting good treatment in the afterlife. In Israel, the temple entrance liturgy contained something analogous. See Psalms 15, 24 for examples of the requirements of righteousness which were expected of the temple worshipers. Here in Job the "Confession" is turned into a negative indictment against Job's assertions of righteousness.

GOD IS LOVE

. . . written for the wedding ceremony
of Tom and Cindy (Cameron) Grafton

"God is Love."

*These three words compose the greatest truth of this life,
but the greatest mystery as well.
For if these words are to be believed,
they seem to say that love has the same qualities as God:
That love is everywhere.
That love is infinite.
That love is all powerful.
That love is eternal.*

*But one may ask:
If love is everywhere,
Why are so many unable to find it?
If love is infinite,
Why are so many lives so empty?
If love is all powerful,
Why do so many lives remain unchanged?
If love is eternal,
Why does it die in the lives of so many?*

*You must always remember that love is greater than yourself—
Greater than your heart,
your desires,
your feelings.
It is not a thing to be possessed,
but Life to be expressed
through the open channel of a selfless heart.*

*Indeed, Love is everywhere,
but only when you are content to be nowhere
for the sake of another.
Love is infinite,
but only when you have given your entire finite self
to someone else.
Love is all powerful,
but only when you have ceased to wrest what you can
from the lives of others.
Love is eternal,
but only when the importance of your own precious time
ceases to exist.*

*Only then can Love live in you.
Only then can God live in you.
Only then does Mystery become Truth in your life.*

—Ken Cameron

Ken Cameron of Fayetteville, Arkansas, writes that he is in a state of transition at the present time.

RESTORATION: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Restoration and the Cultural Risk

THE RECOGNITION THAT
THE MEANING OF THE GOSPEL
IS RELATIVE TO PEOPLE AND
THEIR SITUATION HAS PROMPTED
TWO EXTREMES OF REACTION
IN OUR DAY.

By RON DURHAM

As the restoration principle undergoes continual reassessment, it is important to remember that we are not merely examining an abstraction. The attempt to return to the original well-springs of the faith involves *people*, as well as theory. Wrapped up in the desire to "be believed" are two people-oriented risks. On the one hand, the merely cultural concerns of people in our own day may blind us to what is of eternal validity in the biblical material. On the other hand, what was of purely incidental significance in the culture of people who appear in scripture may be seized on as eternal. It may encroach *unbiblically* on our responsibility to be God's people in our own day.

Every attempt to be Christian this side of the cross has had to come to grips with this cultural risk. Conservatives or restorationists have been hesitant to label much biblical material "merely cultural." Thus, they run the risk of being irrelevant to their own culture. Liberals have often relegated the most basic New Testament material to what they consider a provincial past. Thus, they risk throwing out the baby with the bath.

What is sometimes overlooked on both sides is that these generalized attempts to deal with theology and culture can never be self-consistent or wholly

successful. Decisions about the distinction between the eternal gospel and transient culture are always arbitrary at some point. This is simply because a people's faith never appears abstracted from the people themselves. External signs of belief which later generations may consider "mere symbols"—such as the veiling of women—are an actual part of reality for the people who are gripped by that symbol.¹ The cost and risk of discarding the biblical symbols has been understood more clearly by conservatives than by liberals. The urgency of speaking to moderns in symbols that are meaningful to them has been sensed more readily by liberals than by conservatives.

The restoration movement has found it easy to label such things as wearing veils and foot washing as expendable culture. The fact is that *all* doctrines and practices in the New Testament documents are set squarely in New Testament culture; if this had not been true, people of the day would have felt no points of contact with the gospel. Likewise, all attempts to apply the gospel are influenced by the modern interpreter's time and place; if it were not true, we could never be touched to our depths with the judgment and grace of the word.

The recognition that the meaning of the gospel is relative to people and their situation has prompted two extremes of reaction in our day. Some despair at the possibility of truth and become immobilized by the mistaken notion that relativity means futility.² Others adopt a knee-jerk stance and enshrine their

Reprinted from the April 1974 issue of *Mission*. At the time the article was written, Ron Durham was an editor for the Sweet Publishing Company in Austin, Texas. A former editor of *Mission*, he is currently Editorial Director of the Minister's Personal Library, a book club operated by Word, Inc., in Waco, Texas.

current understandings as the eternal truth—having seen the abyss, they avoid it at the price of honesty and humility.

avoiding extremes

I argue that the modern heirs of restorationism ought to be in a position to avoid either of these extremes. But I fear that the posturing of both liberals and conservatives who think they have sliced New Testament theology neatly from New Testament culture is obscuring that possibility.

First, those so easily denying any concept of pattern authority to the New Testament scriptures—viewing their normative force as limited to another culture—should realize that if they cling to *any* biblical concept they cling to a notion dripping with primitive culture.

The doctrine of the church; Christology; baptism and communion; even the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ—all these were preceded by at least formally similar ideas in Jewish and/or Hellenistic cultures.

Obviously, the nineteenth century liberal conclusions that Christianity was *merely* cultural was oversimplified and overstated.³ The faith *does* have its uniqueness; but it does not lie in its unrelatedness to culture (and conservative attempts to show how various details in the above comparisons differ miss the point). The uniqueness of Christianity stands or falls with our belief that "God was in Christ (to a degree so different from others in that culture that it is a difference in kind) reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). We discuss "restoring the faith" instead of "restoring the faiths" of the ancient world because of our trust in the Man of the faith.

But when and where was God in this Christ? In first-century Palestine, a time and place progressively further from our ken. Hence, it is inevitable that as the cultural gap widens, *biblical* theology will become an ever-increasing scandal to those who have no stronger grip on what happened in Christ than whatever the times allow is in vogue. The only alternative is to allow some normative authority to the cultural-theological mix that is the gospel. To deny this is theologically, historically, and practically naive.

losing the gospel

Theologically, some have attempted to separate the gospel from its "world view" and to reshape it to suit a more scientific age. It has been held that biblical man naively thought heaven was "up," all births were miraculous (much less a virgin birth), and

changing water into wine would be no more marvelous than being told about photosynthesis and the fermentation process.⁴

This argument is not only shallow; it lacks the boldness to take the cultural risk. It would have surprised a Jew to find the omnipresent God of Psalm 139 somewhere "out there." It was a marvel (Greek *semeion*—a sign that God was visiting man's world in a radically different way) that Jesus changed water to wine. And Joseph's embarrassment at finding Mary with child is a strong hint that he, as well as we moderns, suspected where babies come from. I find the first-century reality structures—which included the belief that nature's sovereign God could interrupt nature's "normal" functions—more theologically meaningful than the modern myths of scientism and secularism.

Historically, one can look back on a scene cluttered with abortive attempts to do theology without a biblical pattern. The early gnostics were the first to attempt to separate theology (the Christ idea) from culture (the fleshly Jesus). A good deal of neo-orthodoxy in our own day suffers from the same gnostic bent which would divide "salvation" history from "mere" history. The early councils' pronouncements against gnosticism were at least based on a sure instinct: Jesus was either the Word made flesh—with its embarrassing fleshly and cultural realities—or he was not the Word at all.

We must also remember how the real father of the modern liberal movement, G.W.F. Hegel, lost the gospel in the opposite fashion. Spirit, eternal reality, *did* enter man's culture, Hegel taught. It set in motion reactions in history that were supposed to so transform culture that it exhibits Spirit concretely. In practice, however, Hegel's sweeping scheme buried Spirit *within* culture. Today, men have called it the Death of God—and that school, as dead-ended as it was—stands as the logically consistent result of the attempt to dogmatize the dialectic of history as the bearer of Spirit. History can kill a man called Jesus; but *mere* history cannot raise a man called the Christ. A risk well worth taking is that the New Testament interpretation of this event, and the earliest communities of faith formed by it, constitute some sort of blueprint for all history.

Then there is the practical inadequacy of refusing to grant "blueprint" authority to the gospel. As a religion writer for a secular newspaper, I watched a modern denomination struggle mightily to teach its members a "servant theology." One of its ministers agonized that his people simply could not apply the pattern! But not only Isaiah's servant passages but the New Testament's interpretation of them had long been relegated to cultural irrelevancy in this movement. How could a church be urged to social action

on the basis of a gospel its ministers had taught them not to believe?

In another group, which has long prided itself on requiring no doctrinal stance of its ministers, the question of a homosexual and a bigamist serving in the ministry arose. Finally one bishop cried out, "We must brand this as *sin* because the Bible says so!" Suddenly, in the exigency of moral chaos, a liberal bishop found blueprint fundamentalism strangely useful.

inadequate hermeneutic

But it must also be emphasized that conservatives have never neatly settled the issue of culture, either. Many have yet to admit the bankruptcy of a glib application of the "command, example, and necessary inference" hermeneutic. As a contribution to the nineteenth century scene, this scheme was a creative effort which was actually worth more recognition than it received from surrounding folk. As a pat and permanent solution to "pattern authority," it proved inadequate: its elevation to a status even higher than scripture divided the very movement struggling to unite men under the banner of "Christians only."

And all along, even the strongest advocates of pattern authority adopted a pick-and-choose method of deciding what in the New Testament scriptures was theologically essential, as distinct from what was culturally irrelevant. Indeed, some method must be adopted; but the hardline rightist often cannot bring himself to admit that his canon of interpretation lies outside the canon of scripture. Admitted or not, the strictly biblicist approach would find us all washing feet (ritually) and our women wearing veils in worship.

Even the more sophisticated approach of Krister Stendahl of Harvard some years ago proved too easy. He urged that the cultural gap be bridged by asking first what scripture *meant*, and then what it *means*—today.⁵ But an intermediate question must be asked: *Why* did it mean what it meant? And does that reason still hold today?

The current issue of the role of women in the church is a good example of both the necessity and the difficulty of asking why a particular position was taken in scripture. A biblicist approach must surely fake it some to explain how Paul can command women to be silent in 1 Corinthians 14, and give them instructions about how to pray and prophesy in chapter 11.

We must ask about the situation in Paul's day which prompted such puzzling instructions. What cultural factors were at work—both regarding

women and regarding his use of theology—specifically the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of sin—as he teaches on the issue? Again it becomes clear that it is *not* clear how New Testament religion can be separated from New Testament culture.

needing each other

I conclude, therefore, that the cliché that "liberals and conservatives need each other" applies among restoration heirs. The left has not yet learned to walk without the support of those who know better the cost of giving up the pattern authority of the scriptures. The right has not yet learned how to meet modern issues without the goad supplied by those more sensitive toward forms that tend to fossilize men instead of setting them free as the gospel was designed to do.

Almost all of us, right and left, still believe that gospel—the message that God was uniquely in the crucified and resurrected Christ—and in the formative, normative power of that evangel. It is that message which proves greater than cultural gaps, so powerful that it compels conformity not as a legal requirement but as a pathway to freedom.

We disagree widely on a theological method of applying the implications of that message. This is admittedly a crucial issue, and calls for our most rigorous study and thought. It is also an issue that has never been perfectly solved. We cannot afford to wait for its solution to love each other as brothers, to act in concert in Christian ministry, and to tell of the freedom in our plea to be Christians only. We cannot wait until we know precisely how to separate New Testament faith from New Testament culture. All will make some missteps along that path; that is the cultural risk. Yet, it is a risk that all of us can afford to take—if we can take it together. _____MISSION

NOTES

¹As Paul Tillich saw so clearly, the term "mere symbol" implies a failure to understand that a symbol "participates in the power of what it symbolizes, and therefore, it can be a medium of the Spirit." *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), vol. III, p. 123.

²A book like H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, which seems to show an inevitable progression from sect to denomination, often has this effect on young men who had hoped that restoration was an exception to the historical process. They can take some heart in the fact that Niebuhr himself felt later that the study unduly stressed social relativity at the expense of human responsibility. The result of his later thought was

(continued on page 18)

PATHS OF UNITY

A Disciple Responds To The New Search For Unity

Disciples still claim the Stone-Campbell origins, which we share with the Church of Christ and the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. We simply interpret our biblical and historical heritage differently. Stone and Campbell are seen as pioneers of ecumenism, not as great Scripture scholars.

By DANIEL GRIGGS

I grew up in the Church of Christ (non-instrumental) in Tennessee, received my college degree in Bible at David Lipscomb, and took a Master of Arts in Bible at Harding Graduate School in Memphis. In 1970 I entered the preaching ministry in a rural congregation in Kentucky, moving shortly after that to western Pennsylvania. I served Church of Christ congregations for five years before transferring to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1975. The following reflections represent my views after having been out of the Church of Christ for a decade.

Every denomination has its strengths and its weaknesses. I am quite aware of the shortcomings of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and I am sure that my readers are aware of weaknesses in the non-instrumental fellowships—weaknesses from which many have turned away over the years. Before I left, I had a passion for Christian unity, which was strongly discouraged in the brotherhood at the time. I am very pleased to see all the reports now pouring forth about conversations between leaders in the Church of Christ and leaders in the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. I would expect the Nashville leadership to raise strong objections and the Texas leadership to signal a more open attitude, and this seems to be the case. Still, the process has begun and there can be no going back to a time when it was a taboo subject. Even if the two

Dan Griggs is a minister in Parma, Ohio, a member of the Council on Christian Unity and the Disciples Peace Fellowship, and an avid guitar player.

fellowships never achieve a sense of fellowship together, both groups will be deeply changed. I am very glad about that. I only wish it could have come earlier. I will refrain from making predictions because nobody cares about my predictions anyway and because I believe God will do what God wants to do with this process.

Disciples leaders have been participants in some of the new intra-Restoration conversations. Is it possible that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) would turn around and take this as a serious option for its denominational future? A recent convention of Canadian Disciples approved a resolution (that is the way we Disciples talk nowadays!) which was quite positive toward contact with and fellowship toward other Restoration groups. But then, of course, Canadian Disciples are famous for being more conservative than those in the United States, such an attitude stemming from their Scotch Baptist background.

It is my opinion that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will not move back toward the Church of Christ and the Christian Churches (Independent). There are several reasons for this conclusion. First, few members of Disciples congregations have a strong sense of Restoration history; they would see little need to seek more direct contact with two much more conservative religious bodies. For Disciples have very little in common with non-instrumentalists and independents, now eighty years after the first division was complete and nearly fifty years after the first trends leading to the second divi-

sion. This "very little in common" extends beyond the Disciples sense of history to include the dominant outlook of typical Disciples. Whereas the conversations between non-instrumentalists and independents focus on hermeneutics, biblical authority, the nature of "fellowship," and other similar "heavy" subjects, Disciples simply care little about these topics. Unlike non-instrumentalists, Disciples no longer feel the need to back up what they choose to do with scriptural authority. This does not mean that Disciples have thrown the Bible away; it means that for Disciples the Bible does not function as a rule-book for church development. Among Disciples the Bible has authority as a witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and to the ways women and men who have met God in Christ have responded to Him. The organization of the church, the function of officers, the appointments of the worship center (we call it a "sanctuary" most of the time now) all come from common sense and the history of the congregation and of the denomination. This is not to say that there are no members of Disciples congregations whose outlook is similar to that of independents or non-instrumentalists—there are many such Disciples. But they are the minority. Disciples see themselves as a

Among Disciples the Bible has authority as a witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and to the ways women and men who have met God in Christ have responded to Him.

mainline denomination within Protestantism, and they like that identity.

The second reason I believe the Disciples of Christ will not participate in the new Restoration unity process is the Disciples' approach to Christian unity. To be crass about it, Disciples decided a long time ago that the Restoration "plea" is invalid but that the ecumenical intuition is correct. As a result, for the entire twentieth century, Disciples have allied themselves with the world-wide Protestant ecumenical movement. This movement has several centers. The conciliar approach led to the development of local and national councils of churches and eventually to the World Council of Churches, in which many diverse denominations all coordinate their work in foreign missions, world aid, educational curricula, social action, and theological discussion. Another center of this movement is the training of ministers. An accreditation agency has been created to certify theological seminaries; and

although specific seminaries may draw most of their students from the sponsoring denomination, students from other denominations are welcome, and often classes are arranged to provide those students training in their own denomination's polity and history. I attended a Presbyterian seminary where the emphasis was of course on the Presbyterian theology; but there were many Disciples and Methodists, a strong representation of Episcopalians, and quite a few members of the United Church of Christ, along with foreign students from Europe, Africa, and Asia. A third center of the world-wide Protestant ecumenical movement is to be found in clusters of denominations actively pursuing union, such as the Consultation on Church Union which in-

I think Disciples will not be deeply involved in the intra-Restoration unity process because the Disciples of Christ are already otherwise committed in regard to Christian unity.

cludes ten denominations in the United States. Disciples not only participate in these centers of ecumenism, but are actively involved in spearheading them. This is one of the major activities of the denominational structure of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and this was one of the primary reasons the denomination undertook restructure in the 1960s. So the second reason I think Disciples will not be deeply involved in the intra-Restoration unity process is that the Disciples of Christ are already otherwise committed in regard to Christian unity.

Now all of this is not to say that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has thrown over its biblical and historical heritage and commitments. Disciples still claim the Stone-Campbell origins, which we share with the Church of Christ and the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. We simply interpret our biblical and historical heritage differently. Stone and Campbell are seen as pioneers of ecumenism, not as great Scripture scholars. The early history of the American Restoration Movement is seen in the context of the primitive social conditions of the frontier, which were (thankfully) mitigated with the coming of the railroads, allowing the development of culture and sophistication in the communities and in the churches. The primitive focusing of congregational authority in the elders was blunted in the 1930s in a public attack on domina-

tion by elders and by the development of a corporation-like structure for the congregation and for the denomination. The impact of Liberal and then Neo-Orthodox theology on the way Disciples have understood and interpreted the Bible has been almost complete. Most Disciples now attend to Scripture for inspiration and moral instruction, not for a doctrinal system or a polity.

The current debate between the non-instrumentalists and the independents who are involved in the intra-Restoration unity process would have very little meaning for most Disciples: why be concerned about whether the churches in the Roman era used instrumental music? We live now; and such music is not only inspiring, but it also sets us on a par with the Presbyterians and the Methodists. And after all, the New Testament does not once condemn it. With this reasoning it is clear that the biblical thrust of Christian unity is united with a concern for spiritual experience. I think this is the attitude of most members

of Disciples congregations.

I have written this article solely to explain my view of how the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will probably respond to the current conversations between the Churches of Christ and the Christian Churches (Independent). I have not gone into great detail about the weaknesses and strengths of the Disciples fellowship; that subject would require another time and another audience. In summary, I am sure that some Disciples will become involved in the conferences, but I am equally sure that the denomination will generally ignore it. We have too little in common now. My own hope is that the two conversation groups will be able to work out a strong basis for fellowship. The evangelical movement in our country needs the testimony of Christian unity just as much as the mainline denominations do.

MISSION

A Word For Our Times

**a column for
opinion and
personal
reflection**

Relics Of The Past

By Ben B. Boothe

A banker learns to be calm, and to control strictly his emotional reactions while in a loan interview. Many people cast the banker in an aura of high esteem. Perhaps they believe if he can be trusted with their money, he can be trusted for advice on personal matters. Thus over the years I have been asked a thousand questions—some of which were surprising, even to me: which job to take, what college to attend, where to donate lands and money, which woman to marry, and even, in one case of a pregnant woman, which man to marry. Questions such as what lawyer to hire, which C.P.A. to use, whether or not to hire out as a mercenary soldier, whether to leave one's family, on and on, people assuming the banker has answers.

But this day stands out, because it said so much about humanity, religion, convictions, and misplaced zeal. An old man hobbled into the bank lobby, wrinkled, and bent with age, but with energy in his expression. He grabbed me as I was hurriedly leav-

ing, on the way to an appointment. "Brother Boothe, I need to talk to you!" I was late, but that intense expression on his face was compelling, and he had my arm with a strong grip. "Okay, come on into my office." We sat down and I asked, "What can I do for you, Mr. Sanders?"

He bustled with excitement, "I've got an idea, but I wanted my banker's advice before I did anything!" This old man had lived most of his life in this same town. He had never achieved wealth, or any notoriety. But he loved his church, and he believed in its creeds. Indeed his faith in those creeds seemed to give him some sense of identity, some sense of significance to make his life worthwhile. As I looked at this old man, the only remarkable thing about his life was his commitment to his denomination. He went on, "I'm going to get 1,000 people together. Get each one to give \$1,000.00! That's a million, right?"

"Right," I said.

"Then I'm going to buy a full page

ad in the newspaper, and say, 'If anyone can prove that the Church of Christ is not the one true church, we will give him one million dollars.'"

I was speechless. This old man was so convinced! So sincere, and naive. It was his life! I didn't want to say anything which would destroy his faith, and yet, feared that he was about to make a terrible mistake. The ridicule and embarrassment he could be subjecting himself to—not to mention the other problems!

I frowned and very seriously answered, fixing my eyes on his, "I believe that is a mistake."

He seemed startled. "Why?"

"Because, in this day of litigation, you will lose your money. Someone will challenge you legally, and you will lose."

He listened and seemed to value the words. "What should I do?"

In my office I happened to have some materials by Alexander Campbell. "Mr. Sanders, you have heard of Alexander Campbell, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, he was a brilliant man. Brilliant enough to get the Church of Christ movement started during the 1800s. Now, I don't want you to collect a single dollar until you have read what he believed about other religious groups. For what he really wanted was a unity movement, not a sect. Will you promise me that?" He hesitated, and then nodded.

His was a generation who would fight over a religious issue. His generation had fire! They filled up tents with thousands to hear great debates over

issues that sent people to hell! They went home from church telling about how the preacher really put over "a point of the law," *they* said the law of God. They were a fiery, colorful, and sure-that-they-were-right generation—no compromise, no grace, no quarter. And, yes, they were a good people. People of the Book! But their Book was sometimes interpreted for them by men without grace, love, or temperance: "my way or no way," "the one true church," "God will not hear the prayers of a sinner." And, as their children became educated, that generation was left behind. Fighting

those same old battles. Repeating those same old debates. Charging those same old windmills of fifty years ago.

I hurried off to my appointment; and as the day ended, I considered the bent, worn-out old man, and his philosophy. A philosophy aimed at a people with so little esteem that it had to exclude all others, so as to give its adherents a sense of importance. And it occurred to me that the old man and his philosophy were relics of the past. To be loved and cherished and understood from the perspective of their time . . . but as relics . . . curious, and interesting, but relics.

How Much Is A Person Worth?

By John Wright

If you show partiality, you sin.
James 2:9

As I write this, I sit in one of the many over-flowing waiting rooms at Ben Taub hospital in Houston. All around me are sick and hurting people—most of whom are indigent. Almost all of which have been sitting and waiting for hours. Two men in handcuffs just sat down in the seats immediately in front of me. Watching the varied levels of insanity that I see transpiring before my eyes, I find myself wondering—how much is a person worth? Is the human worth of one person the same as that of any other? Or do we come with different price tags on our heads?

It seems to me as though one of our country's founding principles was that "all men are created equal." Yet, as I look about and see the way we treat one another, I cannot help but think

that some are perceived as more equal than others.

Certainly, it appears that those of higher intelligence are deemed as intrinsically of more value than those who are dull. The beautiful are treasured more than the ugly or plain. The successful more than those who have failed. The religious more than the people of the streets. The white-skinned exceed the brown, black, and yellow. Those who have been labeled as "losers" are not treated with the same human dignity as those who are "promising" or "up and comers" or "leaders." Instead, contempt or impatience or blatant patronizing is our rule of conduct. Oh, yes, sometimes it is subtle. But, often as not, it is bold and shameless.

Surely, it is not a problem that is simple to remedy. It is all too easy to rationalize because of our own personal attachment. What I mean is that

my family has greater personal worth to me than anyone else on the face of the earth. Because of that fact, I treat my family with definite preference. Probably you feel the same toward your family. And I suspect that is the way it is supposed to be. But you see, that makes it quite easy to justify treating all people with varying degrees of partiality.

Yet, when we extend "partiality" beyond that personal realm, do we not sin? When we treat some folks like kings and others like dirt, isn't that wrong? Ought not every person be treated with human dignity? Not because of his/her beauty or affluence or influence or nationality. But, simply because he/she is created in the image of God.

Lord Jesus, help us to remember that as we respond to "one of the least of these," so also we respond to you.

By David A. Sampson

Maturity Or A New Infancy?

Abraham Joshua Heschel, the premier Jewish-American thinker of the 20th century has written, "If the ultimate goal is power then modern man has come of age. However, if the ultimate goal is meaning of existence, then man has already descended into a new infancy."

Late 20th century civilization seems to be obsessed with power—acquiring it and wielding it over others. This is the age of power politics, power lunches, and even power watches. We can read books which tell us how to intimidate others by the way we dress.

Unfortunately, we are all too familiar with the language of "megatonage and throw weights." Everything is "turbo-charged" from cars to hair dryers. But perhaps the most common source, measurement, and display of power in our day is wealth and possessions.

Let's face it; it's easy to be impressed

with what we have discovered, harnessed, and acquired. Compared to previous generations we have come of age in the late 20th century!

Or have we? Have we in fact entered a new infancy? Has all our power in its myriad of forms led to meaningful existence? The weight of evidence would cry out, "No!" Ours is an age

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characterized by fractured relationships, drug addiction, throw-away babies, and suicide.

Who could really argue that our society for all of its power has found meaningful existence?

But this dilemma is not new to our age. Actually, it is quite old and I would not be honest if I left the impression that we are the first to be consumed with power. The wise man of Ecclesiastes was driven to cynicism and

despair as he looked at his own society, "I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun and beheld the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power . . . and I thought the dead who were already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive" (Ecclesiastes 4:1-2).

Power is relative; its quantity and manifestations change from generation

to generation. Yet it is terribly constant; divorced from the transcendent, it destroys our humanity.

Heschel knew that, but we as Christians have an even greater understanding of that transcendent God, because we have seen him in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He who was transcendent came to live among us and share his life with us.

"I came so that you might have life, and have it abundantly."

Don't Count My Blessings For Me!

By David Mercer

Once when I was visiting my family, my mother imparted this bit of wisdom to me: "I think it is good for me to count my blessings, but I don't want someone to count them for me!"

Do you know people who come to you when you feel sadness over some tragedy and tell you that you should not feel that way? They remind you of some of your blessings and suggest you should really be happy instead of sad. They walk away thinking that they have been comforting, when they have

actually made you feel guilty over an honest emotion.

Many people think they comfort those who grieve by telling them to "snap out of it." How callous and unsympathetic! When a child cries because he has injured his finger, we do not say, "Here now, you have nine other fingers that are not hurt. You shouldn't be feeling any pain at all." Of course we would not treat a child that way, but how many times have we told others not to feel sad when they had a legitimate reason for grief?

Jesus teaches us through instruction and example to meet others' needs, but just to tell someone to stop being unhappy does not help at all. Instead, we should "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). If you should find me suffering, put your arm around my shoulder, hold my hand, cry with me, tell me you are sorry, or perhaps do a kind deed; but don't count my blessings for me. With the help of your comfort, perhaps I will soon be strong enough to count them myself.

(RESTORATION, continued from page 13)
the more balanced *The Responsible Self*.

³Perhaps the greatest error in assuming that Christianity simply borrowed its message from paganism is that the notion of *incarnation* in Christianity was actually offensive to pagan ideas of dying and rising gods. Cf. A. D. Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. ix, etc. But in the last century, seminary students read Sir James G. Frazier's *The*

Golden Bough, or E. Hatch's *Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* and concluded that Christianity was merely a mystery cult writ large.

⁴Even James D. Smart lapses from his usual clarity at this point in *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), chap. X.

⁵"Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. I, pp. 418-37.

When the geologist has analyzed all the mountain's rocks, the chemist all its minerals; when the astronomer has traced the earth's orbit that brings on the dawn, and the physicist has counted and tabulated the rays of light that make the colors, our conviction of the scene's beauty will be as little explained or proved as is our confidence in God. . . . Every realm of reality has its own appropriate kind of proof, and a method of proof available in one realm is seldom, if ever, usable in another. . . . If, obsessed by the procedure of a laboratory as the solitary path of knowledge, one will have no convictions which cannot meet its tests, then in good logic there must be a great emigration from his soul. All his convictions about morals and beauty, all his convictions about personal friendships and about God must leave together. He will have a depopulated spirit. . . . The most essential and valuable equipment of our souls is in convictions which the demonstrations of physicist can as little reach as an inch worm, clammering up the Himalayas, can measure the distance to the sun.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Meaning of Faith*

BOOKS

Bruce Edwards, Book Review Editor
Readers are invited to submit reviews to
 1040 Village Drive, Bowling Green, OH 43402

Computers and Christianity: The Challenge of the Future

A review of Joe Nathan, *Micro-Myths: Exploring the Limits of Learning with Computers*, Winston Press, 1985 and Parker Rossman, *Computers: Bridges to the Future*, Judson Press, 1985.

By now we've gotten used to the proposition that microcomputers have radically altered the way financiers, executive-types, and certainly, writer-editors go about their business. It is a contemporary truism that computers have become essential tools for "productivity," and TV commercials consistently link the Michelob life-style with spreadsheet facility in the way they used to pair it with athletic performance. Likewise, we are increasingly told how important a computer is, not only to the office but also to the home—little Johnny and Kate mustn't be left behind in the revolution, which promises to change the way both children and adults learn what it is they have to learn. In the midst of all this it is not clear that our roving bands of social critics have begun to assess the actual impact of computers on our culture, assess it, that is, beyond the USA TODAY-level of happy-go-lucky promotion of computers for computers' sake. What kinds of questions should we as Christians—as parents, teachers, and workaday employees—be asking about these electronic gizmos and their effects on our lives and patterns of thinking?

Joe Nathan believes that computers are no more and no less innovative as "teaching machines" than televisions, vcrs, "talking typewriters," or even the radio—each of which, he reminds, were introduced to parents and educators with a great deal of hoopla as remarkable adjuncts to teaching that would revolutionize learning. Nathan's book, *Micro-Myths*, challenges the "hype" of the computer industry, investigating what he terms seven myths about computers and learning, among them: (1) computers are just another neutral learning tool; (2) com-

puters are the most effective tool in learning most subjects; (3) computers will revolutionize schooling; (4) the lessons of the past about introducing new technology into schools are clear and obvious; and (5) all responsible parents who can afford it should buy their children a computer.

Despite this seemingly negative list, Nathan does believe that computers can be used effectively and significantly in teaching children and adults; his book is a cautionary tale about the growing utopianism

Computers are not neutral—they radically alter both ways of thinking and lifestyles, the very way we organize our lives.

that surrounds computers. Nathan is a board member of the Minnesota Education Computing Corporation, one of the best known and most respected educational consortiums investigating the practical uses of the computer in the classroom. Computers will not solve our learning problems but, like any tool, can be used to complement teaching strategies that lend themselves to the interactive process that computers model. More than a harangue, Nathan's book is a serious and practical inquiry into how computers affect students' learning capabilities and outlook on life.

One comes away impressed with Nathan's three concluding themes. First, Nathan cautions, widespread involvement of parents and schools is necessary to insure that computer applications are not left to experts and marketing executives. Without the involvement of parents, schools are left to devise their own computer curricula, potential victims of the computer industry's natural self-aggrandizement. Second, computers are not neutral—they radically alter both ways of thinking and lifestyles, the very

way we organize our lives. Nathan points out the peculiarity of saying good-bye to his wife and children as he goes off to work in his "office" in the morning—a spare bedroom in their Connecticut home. Third, to make the most effective use of computers, Nathan argues, some rethinking must take place about curriculum and staffing. Schools need to hire some non-traditional teaching specialists to plan curricula and train their existing staff and must re-create vocational and career opportunities which take into account the potentialities the computer represents. He cites the Minnesota school district that helped a group of students learn to operate their family farms more efficiently using computer simula-

Rossman capably presents the formidable challenges the "fifth generation" of computers will represent to traditional thinking about mankind and its relationship to knowledge and to God.

tions and forecasts. Nathan concludes his book with a sane and helpful summary of what parents and educators should do to become more aware of the limits and the applications of computers in education.

While Nathan does not explicitly raise theological questions about computers, his book is a good starting place for the reader who just wants to be informed about what computers can and can't do in education. Parker Rossman's *Computers: Bridges to the Future*, on the other hand, is a serious inquiry into the "effect of tomorrow's computer tools on religious thought and institutions." It is not an easy book to read—and this is not because it is poorly written or filled with technical jargon. Rather, it is hard to read because Rossman capably presents the formidable challenges the "fifth generation" of computers will represent to traditional thinking about mankind and its relationship to knowledge and to God. Those church leaders and disciples who want to know what it might be like to minister to the 21st Century should read Rossman's far-reaching prophecy of the future. Rossman focuses not only on advances in technology but upon the way technology changes the way we think about ourselves.

Quoting technology critic Jacques Ellul to the effect that the modern age has been preoccupied with HOW to do things and this has led to a loss of perspective about WHAT must be done, Rossman concludes, "If it does become possible to create tools to do anything we want, the issue is: What do we

want?" Rossman does not attempt to answer this question as much as frame the appropriate questions that should follow from it. In this, the book is both troubling and exhilarating: troubling, because it is clear that the Church has not even begun to contemplate the effects of the new technology on education, communication, interpersonal relationships, the home, and so on; exhilarating, because Rossman is neither pessimistic nor utopian about the future. He sees the struggles and the opportunities that computers, as one aspect of the future-is-now technology, present to the church.

Rossman's primary concern is the effect of the computer on the "life of the mind." Western man, he points out, tends to think in a linear, "logical" fashion—a product of the left-to-right orientation that alphabetic writing systems have evolved over time. Knowledge is thus organized linearly so that it is retrievable conveniently—by letter or number—and can be stored faithfully in its slot. The computer, however, is not bound by such linear patterns of organization, storage, or retrieval. There are no "slots," or rather, all "facts" are stored in one vast, always-available pool. Any bit of information may be retrieved in an instant from a random access memory; conceptual leaps, recombinations of ideas and frameworks, may be achieved with the pressing of a key.

If Western man is freed from—or less dependent upon—this linear, Aristotelian pattern of thinking,

The Church has not even begun to contemplate the effects of the new technology on education, communication, interpersonal relationships, or the home.

will the result be loss or gain? In the midst of these new epistemological venues, how will concepts of deity, relationships within local churches, and the meaning of Scripture be radically altered or redefined? Rossman's book helps prepare us for facing these questions and points to areas of investigation that may yield an answer. One need not be a computer expert to follow Rossman's exposition though he does provide a helpful glossary in the back.

Nathan and Rossman have composed two provocative and unsettling books, appropriate for study groups and family dinner table discussion. One can hardly think of two other volumes written for popular consumption that elucidate the key issues of the computer revolution better than these.

MISSION

FORUM



The Anguish of Change

It's at least ten years too late for many of us, but at last an article like "Pilgrimage of a Congregation: The Anguish of Change" has been printed in *Mission!* Thank you!

And thank Lanny Hunter for sharing his personal insights with *Mission's* current and former readers. I found particularly poignant Lanny's statement that "unless we are content with progress that is absolutely glacial, a deliberate decision must be made to effect change."

I do not share Lanny's optimism that perhaps other Churches of Christ will take the stand needed to stop the exodus, having both personally experienced the glacial age and been part of its exodus. But I do have great empathy for Lanny Hunter's strong and beautifully expressed convictions and thank him for the courage and energy to put them in writing for others.

Sallie Turner Hightower
Former *Mission* Trustee
Houston, Texas

How The Church Of Christ Became A Denomination

Here are a few observations about Don Haymes's article "How the Church of Christ Became a Denomination" in the March issue:

Waterview [Richardson, Texas] has about 1100 members, of whom 568 are active and involved, for a percentage of 60% involved in "corporate" congregational ministries and programs.

There are 52 ministries. Each ministry is led by a deacon or ministry leader who controls the budget and pace of the ministry. Ministers serve on the various committees and are under eldership mandate to facilitate the development of leadership within our men and women. In addition there is a varying number of special "task forces" to meet one-time needs such as the building program.

The reason for the high involvement is the very active women's ministries,

high number of deacons (42), traditional Waterview management concept of dependence upon the members, and an emphasis on involvement of members.

Now some "gut" reaction:

Haymes paints with a broad brush (say about two miles wide!) and misses the mark entirely. First of all, there are many, many churches which still operate under the same concept as did James Allen. They hold strongly to the belief that the eldership is infallible and lord of all it surveys. In such congregations the eldership is absolutely responsible for everything and anything. I firmly believe in the authority of elders and gladly submit to our elders. But to say that the stronger a preacher is the weaker the elders are is indeed one of our problems. It is not a matter of strong or weak. It is a matter of responsibilities, delegation, and authority. Were there no strong preachers in the first century? My experience is that many preachers work together as partners with the deacons and the elders. That partnership does not threaten the elders, it helps them. How does the church benefit from a weak ministry?

It is also impossible to categorize the "Church of Christ." We are not just a lot of mindless groups following one another into some abyss. We struggle with these matters just as Haymes does. He is right, however, in that there is a movement afoot among many churches where the eldership, for all practical purposes, passes all authority to the church staff, i.e. the pulpit minister. That is not the majority, I believe.

Most of the denominational church growth writers say that the Church of Christ has two basic things going for it: 1) a strong fundamental faith in Scripture and 2) a strong belief in "lay-ministry." He is actually attacking one of the church's basic strengths compared to other religious bodies. We can grow weak here, no doubt, and we need to stay on guard, but it is not as deeply seated as he implies.

One final thing: I am concerned about articles making such critical generalities with no direction offered or positive examples given. The article sounded like it belonged in another paper rather than in *Mission*. Not many grand structures are built on negatives and on weak foundations. I

hope that *Mission* has a greater mission than nitpicking the church. We should build our faith on Scripture, not on what the mainstream Church of Christ has done wrong or what its weaknesses are.

Les Gleaves, Ministry Co-Ordinator
Waterview Church of Christ
Richardson, Texas

More On The Holy Spirit

I have tried to figure out a good response to Lynn Mitchell's response ("Getting in Touch with the Spirit," March, 1987) to my response (see letter included in article cited above) to the original article ("Getting in Touch with the Spirit," March, 1986).

I agree with the comments that charismatics are often sectarian and theologically distorted. Also I'd agree that "there are no non-charismatic Christians in the biblical sense of charisma." Some Christians are unaware of the workings of the Spirit in themselves, and are the poorer for it. Some charismatics lack discipline, and are the poorer for it. Nobody's perfect, we're all Christians; and we'll probably all get together in heaven and shake our heads over our own obtuseness.

The emotionalism is a matter of taste. I consider myself a charismatic, but I prefer Episcopal services to Pentecostal ones; order is comforting to me.

So really Lynn Mitchell and I have very little to disagree about. I do think Paul had something more spectacular than steady growth in mind in Galatians 3:2 ff., but that's a matter in interpretation and will not be settled until we can ask Paul. (I have a fantasy that, as we arrive at the Golden Gates, there will be a notice posted giving the time and location of Paul's next lecture on such topics as "Grace vs. Works—What I Really Meant", because the demand will be so great from all us puzzled folks.)

One other problem I can illustrate from the original article:

In Churches of Christ when we know or believe we have the Spirit, we seem to want to keep it such an individualistic thing that we are embarrassed to talk about it in public. If some dare actually

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testify to the reality and the activity of the Spirit in their lives, others of us could not be more embarrassed if they were taking off their clothes or putting lamp shades on their heads or otherwise making fools of themselves. (*Mission Journal*, March 1986, p. 20)

The Church of Christ has always been strong on studying the Scriptures, praying daily, obedience, and church fellowship (summarizing and paraphrasing the first paragraph in the '87 article.) We still have the situation described in the '86 article.

What I'd like to learn are some ways to remove the "Church of Christ glasses" I wear without realizing it—most days. The "Pilgrimage of a Congregation" is an example of one type of article that I find helpful—I guess you'd call it a case history of the congregation, a "we-tried-this-and-observed-the-following-problems-and-benefits" approach. Similar articles on a personal basis would be helpful. How do spirit-filled individuals fit into

their congregations? To what extent are they able to influence the congregation and how do they go about it? Other questions will, I'm sure, occur to others.

One way to fit into the Church of Christ, even if it is into the left wing of the edifice, is to write in to *Mission*. Thanks for the opportunity and the FORUM.

Joyce Barton
 Dallas Texas

Mission Usefulness

. . . I believe that *Mission* has had a useful life, speaking for what change is needed within the church. I believe that the concerns *Mission* has spoken to are finding considerable acceptance amongst those who take time to attend a lectureship. Such acceptance is far from common in the church, however. Thus, these concerns still must be addressed, with an emphasis on how change can be most constructively effected in the local church. . . .

Specifically I want to suggest:

1. More articles on books, similar to

those done by Michael Weed, for example, that made specific recommendations about particular subjects. Perhaps several authors could collaborate on compiling a list of the 50 or 100 best books for a church library, with consideration to what the "average-goer" can handle.

2. Some more articles giving attention to the role of women in the church—articles that give serious attention to the scriptural and the emotional issues involved. . . .

3. Continuing attention to the communication going on amongst the varying factions of the Restoration Movement. I assume that institutional division will continue, but we can grow in understanding and respect for one another. We need suggestions for ways to express this understanding and respect in practice.

4. Articles that address issues that concern a wide-range of people within the church—New Age Movement, divorce, etc.

Mike Sanders
 Boise, Idaho

COMING UP

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God's Spirit within is not power for controlling others but rather power for lifting up the fallen, for encouraging maturity and responsibility, and for empowering others.

By Scott Bartchy

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Some views of a layman about how congregations can begin righting wrongs and taking advantage of that vast reserve of talent that is wasted when church women are not allowed to participate fully in the work and worship of the church.

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By Elmer Prout



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