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MISSION

DECEMBER, 1987-JANUARY, 1988

JOURNAL



The enfleshing of the Word which spoke the galaxies made the death of that Word inevitable. All flesh is mortal, and the flesh assumed by the Word was no exception in mortal terms. So the birth of the Creator in human flesh and human time was an event as shattering and terrible as the eschaton. If I accept this birth I must accept God's love, and this is pain as well as joy because God's love, as I am coming to understand it, is not like man's love.

What one of us can understand a love so great that we would willingly limit our unlimitedness, put the flesh of mortality over our immortality, accept all the pain and grief of humanity, submit to betrayal by that humanity, be killed by it, and die a total failure (in human terms) on a common cross between two thieves?

What kind of flawed, failed love is this?
Why should we rejoice on Christmas Day?

—Madeleine L'Engle, *The Irrational Season* (1977)



A Manger And A Cross

Mangers and crosses are not the accouterments of gentility, genteelness, refinement, polite society, or good folk. Only an outcast of society would vent birth-screams in a barn and put her newborn in a trough from which the animals ate. And crosses are for the dregs and criminals. Certainly these are not the trappings of Divinity.

AND YET—He who spoke the worlds into existence—The Word—God-with-us—the Promised One was born amidst the dung to a woman of lowly state, her only anesthetic the lowing of the cows. And ultimately that Son died between two criminals—after He was denied, betrayed, and mocked.

Sentimental manger scenes, that ignore the dark side of Christmas, and James Avery's beautiful crosses do not tell the story of redemption. And, as Bill Love reminds us, we do violence to the story unless we include the cross at this time of year. After all, as one baby boy was born, thousands were killed. We need both Matthew and Luke.

Divinity intersected humanity, Heaven and Earth met in the darkness of a cattle-cave, God-become-Man lay in a manger, and on the cross the Master of the Universe hung as the most sinful person who ever lived.

The Word became a human being . . . full of grace and truth. (John 1:14, GNB)

Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds [God's own wounds] that you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24, GNB)

The impossibility of it! The enormity of it! It's too much for finiteness! And, yet, that's just the point. Infinity confined itself in finitude. Jesus came to show us! That He could love so much! We are drawn by that love. "I," this Jesus said, "when I am lifted up . . . will draw all men to myself (John 12:32, RSV).

In the first part of this, our last issue, we lift up Christ to you! The writers, in prose, poetry, prayer and meditation, draw us to Him in their reflections on the manger and the cross, the birth and the death. In the latter part the meaning is made concrete in some suggestions for how to "live for righteousness."

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you!
—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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JOY SONG

*(Dedicated to the memory of
Ruth Curtis Waters and William B. Curtis)*

I

I never knew him but I heard the stories
Of how one Christmas Eve he took a gun
And shot himself.
He left a wife, no kids.
I wonder if he left a gift for Eula
In whose house he chose to die.

II

It was a nice lamp.
He bought it for his wife.
Promised he would give it to her
If she would just come back to him.
He used the lamp, alone until he died.

III

They were special little building blocks
With wooden trees and English tudor bricks.
They would have made a great gift
If the family hadn't quarreled,
Leaving the child alone in a back room
To celebrate joy.

IV

They cast him out that day,
"Unclean, Unclean," he was forced to cry
As he walked the lonely path
To the place of the lepers.
He didn't know about Christmas,
He was born before the angels sang
And walked his lonely path
Among those who came to be counted
According to Ceasar Augustus' decree.

V

But the angels sang
And the shepherds and the wise men came.
It wasn't for the happy and the whole
That the baby boy was born.
It was for the desperate,
the lonely,
the striving,
and the sick
That the joy song was sung.

*I have told you these things,
So that in me you may have peace.
In this world you will have trouble
But take heart,
I have overcome the world.*

John 16:33

—Wilma C. Buckner, First Rights Only

Should We Mention The Cross At Christmas?

Robbing The Celebration Of Its Deepest Meaning

By BILL LOVE

Christmas should be a happy time. Children of all ages agree. If something destroys our joy at Christmas we feel cheated. In recent years we in the church of Christ have joined the Christian world in celebrating the birth of our Lord. I look forward to the celebration we have each year in our church family. We have two Sunday morning services planned around the birth of Jesus, a chorus program, a joyous fellowship dinner, and more. We send out Christmas baskets with hams, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, the works. With other churches we try to help make the Christmas of the poor happier by providing gifts, food, clothing, toys, etc. What is my own favorite part of Christmas? What is that one thing without which Christmas is a disappointment to me? Handel's *Messiah*, I need to see it every year at Christmas.

That masterpiece includes not only the glorious "Hallelujah Chorus," but also the moving "Worthy Is The Lamb That Was Slain." Would I be the "Grinch Who Stole Christmas" if I asked about the cross at this time of year? Should we mention the cross at Christmas?

At Christmas we always read from Luke's account of Jesus' birth? It's not surprising. We find as preface the charming stories of Zechariah and Elizabeth: their disbelief and their hymns of praise when God works the miracle. Mary and Joseph, hardly more than children themselves, journey to Bethlehem to be enrolled. She gives birth to her first-born son, wraps him in swaddling clothes, lays him in a manger because it's all that's available. An angel appears to shepherds in the field, scaring them half to death, telling them the good news that a Savior is born in the city of David! This announcement is celebrated by an angel chorus, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men with whom he is pleased!" The shepherds find the little family, share what they have heard, and Mary ponders these things in her

Bill Love ministers for the Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas.

heart. After circumcising the baby on the eighth day, they take him to the temple for dedication. Two senior citizens adore the child. In tears, they speak wonderful things about the baby. Is it any wonder that we read from Luke at Christmas? What a glorious story!

Matthew's birth story seems less appropriate at our celebration. At first glance the reasons are obvious. Genealogies make dull beginnings. Our interest begins to rise as Joseph is told in a dream not to "put Mary away," the child is of the Holy Spirit. His name will be called Emmanuel, "God with us." The story is getting better. Wise men come from the East saying they have seen the star, asking where the child might be found. Then, just when we begin seeing the beauty of the story, the narrative turns dark and forbidding. We see old King Herod's bitter face full of jealousy as he grills his wisemen about the rival king born in his territory. With a saccharin smile he asks the visitors to return with the address; he would like to worship also. When they never return, he takes out his fury on the general population of Bethlehem. In the night one hears the sound of soldiers in the street, doors are broken open, mothers plead helplessly as babies are torn from their breasts and dashed to pieces. Out-numbered and restrained, fathers cry out in their rage!

*A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled,
because they were no more.*

Joseph and Mary have barely escaped with the baby. From shadow to shadow, through alleyways, along side streets, they leave town before the police find them. Emmanuel, before he can walk, is a fugitive on the run! Across the birth story falls the shadow of the cross.

Is it any wonder we don't read Matthew at

Christmas? Who wants King Herod included in the carols? No one wants a nativity scene showing the slaughter of infants, Joseph and Mary on the run. Even if such grizzly things happened, who wants to spoil the season by mentioning them. Who needs the cross at Christmas?

The Hurting Need The Cross At Christmas

If we ask who needs the cross in the birth story, perhaps the first answer is the Christian community to whom Matthew wrote. It's probable that they were Jewish Christians under pressure. As Norman Perrin has said, "The church he writes for is closely related to a synagogue 'across the street' in any Gentile city with a strong Jewish element in its population" (*The New Testament, An Introduction*, 1974). If that was the case, a moment's reflection tells us what they were up against. They were despised by the Gentile community as an odd group with strange beliefs. They were ridiculed and outcast from the Jewish community as heretics. People who are hurting need Matthew's account of Jesus' birth. It tells them that God came into their darkness to suffer with them.

Nor were these first century Christians the last ones to find meaning in Matthew. In Faulkner's *The Sound And The Fury*, he pictures a rural black worship service in Mississippi. A nondescript visiting preacher glances at the children in the assembly and tells the good news from Matthew's Gospel.

Breddren! Look at dem chillen settin dar. Jesus was like dat once. He mammy suffered de glory en de pangs. Sometime maybe she helt him at de nightfall, whilst de angels singing him to sleep; maybe she look out de do' en see de Roman police passin' . . . Listen, breddren! I sees de day. Ma'r settin in de do' wid Jesus on her lap, de little Jesus. Like dem chillen dar, de little Jesus. I hears de angels singing de peaceful son en de glory; I sees de closin eyes; sees Mary jump up, sees de sojer face: We gwine to kill! We gwine to kill! We gwine to kill you little Jesus! I hears de weepin en de lamentation of do po mammy widout de salvation en de word of God."

As the black preacher saw so well, lots of hurting goes on in the church. It's not always troops at the door. Too often we brothers and sisters inflict pain on one another. A few years ago I preached a sermon on the church. Evidently, I preached too much "us" and not enough Christ. About that sermon I received an unsigned note:

Don't teach my children something because we

want so desperately for it to be so. Do we teach our children that friendships are imperative, wonderful, worth the chance of being hurt? Of course we do, but we are also quick to say 'and you're lucky if you make five real friends in your lifetime.' 'Trust is earned, etc. . . .' Can we dare be that honest concerning our church family? Is it so unthinkable to teach our children that 'yes, the church is worth it, as friendships are, but it is FAR from the church as Christ intended it to be.' To my children, idealize Christ forever and without measure; but don't idealize the church. Tell it like it is. Just perhaps, then, their expectations of the church won't crush their faith.

How can we prevent such injuries? What can be said to the one who suffers them? Our churches could be reminded how dark and destructive the forces of Satan are, especially in faith communities. Matthew's story happens in the context of a faith community. The one injured could learn that he or she is not alone in suffering. God, Himself, came to participate in and die at the hands of a faith community. Jesus was Godforsaken so that we need never be alone in our pain. Here is the good news of consolation, the joy of Christmas is magnified in our tears.

We should always see the birth stories in light of the cross. In all four Gospels the main accent is on the cross. Cross and resurrection are "the last of life for which the first was made." It was true in Luke also; the hints are subtle in the beginning but they are there. Matthew makes Jesus' passion clear from the beginning.

So why do we resist including it in our celebration? It's not that we want to ignore the cross. It's just that it seems inappropriate. "Who wants to hear all that 'blood, sweat, and tears' stuff? I get that in the office, out in the world every day. I want Christmas to be an oasis from the pain!"

That is precisely the point. Jesus was not born in a cozy, sterile church nursery but in a cold stable where pungent animal odors filled the air. Emmanuel's mode of entry tells the truth about Jesus'

No one wants a nativity scene showing the slaughter of infants, Joseph and Mary on the run.

life. It also tells the truth about the world in which we live and die.

The way Jesus came also tells us who our Father is and how much He loves us. Ralph Sockman told of an aristocrat in Thailand who discovered soccer and wanted his son involved. However, he said to the

coach, "I do not want my son to undergo the hardship of playing football. I have brought one of my servants with me. You must let my boy sit in a chair beside the playing field, and this servant will do the playing for him (*The Meaning of Suffering*, 1961).

God knew how rough the game was and sent His son anyway. He sent His son just because the game is too rough for us to play alone. Ironically, our failure to include the cross in Christmas robs the celebration of its deepest meaning and highest joy.

The Church Needs The Cross At Christmas

In his book *The Crucified God* (1973), Jurgen Moltmann calls the church back to the cross. He observed that when archaeologists dig up a place of worship and find the sign of the cross they are virtually assured that it was a Christian church. People didn't risk using the symbol unless they were willing to die for it. In a day when James Avery has made the cross in a thousand beautiful forms, it's hard to remember how odious it was when Matthew wrote his gospel. So far as the Jews were concerned, Jesus did not die as a freedom-fighter against the Romans. His was not a martyr's death of heroism. He died a blasphemer. On the other hand, the Romans considered the cross the most degrading of all spectacles. Cicero said, "Let even the name of the cross be kept away not only from the bodies of the citizens of Rome, but also from their thought, sight and hearing."

Isn't it strange, considering public opinion on both sides of the aisle, that Paul would "preach Christ crucified"? He knew his message was offensive to everyone and preached it anyway. Speaking of the Lord's Supper, he reminded the Corinthian Christians, "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Why with all the pain in the world and in the church did Paul say "you proclaim his *death* until he

Jesus was Godforsaken so that we need never be alone in our pain. Here is the good news of consolation, the joy of Christmas is magnified in our tears.

comes"? Why did he not center his faith on the resurrection? That's obviously the *good* news of the Gospel! The Corinthians may have objected: "Has not all that painful stuff on Golgotha been erased and replaced by a theology of glory and victory? Why ever mention the cross again?"

Paul's opponents at Corinth, the "superlative

apostles," had already sweetened the faith by removing the cross. Celebrating only the resurrection, they were "already raised, already reigning" (I Cor. 4:8-13). Paul confessed that he was one of those "like men sentenced to death," "fools for Christ," who continued to endure suffering. He was not denying the glory of the resurrection; he was simply saying, "No cross, no crown. Don't delete the cross. It has a glory of its own. The crucified one was raised; the risen one was crucified. You miss the joy of the resurrection if you jettison the cross."

These ideas are never merely abstract distinctions

Paul's opponents at Corinth, the "superlative apostles," had already sweetened the faith by removing the cross. Celebrating only the resurrection, they were "already raised, already reigning."

without implications for life. Without the cross Christians lose their ministry to one another. There was no sensitivity at Corinth. The rich would eat the fellowship meal and leave before the poor slaves got off work. Preferring only the bright side, they neglected "discerning the body" assembled. Those who were ill could die unattended. Some already had. They neglected the hurting, not because they believed in the resurrection, but because they had outgrown the cross. As painful as it is to read Matthew's birth story, the joy of it lies in the fact that God actually came into our darkness to deliver us into His light. He died with us in order to raise us up with Him. For Christians "in the pits," the cross makes both Jesus' birth and resurrection glorious!

The World Needs The Cross In Christmas

The story of Jesus' birth, both bright and dark sides, is worth telling the world. It's always important to ask ourselves what our message says to unbelievers. What do we have to say to unbelieving, self-centered high school students? Do we have anything to say to the overheated professionals? Can starving ghetto children be served in any way by what we believe? Do cancer patients and AIDS patients without God see any gospel in our words? Can those enslaved to sex, alcohol, drugs, and workaholicism find help in what we preach?

During my almost fifty years I have seen the gospel we preach in the church of Christ go through changes. My earliest memory is of the church embroiled in controversy about supporting orphans homes and radio programs. Good people who loved

God, treasured the Scriptures, and intended to be faithful to Christ debated the issues. However important that agenda was to us on the inside, what possible healing could a lost and dying world find in our intramural disputes?

Today we seem less interested in issues. One minister of a large church was characterized as the one "in charge of popcorn and cotton candy." The point was that the church is competing with a world of entertainment and has to keep up a good show. At a conference on church growth I heard it said, "Don't get up in the assembly and talk about Aunt Suzy's appendix operation. This is our showcase service. People don't want negatives; they want to be built up and made to feel good when they leave!" If we really mean that, soon there will be no place for anything so morbid and depressing as Matthew's birth narrative and the cross of Christ.

The heartbreak of it is that there are people in the audience who are dying inside. Some face divorce. Others are about to go into bankruptcy. Here is a man embattled with a rebel teenage son. There is a woman who is overwhelmed with guilt for her extramarital affair. The popcorn and cotton candy do not help. These hurting ones may leave saying, "I'll go away, put my life together, then maybe I can come back and join the celebration. There is obviously no place here for someone who is hurting."

James Denny gave us a picture which shows us the glory of the cross and why it gives us joy beyond anything we can manufacture. He said if he were sunning himself on a pier and someone came running by screaming "I love you," jumped into the water and drowned, it would make no sense at all. But if he

had fallen off the pier and were drowning and someone jumped in and saved him at the cost of his own life, then he could only say, "Greater love has no man than this!" (*The Death of Christ*, 1973).

Ironically, our failure to include the cross in Christmas robs the celebration of its deepest meaning and highest joy.

What God did at Bethlehem, what Jesus did on Golgotha were not arbitrary and meaningless gestures. Without His presence in our suffering, without atonement for our sin, we are desperately threshing about, going under for the last time. Matthew's birth story begins just at that point. Accepting the *whole* Gospel, we have life with Christ!

If we can receive the Gospel, proclaim His death till He comes, we have something to grasp. Unbelievers can understand Matthew's story. We need not explain every detail. We have all met King Herod. We know what it's like to run for your life. We are no strangers to fear. What we need is Someone who has been there, Someone who has won over it all, Someone here on the scene to help us through the darkness into the light.

In the One who came at Bethlehem we have that One. His birth, life, death, resurrection, Spirit in us, and future plans for us give unspeakable joy! His name is Emmanuel, "God with us"! Merry Christmas! _____ MISSION

(TO BE ONE, continued from page 18)

couraged, but we must never lose sight of God's great eternal purpose to unite all things in Christ. "In hope we are saved" (Rom. 8:24). God is greater than all our failures. We must accept the unity which is Given — acknowledge it and exhibit it — and devote ourselves to live and love and labor at the task of mission and edification by which we can attain to the unity which ultimately is fulfilled when we all are presented "perfect in Christ" (Col. 1:18). We must be more open to the reception of the Gift and strive more diligently toward the attainment of the Goal. To retreat into a defensive stance of "being right" is to close the door of fellowship to many brothers and sisters and to frustrate the Holy Spirit from producing in our hearts and lives the fruit of the Spirit so necessary to unity.

Let me close with a statement by Alan Richardson which seems to summarize what we have been trying to say:

Christian unity is not a "desirable feature" in the life of the Church; it is the condition of the Church's existence, the test of whether the Church is the Church. A divided Church is a contradiction of its own nature as Church; it is witnessing to a falsehood. Its evangelism cannot be effective. Jesus prayed "that they all may be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (John 17:21; cf. 17:23). If we took the New Testament point of view seriously, we should expect to find that the single most serious obstacle to the evangelization of the world is the disunity of "the Churches." (*Introduction to New Testament Theology*, p. 187)

God wants us to be One. He expects us to work at it. We are all diminished until we do.

_____ MISSION

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

O Lord our God,
This season always fills us with wonder. The
Christmas story is a tender one: it touches us at
the deepest level of our consciousness.

The Christmas message is so compelling in its
simplicity that even a child can understand its
story of love. We thank you for the simplicity.

The child that lives in each of us
(no matter what our age)
responds from deep within our being.

Yet the story of Christ's coming
profoundly displays the
breadth of human experience.

We thank you, Father, for its richness.
The most learned and sophisticated among us find
concepts therein by which
our thoughts are challenged.

We thank you, Father, for the
truths so plainly stated, and for the
symbols that capture our
imaginings so dramatically.

As this year of our lives has progressed toward the
day on which we celebrate the birth of Christ,
the days have become shorter,
the nights longer.

We are reminded that the world into which Jesus came
was a dark one:

The armed might of Rome covered the world with
its enforced "peace."

Corruption and greed forced millions into
slavery in order to stay alive.

The jealousy of a petty tyrant caused the death of
countless infants in Judea and
snuffed out the joy of their parents.

The faith of your people had been perverted
into a hollow legalism.

The religions and philosophies of the pagan world
had ceased to bring
assurance and hope to humankind.

The world was in darkness —
a long, dark night
of the human soul.

Lord, the world in which we live is not
very much different.

And for this,
we must beg your forgiveness.

It is partly the fault of each of us
for making it so.

The names and places have changed,
but the same evil spirit
inhabits our world as

inhabited the world into which Jesus came.

And then light came! Your light came —
 the Daystar from on high!
 But Lord,
 how silently, how subtly
 you worked to accomplish your will.
 The Christ could have come to Rome in
 omnipotence, but
 instead he came to Bethlehem in helplessness.
 He could have come as a learned
 philosopher to Athens,
 but instead he came to lowly Judah as a
 babe with years of learning ahead of him
 before he would be ready for the
 ministry that brought him to us.

May we learn an important lesson from the manner in
 which you brought light into the world.
 Help us to understand that power and might do
 not bring peace within the heart.
 Show us the truth that riches and wealth cannot
 assure happiness and joy.
 Lead us to appreciate the wonder of the
 light of God
 permeating the sordidness of this world,
 changing,
 renewing, as it
 finds its way into the shadowy
 recesses of our souls.

O Lord, may there be no corner of our lives which is
 immune to your influence.
 Overpower the stubbornness of our selfish wills and
 help us to perpetuate your generosity in our
 relationships with others.
 May the glory of the Incarnation be recreated in us.
 Let the message of your greatest gift work its
 power in us and
 through us so that
 all may know that Christ has come.

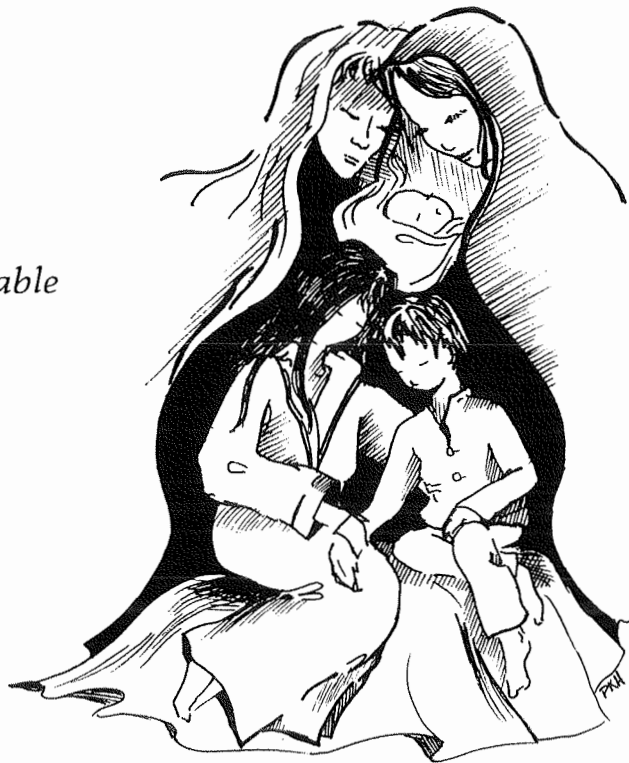
Speak to our troubled hearts through the spirit of
 this glad season —
 enoble our thoughts,
 strengthen our wills,
 purge our souls of evil,
 and draw us close to you, we ask
 in the name of Jesus,
 who came near to us so that we
 might approach you,
 confident in your love.

Amen

—Charles R. Boatman

Charles R. Boatman is Associate Minister for the Westwood Christian Church, Los Angeles.

*Unspeakable
Joy!*



*Abundant
Peace!*

He Gave Himself

To God He gave glory, to the angels proclamation; to mankind, the star of hope, peace, within our souls, good will for one another.

By NITA SHORT

In early November I decided my living room looked like a spring garden after a West Texas hail storm. I decided to splash a coat of paint on the walls, strip and wax the wooden floors, clean windows, shampoo the sofa—you know the routine if ever you have lost your senses and embarked upon such a project. I set a deadline—December 20 sounded feasible (such naive optimism!). As an added incentive to bolster my deadline, I invited the family for Christmas (sheer insanity!).

Much to my surprise, I moved my furniture into my newly painted room on December 20. I arranged flowers, hung pictures, placed newly sewn pillows, and upon the mantle I framed the family nativity scene with evergreen, adding apples, pears and little feathered birds.

It was raining outside as the evening light faded behind the Houston skyline. I was just about to sink

Nita Short lives in Houston, Texas, and is Associate Teaching Director of Community Bible Study.

into the sofa when my twelve-year-old son bounded into the room with an energetic explosion of ideas and suggestions. “. . . and, Mom, let’s go get the Christmas tree—Right Now!” What could I say? It was five days till Christmas! Off we went, out into the 36-degree rain and on to the freeway.

What a delightful son the Lord has given me! I never tire of his enthusiasm, his searching, inquisitive mind. The conversation began:

“Mom, who are those people who take all your money away?”

“What?” I asked. My mind engaged. I knew from experience he never started a conversation with an off-handed question that he didn’t have a hidden agenda.

“You know, you make money then they take most of it back.”

“Oh, you mean the Internal Revenue Service!”

“Yeh, they’re the ones. Why don’t they make a law against them?”

Holding back my smile, I tried to explain. The sound logic behind the IRS only invited my son's rebuttal. Ah, childhood innocence!

When we arrived at the tree lot, it was almost dark. My toes froze to my sneakers as we walked up and down the wooden sidewalks. We had agreed to spend absolutely no more than \$30 for the tree. After the men had loaded the tree into the suburban and I had paid the \$45, we were off toward home. The conversation continued. Kelly, easing down comfortably into his seat, expressed with a contented sigh, "Man, I can just feel it. I was born to be rich."

Now the agenda was no longer hidden! I had a sudden urge to make a lasting contribution to this young man's life - you know, a sharing of deep wisdom all twelve-year-olds long to endure. I began.

"Well," I offered, "that's fine, as long as you understand that money doesn't make you happy."

A silence followed. I glanced over to find Kelly lost in thought. Finally he asked, "Well, if money can't make you happy, what can?"

"Real happiness is called peace. It's one of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. Because it's a gift, you can't buy it, yet it's given in abundance."

Have you noticed? Children have a very effective way of communicating when they are finished listening—and would like for you to be finished talking. They change the subject! He changed—I was finished. Of course, I could have gone on for another hour—I thought I was coming along quite well! So, enough. We discuss this topic from time to time. The lesson will never be completely learned, I suppose. Perhaps that's why I take advantage and discuss it when I can - I need the reminder!

I'm an early riser. The next morning I crawled out of bed before daylight, bundled up in my blue down-filled robe, slipped into the kitchen and poured a cup

of hot coffee. I walked into the living room, turned on the tree lights and curled up on the sofa.

"This is lovely. All finished," I thought. "Of course, I do need a flower arrangement on that table, maybe a bench under the tapestry. Wouldn't a grandfather clock be great in that corner! I laughed to myself as the previous day's conversation came to mind.

"Never enough," I thought, "always more to want, one more thing to buy, happiness never completely attained."

My eyes crossed to the mantle. There, in manger scene, lay the little babe among sheep and cattle and shepherd's gaze. With blushing suddenness my eyes ran full. My tears caused the scene to catch in prism, refracting into every corner of the room and drenching my soul in gladness. Jesus!

Before me lay real happiness—not in the furniture, the painted walls, but that little baby, born that night to peasant's heritage. Oh, the wise men came bearing precious gifts, but true to earth's composite, the valued purity of frankincense failed as cattle's feet stirred the air, and dust gathered into the vial. The sweet scent of myrrh quickly mingled with manger smells, and the gold would soon be gone to grant another day's existence. The child came bearing gifts, as well; but gifts that would not decay in all eternity. To God He gave glory, to the angels proclamation; to mankind, the star of hope, peace within our souls, goodwill for one another. Unspeakable joy! He gave himself! Oh, precious Savior!

I heard soft footsteps in the room. My son quickly crawled onto the sofa and snuggled close beside. Only the gently falling rain could be heard. The tiny tree lights glistened twice as raindrops caught onto the window pane. God's morning stillness surrounded us in peace. _____MISSION

(CAMPBELL, continued from page 44)

Ones Weren't the Only Ones"

Barbara Brown Zikmund

"Campbell's Understanding of Church and Ministry"

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Together At the Foot of the Cross

The Intersection of Heaven and Earth

By LARRY JAMES

Memories of my earliest experiences in church remain clearly etched in my mind. My parents were not members of the Church of Christ where we attended at the time. I remember well the Sunday of their baptism. I was eleven. No doubt the sermon that day centered on the cross of Jesus. Almost every one of our preacher's lessons did. I cannot recall many of the specifics of his messages, but I shall never forget his central focus, nor his tears of joy and sincerity as week after week he faithfully told "the story."

I am thankful beyond words for the ministry of that first preacher in my life. He planted seeds in my heart, and in the heart of a congregation, that still bear fruit. Strange as it may seem (I count it providential), I am now the minister who stands on Sunday before this same congregation of my childhood. For almost eight years we have been "back home." Each week I find that I am driven back to the cross in preparation for presenting this same message. Nothing works for me unless it draws attention to the cross. What was true for me in childhood is even more apparent now that I am an adult (whatever that means!).

We face a challenging future in Churches of Christ, it seems to me. Change, growth, entrenchment, creativity, a radical new and aggressive legalism appear to be just a few of the forces at work in our movement. "Restoration" movements always seem to come to such critical junctures as they course through history in the lives of people who lift up various portions of the New Testament to be restored. Restorers seek to please God by their efforts. Concerns related to justification before God often move to the center of such movements. In the case of our churches, early reformers worked hard for unity on the basis of obedience to the New Testament. What began as an ecumenical commitment, 19th-century style, has gone through various cycles

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with the attendant ups and downs inherent in a people's attempt to make themselves pleasing to a holy God by being "right" on any number of issues, practices, and methods. Anyone who is associated with a Church of Christ will relate to my analysis, I believe.

As I consider my history, my heritage, and my church, positioned today on the threshold of the 21st century, the cross emerges as the truly preeminent force in my thinking and in my ministry. Paul's assessment of the 1st-century situation in the familiar, but seldom understood or applied, description of his message, points the way for our churches: "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared . . ." (1 Cor. 15:1-5a).

For Paul the cross of Jesus Christ intersected the heart of God and the center of all human history and histories. Only the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus deserved to be considered the gospel message. The cross provided the power, the content, the scope, the depth, the hope, and the endurance of Paul's preaching ministry. Paul's incredible legacy of church plantings can be understood only as we reflect on his accomplishments while standing in the shadow of the cross of his resurrected Lord. His message remained constant in every church he established, served, or counseled.

Paul lifted up Jesus as the bloody offering of expiation before the Romans. To the hopelessly divided Corinthians the apostle emphasized again and again the foolish power of the "word of the cross." To the Galatians Paul set the cross over against the manipulation of Judaizing legalists who wanted all to accept a pseudo-gospel of the "cross plus" the human merit of ceremonial conformity. To the beloved Ephesians

he celebrated the believer's position "in Christ," and thus, in the body of Christ, by writing eloquently of the redemptive and unifying power of the blood of Christ that brings estranged persons close to God and to one another. For the struggling Philippians the missionary message was practical and lovingly involved. Still, the soul of his counsel concerned the "emptied" Savior who obeyed even to the point of death on a cross to provide unity, joy, and forgiveness to all who would confess Him.

For Paul the cross of Jesus Christ intersected the heart of God and the center of all human history and histories.

Even though he never visited Colossae, he wrote to build up the church, planted there no doubt by some of his converts and associates. The thesis of his short epistle to this unfamiliar fellowship concentrates on his unending refrain: the Father reconciles to himself all things, making peace by the blood of the cross of Jesus. So certain were the Thessalonians of the power and salvation supplied by the cross that Paul's challenge to these believers involved motivating them to continue in a normal pattern of living rather than waiting idly on house tops for the quick return of their resurrected Lord!

In **Colossians 1:13-14** Paul provides a summary of what God accomplished at the cross. Even in this short passage the power of the gospel message is so tightly packed that it explodes with hope and freedom as we unwrap it. The results of the death of Jesus at Calvary pour over into our lives.

We are delivered. Jesus rescues all those who believe in Him and who call on His name out of hearts that are yielded and dependent. "Rescued" — what a glorious word to anyone who has been trapped in mortal danger! Little Jessica McClure spent over fifty hours at the bottom of a dry well in Midland, Texas in October of this year. Hundreds of people worked frantically day and night to deliver her. Who can describe the relief and release of joy and life when she was brought up and delivered to her parents and then to her healers! So with all believers, yet our rescue is even more dramatic.

We are rescued from the "dominion" of darkness. The same phrase is found in Luke's account of Jesus' Gethsemane experience. When the chief priests and the authorities came to arrest Jesus, He asked them, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour — **when darkness reigns**" (Luke 22:52-53). Literally Paul contends that disciples

escape the "jurisdiction" of the dark side through the death of Christ.

We are transplanted to the Kingdom of Jesus. The rescue means that we are lifted out of darkness and resurrected with the Lord to the very right hand of God — now (cf. Eph. 1:19-20; 2:6)! Like a conquering king, God vanquishes Satan and transfers all of His subjects, not to positions of subjugation but to His throne room. The change brought about by the grace of God at the cross, and **only at the cross**, is dramatic beyond human ability to describe. Still, Paul spent his life in a noble attempt to do the impossible!

We are redeemed and forgiven. Bought off the auction block as slaves, believers are outfitted in the clothing of royalty. Heinous criminals before God's majestic holiness, Christians discover complete forgiveness of sins in the word of His cross.

There is no other message for Christians to proclaim. Every emphasis, method, hermeneutic, strategy, ethic, and decision must be continually measured by the cross. Only in the "Christ event" does heaven intersect earth. Only beneath the cross is there room for man to stand without fear before God. John R.W. Stott powerfully summarizes what

Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be.

my first preacher knew and lived before all of us so well, when he writes, "The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone" (*The Cross of Christ*, p. 160).

As we pursue the elusive dream of a united church, we must be careful to see that our job is to lift up the Lord. By the power of His cross He will draw people to His heart. As people are drawn to Him, and as we recognize significant differences among those who stand around the foot of His cross, we must never lose sight of the truth that the cross that saves is also the only thing that can unite us. May we display the wisdom and the faith to draw closer to all who believe in our Lord by continually moving closer to His cross.

MISSION

THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

A Personal Reflection

By PAUL WATSON

If you were asked, as I have been asked, "What does the cross mean to you personally, on a day-to-day basis?" what would you say? It is a very good question, isn't it? Of all the symbols of Christianity — unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, the lamb and the dove and the sign of the fish — the cross is the most universal, the most pervasive. The cross dominates the Gospels, which in fact have been called "passion stories with extended introductions," as it dominated the apostolic preaching: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). But after all is said and done, all theories of the atonement fully considered, all historical details about crucifixion carefully researched, what does the cross *mean* . . . to me?

"The emblem of suffering and shame . . ."

As I think about the cross, I try always to remember that in the Roman world the cross was a sign of shame, defeat, rejection. It was a mark of infamy, not a mark of honor. But remembering this is sometimes hard to do, considering how we have overlaid the cross with confectioner's sugar, jewels, and neon lights. We've made earrings and lapel pins and steeple ornaments out of the cross, somehow in the process transforming it into a symbol of pious religiosity. Even our hymns, of which "The Old Rugged Cross" is perhaps the prime example, can be sung too sweetly, too sentimentally. For once upon a time, I remind myself, the cross was a stigma, reserved for the worst terrorists and psychopaths of their day. No one loved or respected a crucified person, save perhaps for a few of their deranged followers.

So Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 come back to haunt me: The cross is a scandal, an embarrassment, an affront to all that is decent and honorable. The cross is so much foolishness, madness to anyone with a lick of sense. Whatever else I make of

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the cross, I don't want to take it too lightly or wear it too prettily, lest I rob it of its true meaning and power.

"For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above . . ."

All of which leads me to ask myself, What did the cross mean for Jesus? More pointedly, why did He decide to bear it (for I am convinced He had some say in the matter)? I can understand why He turned down Satan's offer for immediate Messiahship and chose the way of the cross over instant rulership. Satan offered an unworthy, unheroic option with a terrific price-tag. But why, in the garden (Matt. 26:53), did Jesus persist in His refusal to circumvent the cross? He certainly was no masochist, as His prayer to the Father that night indicates. Furthermore, He is about to suffer a great injustice, one from which His followers will also come to suffer severely. So why not summon those 72,000 angels to set things right — replace injustice with justice, lies with truth, duplicity with integrity, fear with security?

The answer I come to is that as Jesus refused to claim the world as it was, at the price Satan quoted Him, Jesus also refused to change the world from without by imposing upon the world a new order it had no choice but to accept. Instead, He found a third way: to affirm the world as it was, in all its ambiguity and confusion, and to change that world from within, through love. Isn't that what John 3:17 is all about? Not a canonization of the status quo by any means; but an acceptance of the world as it was — an unjust world that could inflict upon its best citizen its worst punishment — in order to make of the world what God intended it should be.

"To pardon and sanctify me . . ."

If the cross is an affirmation of my world, then it must also be an affirmation of me. I am frequently struck by the indisputable logic of Romans 5:7-8:

Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man - though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

Of course I don't like to admit my helplessness (Rom. 5:6) that made His dying necessary; but I cannot escape it. You see, I've tried sneaking back into Eden on my own, but the cherubim are still there at the gate. *Why* God would want to bother with me, I'm not altogether sure; *that* He does is my conviction, based upon the cross. So I feel affirmed, accepted, forgiven, loved. And, although it frightens me a bit to think about it, I also know that the Lord intends to change me, just as He would change the world, from the inside out.

"To the old rugged cross I will ever be true . . ."

The cross then, for me, becomes God's way of calling me to commitment, Christ's way of summoning me to discipleship. Heaven has put its cards on the

table, as it were, at the cross; now I must show mine. For echoing in my mind are the words Jesus spoke well before He Himself went to the cross: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

If I answer that call, I want to do so fully realizing that the cross is still full of splinters and that I have no gloves. No pious sentimentality about discipleship, you see. To make decisions based on the cross, and to live out those decisions in my life — that's very tough indeed. But neither do I want to pick out my cross while whimpering and simpering, full of misgivings and self-pity. My Lord went willingly to His cross; so must I go to mine.

No, the way of the cross, it seems to me, is a bold and daring way: choosing one Lord, rejecting all others. Affirming Him who has affirmed both me and my world. Staking my hopes on Him, risking my life for Him. No more concerned about my reputation or recognition than He was for His. Trying to become as genuinely concerned for others as He has been for me. "I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown."

MISSION

Touched By Love

What heals the heart?
The Healer - he toucheth?
His finger burns upon the scar
Some sort of gentle searing?

Or is the reddened tear
Sealed in other ways?
Are we simply numbed
By the world's painkiller?

And how does the comatose mass
Blink their eyes of glass
As they shuffle through
Drabbing grey over the feetcrete?

Friendly Fate - always amiable
Saunters life's mainstreet
With its cousin sober Time
Broken hearts to anodyne.

But the Lonely One atop his hill
Remains the sacrificial link
The Toucher's instrument —
His healing remaker - I think.

— David Henderson

David Henderson is a Plan Analyst for a software company in Dallas, Texas.

God Wants Us To Be One

Maintaining And Attaining The Unity

Some time ago I set my heart on preaching through the book of Ephesians. I haven't finished yet, but I have found it to be one of the richest experiences of my life. The more I study the text the more certain I am that I have not mined all of the gold from it.

In the first three chapters Paul (I accept his authorship) sets forth the theme of Ephesians: the glory of the Church as the society of believers who demonstrate in history the purpose of God made plain in Jesus Christ. This great eternal purpose, i.e., to unite all things in Christ, is to be realized through the Church — the Body of Christ.

In chapter four Paul turns from doctrine to ethics. Between the two sections he places one of his mighty "Therefores" (4:1). He is saying in effect, "You are Christians in belief and experience; now be Christians in the way you behave." Faith and practice, creed and conduct, root and fruit belong together, and are to be lived in fellowship of the Church, not privately. Paul is deeply concerned for the unity of the Church (4:1-3). It is the first item on his ethical agenda. As he immediately addresses himself to those *qualities of spirit* which make unity possible, he is not appealing for some general spirit of friendship, brotherliness, or camaraderie. He is pleading for a horizontal unity based on a vertical relationship with God in Christ. It is a unity of life based on a unity of faith. It is the kind of unity the Holy Spirit creates, not the unity we create. He asks us to be careful not to break this already created unity.

THE ATTITUDES OF UNITY

Paul spells out carefully the kind of attitudes that must prevail within the Body: (1) *Lowliness or humility*: allowing others to take precedence. "Be completely humble" (NIV), Paul says. In the ancient world it was a quality to be despised. Humility does

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not seek prominence for self, does not indulge vanity, allows others to receive credit. Pride lurks behind all discord, whereas the single greatest secret of concord is humility. Peter writes (possibly referring to Jesus washing the disciples' feet), "clothe yourselves with humility" (2 Pet. 5:5) — put on the apron of humility. The model is Jesus, who humbled Himself and became a servant.

(2) *Meekness*: power under control. It is a picture of a wild horse under discipline. Meekness is not weakness; it is the gentleness of the strong. It is the quality of a mature person who is master of self and the servant of others — the opposite of self-esteem, self-assertion, and pride — the opposite of being touchy, resentful, retaliatory.

(3) *Patience*: the spirit which will not be broken by any misfortune or suffering, any disappointment or discouragement. It is the spirit that refuses to retaliate, that bears insult or slight or injury without complaint or bitterness, that is long-tempered rather than short-tempered, and that reflects God's attitude toward us. It refuses to give up hope for improvement in a disturbed relationship.

(4) *Mutual forbearance*: "bearing with one another" (NIV). It is the good-humored tolerance which puts up with those who have irritating faults or idiosyncracies. Someone said it was the power to take revenge, but never does so. When something so vital as the unity of the Church is concerned we cannot afford to grow weary and short-tempered and impatient. Christians learn to put up with one another.

(5) *Love*: sacrificial, good will and caring. Such love includes God and neighbor (Mark 12:29-32), enemies (Matt. 5:44), one another in the Body (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4: 7-21), the unlovely and the unlovable, people we do not like. To so love means living unselfishly, thinking of the good of others (Philip. 2:4), readily giving up things for the sake of others to avoid offending (1 Cor. 8:13). It is warm, intelligent, persistent, resourceful, patient, and

friendly.

What a list! It is typical of Paul! But we must note one thing more: he ties it all up and puts it in its proper framework. He *exhorts* us to be "*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:3). Markus Barth in his magnificent study of Ephesians elaborates upon the urgency of this exhortation:

It is hardly possible to render exactly the urgency contained in the underlying Greek verb. Not only haste and passion, but a full effort of the whole man is meant, involving his will, sentiment, reason, physical strength and total attitude. The imperative mood of the participle found in the Greek text excludes passivity, quietism, a wait-and-see attitude, or a diligence tempered by all deliberate speed. Yours is the initiative! Do it now! Mean it! *You* are to do it! I mean it! — such are the overtones in verse 3. (*Anchor Bible*, Ephesians, Vol. II, p. 428)

Paul was really concerned for the unity of the Church. Such a spirit as Paul has described is necessary if the unity God gives to His Church though the Holy Spirit is to be maintained. *These qualities of Christian disposition are necessary for unity.* Where there is acrimony, accusation, arrogance and anger, there can be no unity.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF UNITY

Now Paul launches into a litany of things which make us one (4:4-6). Here is a message we need to hear today. In this age of individualism and self-assertion we need again to listen carefully to God's plan for creating community. Paul is arguing that *because there is only one God there can be only one people of God.* You can no more multiply churches than you can multiply Gods. Karl Barth said, "The Church is one as certainly as God is one." The unity of the Church is as indestructible as the unity of God Himself. Yet we have divided the Church, defaced it, denatured it, and destroyed its effectiveness in the world. *We are all diminished by our separation from part of our brothers and sisters in Christ.* We belong together. Paul gives us several reasons:

One Body: The Church is persons in relationship, Christ's fellowship with God shared with believers (John 17:21). A divided church is illogical, incomprehensible, and incongruous. *Christian unity is not merely desirable, it is the condition of the Church's existence.* We must understand ourselves to be a community of understanding and concern, bearing witness to the unity of the Church through the recovery of the universal ground expressed in Scrip-

ture.

One Spirit: The "One Spirit" is surely the Holy Spirit, and "the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) is the unity that the Holy Spirit creates. That enables Jew and Gentile to cry to the One Father, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15); and that produces the fruit of gentleness, patience, love, and peace (Gal. 5:22-23). The Spirit that does all this is the very same Spirit by whom we are baptized and that inspires unity: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free" (1 Cor. 12:13). The Church without the Spirit is a corpse; the Spirit without the Church is a ghost. The Holy Spirit is the divine person who animates the church, makes it alive, and makes it one.

One Hope: All who are in Christ have one destiny — the consummation of God's great eternal purpose to unite all things in Christ. It is the Christian belief that there is "mind behind the universe, purpose running through it, meaning in it, and destiny ahead of it." Our salvation is in three tenses — past event, present experience, and future hope. The Holy Spirit is given to us now as the foretaste, the downpayment, God's guarantee of what is to come. We share *one* hope.

One Lord. The earliest Christian confession was, "Jesus is Lord." "Lord" was the Old Testament word for God. Jesus is perceived to be in a unique relationship with God; hence, Jesus is Lord, Jesus is God. Peter closed the first Christian sermon with this declaration: "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Jesus is Lord, our "One Lord."

One Faith. In the New Testament, faith nearly always means trust in and surrender to God in the person of Jesus — obedient trust, or trustful obedience. Christians are bound together as one because they have made one common act of complete surrender to the love of God in Jesus Christ. Such faith commits us not only to Christ but to the community

We are all diminished by our separation from part of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We belong together.

of Christ, the Church, His Body. Faith, unless it is a sham, operates through love, and issues in good works (good deeds done out of gratitude for God's grace).

One Baptism. The most controversial of all the marks of unity is baptism. It was not a problem for Paul and the early Christians. For Paul, as for his predecessors, baptism was the rite of initiation into Christ and into the Church. Its mode was immer-

sion. It was administered upon confession of faith (Rom. 10:9), was in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11), and was associated with the reception of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11). Being baptized is part of the act of believing, since to believe means to obey. *We have made it a mark of division, but God meant it to be a mark of unity.*

One God. To the Gentile converts of the great Asian cities that was a new and marvelous thought. They had believed in "gods many and lords many."

**The Church without the Spirit is a corpse.
The Spirit without the Church is a ghost.**

Each city and tribe, each grove or foundation, each office or occupation, had its special deity. These petty gods kept the heathen in constant fear lest one of the gods be neglected or offended. Into this chaos came the Gospel — "There is One God." The Christian God is creator of all that is and King of the universe. Even more marvelous was the news that the King in the Kingdom is a Father. He is Abba-Daddy. He is a God of love. He is above all and through all and in all. Christians live in a God-created, God-sustained, God-filled world.

The Church by its very nature is one. There is one holy fellowship, one life-giving Spirit indwelling it, and one goal on which its heart is set. There is one Savior to be confessed and adored; one pledge or confession of truth in Him; one rite of initiation into His fellowship. There is one loving Father who is author of all that is. These are the things that make us one.

MAINTENANCE AND ATTAINMENT

But there is one further crucial point: In this grand passage Paul says there is a unity to be *maintained* and a unity to be *attained* — a unity to be kept and a unity to be reached. What does that mean and what does it say to us today?

**We have made baptism a mark of division,
but God meant it to be a mark of unity.**

The unity which the Church is called upon to keep (4:1-6) has come as a Gift. God created this unity by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. When God created the Church He made it One. We are exhorted to maintain this unity — keep it. Do not violate the terms of the Gospel. Value those things which make us one.

Believers are the units of Christian unity. All who are in Christ are a part of His One Church. That must include more than we conceive "restoration

movement" to mean. The early fathers set out "to unite the Christians in all the sects." Such a view demands that we, the heirs of this movement take seriously our own slogan that "we are Christians only, but not the only Christians." That doesn't mean everyone is saved or the Gospel doesn't matter. It means God has more people than "we" have in our groups. We have never equated the restoration movement with the Church. We have never baptized anyone into the restoration movement. In most cases we have not limited the celebration of the Lord's Supper to the members in the restoration movement. The unity which God gives is to be recognized and confessed. "The firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal. The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:19).

This mighty passage in Ephesians also speaks of that unity to which the Church is called: "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge

Through the centuries leaders have been too willing to divide rather than bear the pressure of creative tension that can lead to a *consensus fidelium*.

of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (4:13). The ultimate purpose of the Church's ministry is that all attain the unity of the faith. So it speaks the truth in love, because great humility and meekness and patience and love are required to gain true consensus. Through the centuries, leaders have been too willing to divide rather than bear the pressure of creative tension that can lead to a *consensus fidelium*. But only in this way may the mind of Christ be discerned. William Robinson stated three criteria whereby the Church may know the mind of Christ: The whole Church, in the act of worship, under the judgment of the Word of God (*Biblical Doctrine of the Church*).

What so often happens, however, is that we retreat into our own little corners (groups) of safety and security, prove ourselves "right," and break fellowship with everyone else. We all want to be as correct as we can be; but we need to remember that we are not saved because "we are right," but because God is gracious, and Jesus has become "our righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30). Doctrinal correctness does not of itself save. In our own little group we get by with teaching which would be spiked in a minute if it were submitted to the qualified mind of the whole Church.

Today we stand between the Gift of unity and our attainment of its fulness. It is human to grow dis-

(continued on page 7)

The Spirit of Christ: The Hermeneutical Advantage

"The Head Bone Is
Connected To The Heart Bone."

By LEROY GARRETT

I am uniquely honored to have a part in the last issue of *Mission*, which can be viewed as a kind of Festschrift to its board and editors, and particularly to Bobbie Lee Holley, who has served well as the first woman in the history of Churches of Christ to serve as editor of a major publication among us. For two decades the board remained true to its mission of providing innovative but responsible journalism, girded in biblical truth and relevant to a changing world, and this for a people reluctant to move beyond the mentality of the 1940s.

Understanding the Bible is as much a matter of heart as it is head.

I admire *Mission* for staying with its knitting, refusing to be other than itself, partly liberal, partly conservative, and partly who-knows-what, but always on the growing edge. And always refusing to be dull and ordinary. It might have lived on indefinitely had it been willing to be a party organ. It chose to fight (and die) rather than switch! There is nothing wrong in dying, if one dies nobly. And *Mission* dies nobly. I doff my hat with respect at its demise. It will have an honored place in the history of Churches of Christ.

Mission has been at the forefront of the subject that I address in this essay: *a more responsible and a more workable hermeneutics for Churches of Christ*. Any renewal effort must examine the way Scripture has been treated. It is noteworthy that both Martin Luther and Alexander Campbell had hardly begun their reformations when they provided the people with a fresh translation of the Bible and guidelines for interpretation.

Campbell named a norm that suggested his "New

Leroy Garrett and his wife Ouida, of Denton, Texas, have published *Restoration Review* for 35 years (actually it began as *Bible Talk*) and hope to continue for five more. His book *The Stone-Campbell Movement* is still being received enthusiastically.

Reformation," as he liked to describe his effort, needed a new hermeneutics: *we must come within understanding distance*. While he listed the usual rules that are found in textbooks on hermeneutics, this was unique to him; and it reveals much as to how he viewed the Bible. He was saying that the Bible must be read with the heart as well as the mind, that however extensive one's intellectual tools may be, he will not understand Scripture unless his approach is both humble and sincere.

Campbell may have been influenced by the Bible itself when he made a rule for coming within understanding distance. "If anyone wants to do His will," Jesus says in John 7:17, "he shall know concerning the doctrine." Like Campbell, Jesus here seems to name one's desire to know and to do as basic to understanding. Paul tells us plainly that "the natural (carnal) man," one who surely stands well beyond understanding distance, cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, and then lays down a hermeneutical principle similar to Campbell's: *they are spiritually discerned* (1 Cor. 2:14). At the least this means that there is far more than scholarship involved in understanding the Bible; at the most it means that in some way the Holy Spirit is our teacher, and that conforms to 1 John 2:27: "The anointing which you have received from Him abides

We often force Christ to fit our view of the Bible when we should alter our view of the Bible to fit Christ.

in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things."

This kind of hermeneutical thinking reaches back to the soul-searching psalms: "Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law" (Ps. 119:18). Are we not to approach the Bible with that

kind of spirit? *Open my eyes that I may see!* That is coming within understanding distance. Paul prayed that his readers might have such an experience: "that the eyes of your understanding might be enlightened that you may know" (Eph. 1:18). We may have 20/20 vision and yet be blind when it comes to the insight referred to here. Understanding the Bible is as much a matter of heart as it is head.

Actor Alan Alda said something like this when he gave the shortest Commencement address in the

Alexander Campbell named a norm that suggested his "New Reformation" needed a new hermeneutics: we must come within understanding distance.

history of Harvard Medical School. Having played the role of surgeon on TV for many years, he believed he had something important to say to future physicians; but he chose to say it in a single sentence. Once introduced, he stood and said, "The head bone is connected to the heart bone," and sat back down. The graduates were stunned as much by the profundity of his address as by its brevity. Alda's prescription for physicians is also suitable as a hermeneutical rule: *head and heart must work together in interpreting Scripture.*

Felix Frankfurter, who sat on the Supreme Court for twenty-six years, expressed this principle in a different way when he referred to interpreting the Constitution not only by reading its articles and sections but by "reading life." If a judge must understand something about life, its problems and perplexities, before she really grasps the deeper meaning of the Constitution, must we not "read life" in terms of its loneliness, suffering, injustice, and despair if we are to understand what Jesus meant when he said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33)? If we "read life," we will have to use the eyes of our heart as well as those of the mind.

While we often sing, "Beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord," it has not yet become a part of our hermeneutics. Not only may the Holy Spirit teach us, but history as well, especially the history of interpretation. The story of Martin Luther's liberation from the bondage of legalism by his discovery of "the just shall live by faith" may go far in helping us to understand the theme of Romans. Tradition is important when it passes along to us the Church's continuing effort to interpret the Bible responsibly. There is a sense in which the meaning of Scripture grows and matures through the centuries.

With all this said, I wish to add a dimension to

Campbell's hermeneutics of the understanding distance, and that is this: *Any interpretation must be subjected to the spirit of Christ, and not the other way around.* By this I mean that if we make the Bible mean something that contradicts the *spirit* of the Bible, which is Jesus Christ Himself, that interpretation is suspect, however logical and persuasive it may be otherwise. This means that *our handling of Scripture must be brought to the judgment bar of the spirit of Christ;* and if it is found hostile to the spirit of Christ, it must be rejected. We often do the reverse by twisting and warping Christ so that He will fit into our sectarian molds of interpretation. We force Christ to fit our view of the Bible when we should alter our view of the Bible to fit Christ.

I use the *spirit* of Christ in this context to refer to the *mind* of Christ, not the Holy Spirit, which is another subject. I have in mind Paul's language in Philippians 2:5: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Or to refer to 1 Corinthians 2 again, where Paul explains why the apostles understood when the natural man did not: "But we have the mind of Christ" (v. 16).

So I submit this as the basic rule of interpretation: *We are to interpret the Bible in reference to the spirit (or mind) of Christ.* If Christ is eclipsed or compromised by what we make the Bible mean, that interpretation must be questioned.

One can quote the Bible from "kiver to kiver" and still miss the meekness and gentleness of Christ. It was so with the Pharisees, for Jesus said of them, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (Jn. 5:39). They would have accepted Jesus had He fit their concept of Scripture. They knew their Bible but they didn't know Jesus. They knew the letter of the law but not the spirit of Christ. It is an easy thing for any of us to know a lot of facts

The Pharisees could have accepted Jesus had He fit their concept of Scripture. They knew their Bible but they didn't know Jesus.

about Jesus and yet not really know him.

When a man is exacting with his wife, quoting those verses that to him mean male-domination, something has to be wrong with his use of Scripture, for his behavior is hostile to the spirit of Christ. Whatever those verses mean, they can't mean that! Likewise with those that quote passages that are made to mean that elders have authoritarian rule in a congregation. The spirit of Christ responds to the authoritarian complex with, *"It shall not be so*

(continued on p. 48)

A Word For Our Times

**a column for
opinion and
personal
reflection**

Peace On Earth: Christmas, 1987

By David Sampson

The birth of Jesus was announced by a heavenly chorus of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth among men in whom He is pleased" (Luke 2:14). This hymn encapsulates the whole purpose of Jesus' life and ministry. The eternal Son of God became man in order to reveal God's glory by bringing peace among men whose lives are factious and fragmented.

The promise and hope of peace on earth is at the very heart of the Christmas story; and at least until recent years when secular humanists, the liberal ACLU, and other groups have tried to outlaw the Nativity scene at Christmas, Christmas was a time when even the secular world reflected for a few days on the promise and hope of peace which is at the heart of the Christmas message.

But our world is still enchanted with the idea of peace. No matter how fragmented our lives are, men still yearn for peace; and out of that yearning many have developed schemes and programs they believed would lead to peace: international organizations, peace movements, and arms reductions. All of these and anything else that might be dreamed will fall inevitably short of bringing peace, for peace cannot be imposed from the outside. It is foolish to think that any man-made structure can bring peace, for peace is not natural to man. Rather, conflict is man's natural state in this fallen world, one of inevitable conflict. The very best that we could hope to do is to manage conflict, so that society

does not degenerate into anarchy. That is why God created and ordained the institution of government — to manage and contain conflict in order to prevent society from falling to anarchy.

When God sought to bring peace into the world, He did it not by imposing structures and restraints on man from without. Rather, His eternal Son became man, lived in the world of conflict and disharmony and attacked the very root cause of strife, i.e., pride, arrogance, and self-assertiveness. The Eternal Son of God made peace by attacking self-centeredness head on, dying to it, and putting it to death. This He did by becoming a servant.

In God's economy, there is only one instrument that can bring peace into the world—the community of faith, the Church which is the extension of Christ's ministry in the world, the incarnation of Christ's body in the twentieth century. And thus when Jesus describes the Christian character as related in Matthew 5, He said that His people were to be peacemakers. How important is the role of peacemaker in the world? Christ reserved the title "Sons of God" exclusively for those who are peacemakers. That is how intimately this work is associated with the life of Christ.

We look not to government to make peace, for governments cannot make peace. Governments manage and contain conflict. Only the ministry of Christ can make peace. If we would be peacemakers, we must accept the lifestyle of Christ as the norm for our

own. We too must be willing to be servants, to die to self, arrogance, and pride.

The great Christological incarnation hymn of Philippians 2 is set in a context of overcoming the strife within the Church. Peace is made when we renounce selfishness and conceit (2:3), when we look out not only for ourselves but also for the interest of others (2:4). Unity and peace come from within. It is a change in attitude that leads to a change in the way we relate to one another. It is a matter, first of all, of the heart; and only the ministry of Christ can change the heart.

In serving, we die to self and we become sensitive to the needs of others; this way to peace was modeled by the life of Christ. That is why Paul said, "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus . . ."

The hope of peace that was part of that first Christmas needs to be born anew in the lives of people of faith and then imparted to others as we serve the fallen, fragmented, factious world even as Christ did.

This Christmas may you experience the peace that can come only through the life of Christ. Christmas is an exhortation to each one of us in the community of faith to become a peacemaker through serving. Every ministry of the Church is one which seeks to bring reconciliation and peace into the world. Let our Christmas gifts to our Church communities be the gift of service that can transform the heart and bring peace.

The Church: A Community Of Love

By John Wright

Someone has said, "The future of the human family rides on the fragile fibers of a promise spoken." A loving couple stands before a minister to pledge their troth. He asks each of them, "Do you promise . . .?" They, in turn, respond, "I do." And that promise spoken becomes either the strength or weakness of their home.

The seed of community and relationship lies in the affirmation, "I will be there with you . . . NO MATTER WHAT!"

Surely this is true of the church community. The church is not just persons who have become recipients of God's covenant but also a people who have made a covenant with God and with

each other. The church at its best is composed of individuals who are willing to promise the rest of the community, "I will be there with you . . . NO MATTER WHAT."

Unfortunately, we live in such a transitory, throw-away world that it is almost beyond our culture-saturated minds to grasp the utter importance of

commitment to a promise. It is so easy for us just to "go with the flow." Many "opt out" when the going gets tough or threatening. They simply say, "There's not enough in it for me," cash in their chips, and go home—in spite of promises made. This spirit of "disposable relationships" is so highly contagious that it naturally spills over into the church. Preachers are quickly lured away to "brighter lights" or "louder jingling" in the cash box. Deacons make half-hearted, conditional commitments. Elders persevere so long as things "go their way." Members hang loose on the fringe, letting it be known that they "can be counted on . . . so long as their itch is scratched." Otherwise they will take their dollars and find another show.

Community is not built of these kinds of relationships. And if the church is not "community," it fails as church. Not because of design problems. Not even because of monumental errors on the part of management. The church fails because of broken promises, because people are unwilling to pay the price of "being there with you . . . NO MATTER WHAT!" The church fails because there is no community.

Surveying the New Testament, one is quickly impressed with the number of times virtue is spoken of in a "one another" context. "Welcome one another," Paul admonished the

Romans (14:1). To the Galatians he said, "Bear one another's burdens" (6:2). And when writing to the Christians at Ephesus, he strongly urged them to be about the business of "forbearing one another in love" (4:2).

The author of Hebrews suggested that we "encourage one another" and "build up one another" (10:23-25). James pointed to the need to "confess . . . to one another" and "pray for one another" (James 5:13-16). And, of course, the grandest admonition of all was given by Jesus, Himself. "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13:34).

All of these Scriptures speak of "community": sharing together, struggling together, growing together. The church must be a place where we know we are accepted, not on the basis of total agreement on theological minutiae, but just as Jesus has accepted us—warts and all; where we are surrounded by comrades who encourage us, build us up, and help us along. Such a climate, of course, is in marked contrast to our common experience in the "work-a-day world" where "upmanship" and "cut-throat" tactics are the menu of the day.

Surely the church should be the one place in life where people can be "real"/"genuine." Maybe there are times and places in this life where survival demands that we "play games" or "wear masks"; but neither authentic

community nor growth can take place in such a hostile environment, for they can exist only in a climate free of pretense and sham.

The church must be a place of prayer. Not merely a group recitation of self-centered "give-me's," but community prayer where there is love, concern and petition made in behalf of

The church at its best is composed of individuals who are willing to promise the rest of the community. "I will be there with you . . . NO MATTER WHAT."

one another. Such prayer can bring community healing.

The church must be a place where people truly bear one another's burdens. Examination of the context of Galatians 6:2 will show that Paul's primary emphasis is "spiritual." His concern is not so much for their physical burdens or social burdens (though these are necessarily implied); instead, he is concerned that we reach out to bear one another's sin. Rather than being quick to accuse, denounce, and condemn, we should be ready to support, defend, and mourn with each other in our sin.

Only in the church can there be such a climate. Only here is room allowed for the changing of our minds. Only here can we ask our deepest questions. Only here can we expose our doubts and misgivings. Only here are we free to venture into the wilderness of unexplored knowledge. We do it together—walking hand in hand.

This is the church: a community of love! A place of promises spoken and kept: I will be there with you NO MATTER WHAT!

SPEAKERS OF A WORD FOR DECEMBER: David Sampson is Minister for the Park Row Church of Christ in Arlington, Texas. John Wright is Minister for the Burke Road Church of Christ in Pasadena, Texas. Jon Ashby, a member of the University Church in Abilene, Texas, has deep interest in world hunger. He has made two trips to Ethiopia in behalf of these interests and especially to work with the deaf. John Smith is Minister for the Vandelia Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas. Cal Downs is Professor of Organizational Communication at the University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Showing Love In Ethiopia

A small boy in Ethiopia waited hours in a long line for a distribution of corn at the Church of Christ feeding center of Jido. Tedese took the towel-like home-spun cotton robe off his shoulders to use as his sack, and he watched as it was filled with a scoop of yellow kernels. Picking up the precious cargo so the sack slung over his

shoulder and nested onto his back, he bent forward and started the three-mile journey home. His weak spindly legs would not support him to carry the food all the way back to the hut where his widowed mother and two sisters waited. Tedese fell sideways on a rock and some of the corn spilled on the dusty ground. A white man inspecting

the work at the feeding center happened on him, put down his own briefcase, helped the little Tedese sort the kernels of corn from the dirt, and placed them safely in the sack. When they finished, the frail little boys' face looked up into the eyes of the tall stranger. Language was not used; one spoke only Oromo and the other only

By Jon Ashby

English. The little boy smiled a shy smile and spontaneously reached into the sack and filled his little hand with corn. Now back on his feet the boy reached up, opened the hand of the man who had helped him, and placed a handful of the corn in it. Tedese showed his appreciation with a broad smile and a gesture of sharing. That small sack of corn was to be ten days ration for four people. Why did that little Muslim boy respond this way to the only white Christians he had ever seen? People respond to love.

The positive results of the outpouring of love for Ethiopia from the Churches of Christ are overwhelming.

Nothing Behind

I got there late but I was determined to see her if I could. I hadn't been there in four or five days and I felt guilty. She didn't have much family and so the days were long, the nights even longer. She had fallen and broken her hip about ten days ago and the doctors didn't have much hope for her recovery. She was really old - she had outlived her husband by several years, and nearly all of her friends. She was toothless and the shrunken gums, pinched cheeks and pointed chin made her look even older. Only the eyes remained bright and young. All of the vigor and fire which had once emanated from her entire body danced in concentrated form in her eyes—but not tonight.

It was dark in the room when I entered, I feared she was asleep. I could barely make out the form on the bed. I stood, just inside the door, not wanting to wake her, and thought I'd just pray for a moment and leave. "Who is it?" The voice was soft but she never moved. "It's Brother Smith." I

When the history of the 20th century is written, this relief effort will certainly be the most successful ever attempted. Today there are many new churches in that area. Preachers have been trained, wells dug, dams built, farming tools distributed, orphans cared for; and tens of thousands have been provided food by the Church of Christ Mission. Under the oversight of the Central Church of Christ in Stockton, California, this ongoing work has been responsible for the establishment of three schools for deaf children and has supported all aspects of the mission there since 1962. The Church of Christ is well known and acknowledged by the government and

stepped over, close to the bed, and she reached out and grasped my hand. Her grip was amazingly strong at first.

"How are you feeling tonight?"

"Not too good."

"Are you in any pain?"

"No, not really, I'm just tired, but I can't sleep."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"No, I think not. I don't think I have much time left. I've made my peace and there's a lot to look forward to, and almost nothing behind. I wanted to stay here as long as I was of some use, but I'm not anymore."

"I'm sure it's a better place than this."

"It's bound to be."

I wanted to make some inane comments about how she might be useful yet, she might recover - go home - start again - I just couldn't do it - it wasn't true - she was finished here. We held hands and talked for almost an hour there in the dark. She talked of her youth, her children, the moves they had made, good times - bad times - I had heard the story a hundred times - a

people of Ethiopia as a force for good. There has been a great harvest of souls.

As the spectre of a new drought and famine raises its ugly head over that ancient land, Christians again have the opportunity to help prevent another major disaster. The world community of nations saw over one million people die before the situation was brought under control the last time. With quick action, famine and pestilence of that proportion may be prevented from happening again.

As a result of our past successes, the people responded to love. With our continued support, little Tedese will never have to stand in that line of desperate people again.

By John Smith

thousand times - it is my own story - everybody's story with a change of names, dates, places. It's a good story - a true one - one I never tire of hearing and the end of the story was near. Or, perhaps the beginning.

I've made my peace and there's a lot to look forward to, and almost nothing behind. I wanted to stay here as long as I was of some use, but I'm not anymore.

"I've had a good life," she said "but the best part was when I became a Christian. I've always thought that was the best day of my life."

We prayed—holding hands in the dark. I never did see her but we touched and our hearts were one. As I left I heard her say, "I love you," and I said, "I love you too." And I did, you know.

After all the hassle, how marvelously simple it all becomes at the last.

By Cal Downs

Kaleidoscope

I've had lots of healthy spiritual influences in my life, and one of the most valued is a long affiliation with *Mission Journal* and its board. And even if the journal did not exist, I'd still like to maintain contact with this diverse group of challenging, stimulating people. There's a perspective that comes from their interactions that I value. There's also a perspective that

I've derived which goes far beyond the various issues. It's been helpful to me in the following ways:

The essence of Christianity is not systems. There are, and always have been, those that wanted to reduce religion to a plan, a series of steps, a ritual, a system, an organization, even a set of right positions on the issues.

Steps and plans can be helpful, I'll admit, but over the years the writers of *Mission*, fallible as they might be in some instances, helped me struggle with the realization that the synthesis of Christianity into a series of steps or plans really inhibited my own spiritual growth.

At a 25-year reunion at a Christian college, I was happily visiting at a

reception with a dozen people I had not seen in many years. Suddenly, Sally walked up to the group and asked publicly if she could ask me a personal question. Jokingly, I replied, "You can ask but I can't guarantee an answer." She then asked if I was still a member of the Church of Christ. Hiding a sense of resentment, I blurted out without thinking, "Sally, I'm a member of the Church of Christ everywhere but Lawrence, Kansas."

I have often thought of that answer and evaluated it. I stated precisely the way I feel. A long history of problems in a local church made me opt for a fellowship in a caring, Bible-oriented First Christian congregation. Yet, I respect and value my heritage in the Church of Christ. My network of friends are there. When we travel, we generally try to worship there—recognizing that we will sometimes "hit paydirt" and sometimes be disappointed. Nevertheless, I know full well that for some people my answer would sound foolish, naive, even heretical. For many, affiliation with a national church sect is an all or nothing effect. But not for me. At least not anymore.

I respect you—but I still disagree.

Reading *Mission* made me so aware of the disagreements among reputable scholars, of the different points of view about many biblical issues. Some I still have not sorted out completely—and may never do so. My current congregation has a marvelous climate about this. There is discussion, and the

The challenge of life is to take all the issues, all the problems, all the thrills, all the blessing, all the vulnerables, all the sins, all the varieties of people one encounters and weave them together into a life of faith.

prevailing mood so far is to be less judgmental. We, as a body, are simply not issue-oriented or issue-obsessed.

My major role is to witness, not to control. I can remember congregational discussions and sermons that really harrassed the congregation because someone was not quite right on a relevant issue. There always seemed to be an issue; and once it was raised, there had to be a right position.

Furthermore, anyone who did not hold to that opinion corrupted the whole group. Tension and fear seems to abound unless we can *control*. Through some of the writings of *Mission*, I developed my own realization that my responsibility is to develop my faith so that I can *witness* to others freely; but I am never responsible for their subsequent actions. These are outside of my control. Furthermore, I came to recognize the insidious nature of the implicit belief that if I would just behave the "right way" toward you or another, I'd be successful with you.

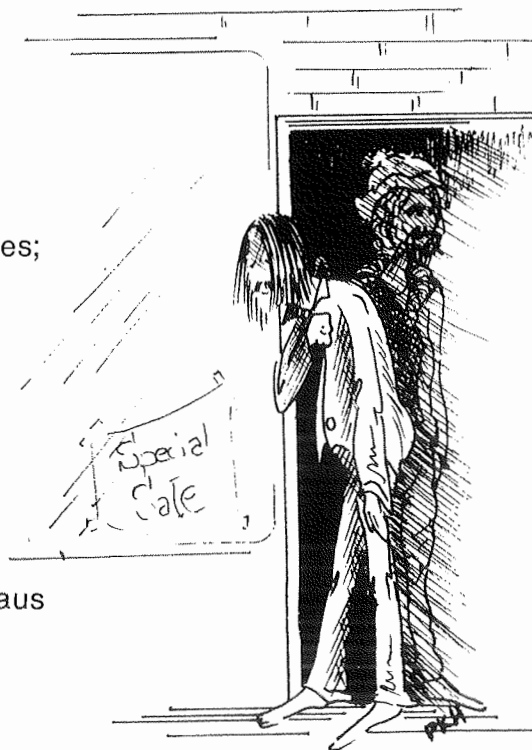
Life is a kaleidoscope. Events have a way of twisting one's telescope, bringing new perspectives out of a jumbled mass. The problem with being issue-oriented is that the issue is just one isolated fact. The challenge of life is to take all the issues, all the problems, all the thrills, all the blessings, all the vulnerables, all the sins, all the varieties of people one encounters and weave them together into a life of faith. God has promised to be with us, and I respect that promise. So give your kaleidoscope another turn and look at the new patterns without fear.

MISSION

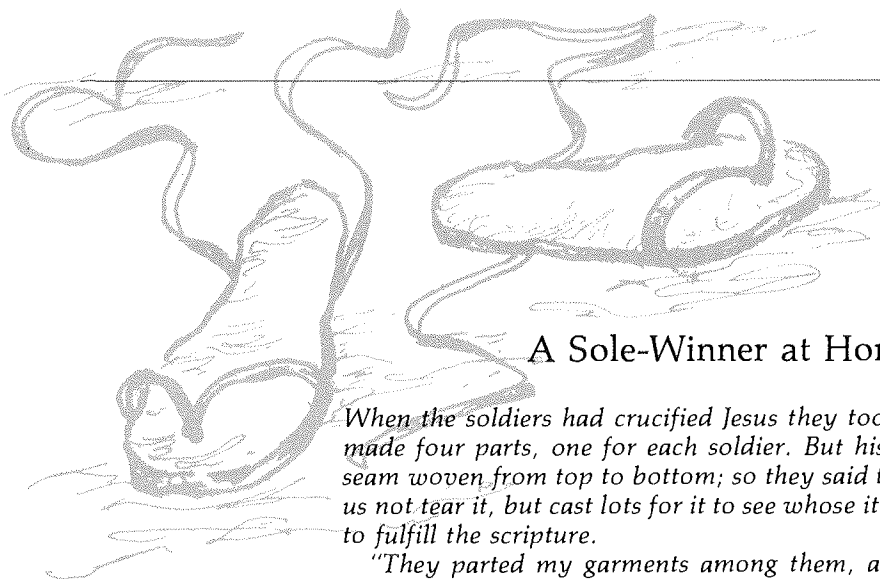
That Face

Two hundred times this year I've seen that face
 downtown at grime-glazed Metro bus stop signs;
 it goes with stopped, strained, dragged, drugged,
 cautious pace
 down plywood walks, through Oscoe's checkout lines;
 Coke bottle glasses skewing wrinkled eyes
 that fearfully peer out beneath the gray,
 while soil-tipped leather hands brush off the flies,
 Is this the Son of Man? the still, small voice
 that calls me down, that bids me leave my nets,
 demanding me to — here, now — make a choice:
 old burns downtown are either pointless stats,
 which my career's ambitions can ignore,
 or crises that reveal my spirit poor?

—Stacy Obenhaus



Stacy Obenhaus is an attorney in Kansas City, Missouri.



A Sole-Winner at Home

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier. But his tunic was without seam woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the scripture.

"They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

John 19:23-24

Yes, Julia, these sandals are well-worn —
 Worn well, I think, by that strange man
 I crucified.
 An honest Nazarene nailer, nailed between two thieves, forlorn,
 Forsaken by his friends, who ran
 Away, or hung far back and tried
 To show they didn't know him.
 The way the trial went, I couldn't blame them —
 The carpenter went to his cross
 I'm not sure why —
 For even Pontius Pilate was at a loss;
 While waving his washed hands he seemed to try
 To cover his confusion with a cry,
 "I'm innocent of his blood."
 And I suppose
 I, too, should feel that way.
 But look — there still upon my hands is reddened mud
 I ground into my knuckles while at play
 With dice to see who got his clothes.
 Oh, Julia, put your hand in mine!
 This day's the roughest I've put in;
 I wish I were back fighting on the Rhine
 Instead of crucifying gentle men!
 He watched me as I threw the dice
 And won these sandals for my part
 Of his estate — and later once or twice
 I felt his eye upon my heart,
 For just before I drove the nail,
 I kneeled before him to unlace these shoes;
 He gently raised his foot, as a king might choose
 To aid a well-loved slave whose clumsy fingers fail.
 Oh, Julia, put the food away!
 I'm filled with dread
 For what we've done today.
 I feel his blood drip on my head;
 I cannot eat.
 Oh, sit by me, sweet Julia, and let's just talk.
 These sandals — Look! They fit my feet,
 And yet they change the Way I walk!

— George Ewing

Liturgy and the Shape of Your Life

Responding to the Good And True

By ROBERT E. SEYMOUR

Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end" (Heb 12:2, GNB). This verse culminates that lengthy eleventh chapter of Hebrews which is a roll call of the outstanding people of faith in Israel's history. Then the Scripture says, "Let us who have this great crowd of witnesses around us rid ourselves of everything" that gets in the way of our view of Jesus.

Liturgy (whether formal or informal) which engages us in worship Sunday after Sunday is an attempt to assist us in focusing our lives upon God's revelation in Jesus Christ. He is the center of our faith, and it is from and through our relationship to Him that the Christian life emanates. Our lives are significantly shaped by whatever it is to which we give our primary attention, for whoever or whatever sustains our attention is likely to get our life as well.

I read recently in *The New York Times* the findings of the American Council on Education's annual survey of attitudes of college and university freshmen. The survey reveals that freshmen are more materialistic than ever before; sixty-eight percent said "a very important" reason for attending college is "to be able to make more money," a considerably higher number than a decade ago. "Being well-off" ranked second place among their personal values, second only to becoming authorities in their field of interest. Predictably, given this ranking of values and trend toward greater materialism, more freshmen are aiming at business careers than ever before in our history.

We need to consider what is shaping the lives of our young people. Toward what are we directing their attention? The words of a familiar hymn come to mind:

O Lord and Master of all! Whate'er our name or sign,

Robert E. Seymour not only tries to keep the eyes of his congregation in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, fixed on Jesus but is deeply involved in the social issues of the community — feeding the hungry, justice, etc.

We own thy sway, we hear thy call, We test our lives by thine. Thy litanies, sweet offices of love and gratitude; Thy sacramental liturgies, the joy of doing good.

The linking of liturgy to life! Karl Barth has said that the Christian life is a "formed reference." We are shaped by that to which we are consistently related. And so a legitimate question for each of us is, "What is the primary frame of reference for my life? Culture is certainly a big factor in making us who we are. A far more important potential factor is the church family, for if we are faithful participants in its worship, we learn to "keep our eyes fixed on Jesus."

Liturgy is the primary work of the Church. We have lived through a period in the life of the Church when some have considered worship as little more than a refueling stop for our work in the world and have failed to appreciate the importance and priority of worship *per se*. Worship has been seen as a means to motivate outreach, and little more. As someone has put it, "We are inside for the sake of those outside." I believe that worship has an intrinsic value regardless of any extrinsic effects.

Frederick Buechner speaks well to this point:

To worship God means to serve him. Basically there are two ways to do it. One way is to do things for him that he needs to have done - run errands for him, carry messages for him, fight on his side, feed his lambs, and so on. The other way is do things for him that you need to do - sing songs for him, tell him what's on your mind and in your heart, in general rejoice in him and make a fool of yourself for him the way lovers have always made fools of themselves for the one they love.

You see, God needs us to do work for ourselves through the worship as well as work for His kingdom in the world. Ethics is best understood not as the purpose of worship but as the by-product of worship.

You may recall the little village of Le Chambon in France where the villagers courageously protected the Jews of their community from the Holocaust, daily risking their own deaths. Phillip Haillie went there to interview the villagers and the survivors to try to discover what had led them to do it. He came to this conclusion: week in week out, every Sunday, the villagers entered the little Protestant Church of Le Chambon to hear the Gospel preached. Over the entrance to their sanctuary were inscribed the words, "Love one another." "Ethics," concludes Haillie, "is not a matter of heroic acts of choice; ethics is only a matter of character."

People-making always precedes moral decisions, and people-making occurs in worship where we are not only acting but are acted upon. Worship, like ethics, is also moral activity. Worship is a response to what is good and true and right. While we are busy serving God through worship, we are being served by God and thereby are being made into God's people.

The fixed point in ethics is Jesus Christ. Abstract words such as "love" and "justice" and "truth" are difficult criteria apart from Him. For us these concepts are always relational, for we understand what they mean only in relation to what we know of God in Christ. The making of Christians cannot occur outside of a worshiping community in which we serve God and God serves us. To be a Christian means to be formed in a certain way, and this happens as we "keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus on whom our faith depends from beginning to end."

We have all heard it said of someone, "That's just what I would have expected her to do." The implication is that the moral behavior is more a matter of being than it is of doing, and becoming a different kind of person occurs in a liturgical community, in the discipline and work of worship. Here character is formed which represents lifelong human responses to what God is doing in us.

Sometimes non-church individuals say to Christians, "You need to get out into the real world." Often our response to the legitimate demands of the world, with our obligations of outreach, subverts us into thinking that what happens in worship is not the real world but that the real world is "out there." To the contrary, participation in liturgy is giving our attention to the real world. Worship is not a retreat from the world. It is rather the activity in which we get a glimpse of the Kingdom, which is the vision of reality and truth. And it is this vision that shapes Christian character. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that to whatever degree my life reflects Christian character,

it is because of faithful participation in liturgy during my formative years. Sunday after Sunday there was held before me a vision of the real world in which God called me to live, and week after week there was a worshiping congregation which encouraged me to give my attention to Jesus Christ, who alone represents the real human being. As we meet together as worshiping communities, we are given opportunities to affirm our faith, to look at life from a particular vantage point. Interestingly enough, the very word "orthodoxy" literally means "right praise," i.e., seeing the world as it truly is in relationship to the Living God.

Writing about the significance of ritual in human life, John Dewey referred to ritual as "imaginative rehearsal." Liturgy is the dress rehearsal for the real world where we perceive the world as God sees it and thereby anticipate what it means to dwell in God's world rather than the shabby one around us which masquerades as reality. The writer of Hebrews reminds us of that long procession of people through the centuries who were welded together by faith as

The making of Christians cannot occur outside of a worshiping community in which we serve God and God serves us.

God's People and who were thus able to see far more and far beyond their contemporaries. "Through faith they did what was right and received what God had promised." The worshiping community shaped them for a future others could not see.

I have read the moving account about the church in Alabama where Martin Luther King, Jr. preached, the pulpit from which he said, "Ultimately the most prejudiced mind in Montgomery will become a loving mind." The time came when none other than George Wallace was asked to preach from that very pulpit, and he affirmed King's vision of one human family and testified to the redemptive power of suffering. After the address, as the former Governor was rolled up the aisle in his wheelchair, the organ played "the Battle Hymn of the Republic"—"Glory, glory hallelujah, God's truth is marching on!" Everyone wept.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he urges: "Fix your mind on those things that are true and noble and right and pure and lovely and honorable." Give Christ your undivided attention. Get rid of other things that are in the way. This is the work of liturgy in which God works with us to make us new people in Christ, persons who perceive, even though dimly, what the real world is really like. People who are keeping their "eyes fixed on Jesus."

MISSION

Eulogy For A Young Man

When The Dreams Are Shattered

By ROBERT M. RANDOLPH

Note: On June 26, 1987 Jay Vanderpool, son of Nathalie and Harold Vanderpool, was killed in a boating accident in Galveston, Texas. Robert Randolph is a long-time friend of the family and one of the ministers of the Brookline Church of Christ, where Jay was a member while attending Harvard.

How hollow our words sound today as we confront the magnitude of the tragedy that has brought us here. I am, I confess to you, more comfortable with the anger that rages within my heart of hearts. It is an anger directed at God; it is an anger directed at those who perpetrated this tragedy; it is an anger at those who go their uncomprehending way unaware that Jay is gone. Those were the first words I heard when I arrived here on Saturday evening: "He is gone, Bob he is just gone." Are we, I thought, in Shakespeare's words: "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the Gods;/They kill us for their sport" (Lear). But in the seeming years that have passed these last days I have found no comfort in my anger, for it destroys; and I affirm that we are more than flies to the God we worship.

William Barclay, reflecting on a circumstance in his own life not unlike what we have lived with these days wrote, "When things like this happen there are just three things to be said. First, to understand them is impossible. Second, Jesus does not offer us solutions to them. What he does offer us is His strength and help somehow to accept what we cannot understand. Third, the one fatal reaction is the bitter resentment which forever after meets life with a chip on the shoulder and a grudge against God. The one saving reaction is simply to go on living, to go on working and find in the presence of Jesus Christ the strength and courage to meet life with steady eyes, and to know the comfort that God too is afflicted in my affliction."

So we are back to words, those small, hollow, weak expressions of our humanity, which turn out to be the strongest weapons we have. These past days there have been many words—and the strongest have been the most simple. "I love you" rings like an anthem sung by gesture, deed of kindness, word of

comfort. And words sustain us. Those of the Apostle Paul speak through the centuries from a place of most humble origin: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, not any powers, neither heights nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:38-39).

The Jay we love and celebrate today would have wanted it no other way, for he was at home with words as few his age are. One of our last conversations was about a paper he was writing; a combination of procrastination, shifting priorities, and a blooming social life left him scrambling to find the words to analyze an aspect of a particular subject through the lens of Emile Durkheim's work. He didn't really have the words; so we came up with a swing phrase; "Durkheim," we said, "gave insight/offered insight" on the topics under consideration. Such phrases allowed him to say what he knew while appearing to know much more.

Jay, too, would have wanted no part of the anger. He knew how to be angry. You who knew him well know that. But he recognized anger for what it is—a powerful shot of adrenaline, but ultimately a dry refuge. He would have been quizzical; "Bob," he would have asked, cocking his head as he did and smiling, "What does your anger gain you? What does it leave you with?" I, too, would have smiled and replied, "Smart-aleck kid." Jay could have remained in Boston this summer, angry at the hand fate had dealt him, but he came to be with his family. His presence was a healing force in difficult times.

We must now begin to turn from our grief—and for what will be a long process—to find those words that we can take with us into the future. And it is here that we begin to plumb the legacy of Jay Vanderpool. And in this quest I believe we can see the hand of God at work among us. Karl Barth in his little book *The Word of God and the Word of Man* writes, "The only source for the real, the immediate, revelation of God is death. Christ unlocked its gates. He brought life to light out of death." What are the words of life we are left with?

The first is the word WHY. Jay was not afraid to ask "why"? Questions were second nature to him. He sensed early on that we are here to grow and to change. The joy he found at Harvard was in a community that gave him a chance to become. He delighted, as many of you know, in learning. He wanted to know what you did and why. "What are you doing now, Uncle Bud?" was always his question to his uncle, General Aikin. "What has the church to say about poverty, homelessness?" was his question

"The one saving reaction is simply to go on living, to go on working and find in the presence of Jesus Christ the strength and courage to meet life with steady eyes, and to know the comfort that God too is afflicted in my affliction."

with our community of faith in Boston. And we have a seminarian better trained because she tried to answer Jay's questions. It is not surprising that Jay was a learner, given the family he came from. On both sides learning is valued, given credence. But there are lots of families like that, but few children who have taken the legacy as seriously as Jay did. But there was more. Learning was not an end in itself. It was to be a tool, a way of preparing for greater service in the world.

The second word is PURPOSE. Jay felt that his life had purpose. He was here to do things. That is why he was where he was on Saturday. It was like him to reach for the higher rung, to stretch to the limit. Going for it, whether on the football field, in the classroom, or in business, was second nature to Jay.

Let me offer an aside to those of you who are Jay's peers—I want to give you a peek into the inner world of those strange creatures called parents. When we heard—all of us who have dared to love enough to bring a child into this world—we immediately wanted to know where you were and what you were doing. We wanted you close, we wanted you with us, we wanted to protect you. In the weeks ahead that emotion will still be there. We will try to remember, and you will need to remind us, that like Jay, you will never be all you can be or do all you can do unless we let you stretch your wings and fly.

My daughter Kathleen once remarked that Jay could do anything. He believed he could; we wish that all of you felt the same way. Jay could have done anything he wished. There were more than a few who said they were preparing to have cabinet posts when Jay became President. I am not sure what would have been left in Washington when he got there, but I am confident that he would have made a difference. Jan Randolph, the woman to whom I am

married, talked to Jay a lot about such things and in one of their conversations they talked about whether one person could make a difference. Jay said he didn't think so. Jan told him that one person couldn't do it alone, but that one could have an impact. That is where they left it, for Jay knew he could make a difference in the world, but he also knew he wouldn't make it alone.

The third word we leave here with is LOVE. Jay had the capacity to love in such a way that he drew people to him regardless of race, age, circumstance. At church on Sunday he could be with a child or with

Jay had the capacity to love in such a way that he drew people to him regardless of race, age, circumstance. That is why you are here from all over this city, this state, this country and beyond. In his sheer joy of living he did not rest within life's pleasures, he reached out and gave to each of you a portion of himself.

a matriarch in equal ease. He cared about them and they about him. That is why you are here from all over this city, this state, this country and beyond. Love is why he touched you. He knew love and he gave love. In his sheer joy of living he did not rest within life's pleasures; he reached out and gave to each of you a portion of himself.

What then are we to do now? We could enshrine this tragedy for all time and let it end there. Jay's life could be a monument to our frailty. Ron Heifetz of the Kennedy School of Government speaks of the energy available to create martyrs. We can use our energy to make Jay a martyr to chance, or we can go from here committed to making real the things he believed in. Rollo May reminds us that the courage to create is found in the ability to push through the pain and ask the questions that help us grow. We can seek the frontiers of learning and push them further ahead, but always with purpose. We are here to make things happen—to, with the help of God, build a new Jerusalem in this green and verdant land. And it will be a city where who you are is measured by what you are, not what you do, or whom you know, or where you went to school, or what you look like.

The Jay Vanderpool we love and celebrate is with us here in memories, the stories, the images which we hold close and which will never leave us. Furthermore, I believe the story has not all been told. A friend of mine, through his books, has said, "When I die, I should like to slip out of the room without a fuss—for what matters is not what I am leaving but where I am going" (Barclay). I have always believed

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Baby Doe And Ginny

By DOUGLAS BROWN

A distraught family entered an African children's ward, begging the mission doctors to take care of their small child. He had been tragically disfigured by an animal. In American medical fashion, the doctors began skin-grafting procedure to restore the child's face, shoulders, and arms. The treatment spurred steady improvement.

Then, one day the doctors came on the ward and discovered the child was gone. Looking to the nurses, they asked, "Where is this patient?" The nurses turned away.

One doctor kept asking, "What has happened to the child in this bed?"

Finally, one of the nurses came back to say, "Doctor, the child was never meant to live after the attack."

The doctor probed further, "Did he die?"

The nurse responded, "No, the family has taken him to the bush where he will be left to die." She went on to explain that in this African village parents whose children were traumatized at birth, or later by some abnormality, abandoned them to the bush as something evil. The troubled doctor left the hospital bewildered.

This situation, recounted in *The Plains Brood Alone*,¹ is not so foreign as we might like to think. Advances in our medical technology have come with amazing speed. This is especially true for the treatment of babies. We can increasingly intervene where just a few years ago we could only passively observe. Given the rapid expansion of what *can* be done for fetuses and newborns with physical and/or mental handicaps, we have to make perplexing decisions about what *should* be done. Is therapeutic abortion ever justified when fetal abnormalities are detected? Once a newborn with serious disabilities is stabilized, should correctable life-threatening conditions be

treated or should these conditions be allowed to take a baby's life? When dismissed from the hospital, can such a child be sensitively and meaningfully integrated into family and society?

Since at least the early 1970s, the case studies for discussing these questions have usually been babies with Down syndrome, like Ginny, the now five-year-old daughter of Tom and Carolyn Elkins.

Down syndrome is a chromosomal abnormality that results in mild to severe mental retardation. Medical professionals and medical ethicists, with notable exceptions, have favored therapeutic abortion when the abnormality is detected in utero or non-treatment for the afflicted newborn when facing a life-threatening complication. Society took notice in 1982 when informed that a Down syndrome baby died in Bloomington, Indiana, because one such life-threatening condition was not corrected. Debate escalated. The federal government stepped in with "the Baby Doe decisions," designed to protect infants in newborn intensive care units who were struggling to live in spite of some form of severe physical or mental handicap.

Tom and Carolyn recall vividly when Ginny entered their home. It was a difficult time. While they grieved over the loss of the normal child they had expected, they struggled to accept and love the handicapped child suddenly theirs. They realized she would not be taken to anyone else's hospital room. Ginny was *their* daughter. Soon their attention shifted to the beauty and the importance of life itself. The previous day's worries—the tests, the friends to call, and flowers—all became secondary to the desperate struggle for life they saw before them.

Looking back, the Elkins see that the beautiful innocence of little Ginny opened a new dimension in their understanding of grace. But Ginny and the grace she brought did not enter easily into their family. A wall of initial despair and loneliness had to be broken down. However, an expanding sense of inner peace and joy steadily chipped away this divisive

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barrier.

Tom and Carolyn did not truly begin to understand the grace channeled through the very special little children like Ginny until their obstetrician jolted them with his projection, "This one's special, you know."

They were not yet prepared for such an idea. The grief and agony of admitting they had not received the normal child they had expected still weighed heavily on their hearts. They refused to look ahead at the long-range changes this new life would bring them. So they caustically responded, "Oh, it's special?"

And he continued, "Yes, she is special. This child is one you will love anyway. She will teach you what love really is. She will love you first. You will love this child because she is yours rather than because of her performance."

Ginny was born to Christian parents. Did the Christian commitment of Tom and Carolyn offer any resources for their reactions and decisions? Or were they left to depend only on the guidance of modern wisdom?

The couple listened seriously to the opinions of the

"You will love this child because she is yours rather than because of her performance."

professionals attending Ginny. They had the added advantage of being trained themselves in obstetrics and gynecology. Their Christian faith provided no specific guidance. Many of the difficult questions surrounding the birth of a handicapped child like Ginny are not addressed in Scripture. However, their Christian faith has helped resolve three crucial questions fundamental to making those tough decisions.

First, *the presence of the Ginnys being "saved" by advanced medical technology magnifies the painfully apparent inequalities among people.* On what basis, then, can we say all of us share a common identity? Tom and Carolyn have found a view of humanness in their Christian faith that makes such an affirmation possible. From this perspective, they have come to see all human beings drawn together by creatureliness and by spiritual uniqueness. This dual nature explains human dignity, human limits, and human potential.

Christian faith has helped them see a dignity in each human being that neutralizes differences. The worth of life itself settles any doubt about the respect due each person. We all bear "the image of God." We are the focus of divine love. We will be raised from the dead into new life. In varying degrees, we are aware of ourselves and the world around us. We bear

responsibility for the natural order's welfare. We feel the tug of conscience. We enjoy the freedom to love and be loved.

At the same time, they have learned that human dignity and potential is not incompatible with acknowledging human limitation. To be human is to be "handicapped" or disadvantaged is achieving certain desired ends. Reminders of this humbling reality abound. We all die. Our wisdom is neither flawless nor exhaustive. Time and chance conspire to hurt us.

Tom and Carolyn have come to see all human beings drawn together by creatureliness and by spiritual uniqueness.

Commitment to the common humanness that pulls together otherwise diverse persons has enabled Tom and Carolyn to recognize their own handicaps and thereby to identify with Ginny.

Second, *should those who are normal stand in the center of society and push those stricken with physical and/or mental abnormalities far out on society's margins?* Christian faith has encouraged Tom and Carolyn, though normal, to stand on society's borders with the abnormal and look inward toward the rest of society. This radically different view of their "neighbors" stems from the fact that God, while no respecter of persons, "looks" at human beings from an alignment with "the least of these" (Mt. 25:31-46).

Israel was taught to think of God as standing alongside the ignored or forgotten. The Israelites themselves had been social outcasts when they marched out of Egypt by God's power as liberated slaves. Their psalms called attention to God's commitment to the widowed, the pained, the powerless, and the weak. Their true prophets spoke for the socially disenfranchised.

Jesus repeated frequently the paradox that the first

Human dignity and potential is not incompatible with acknowledging human limitation.

shall be last and the last first. Luke, in his gospel, magnified Jesus' attention on "the least of these." Jesus touched lepers. He had compassion for demoniacs. He received beggars. He had time for children. He dined with street walkers and tax collectors. The first Christians were most effective when spreading the Gospel among the lower classes and the socially marginal. The more privileged converts were instructed to submit themselves to "the least of these."

Tom and Carolyn's Christian faith has freed them from the habit of excluding the abnormal when determining what being human means and what a minimal quality of life is.

Third, *can "the least of these" be other than a medical problem? an ethical problem? a technological challenge? a theological dilemma? a parental disappointment? a domestic burden?* Christian faith has taken Tom and Carolyn behind divine grace to divine love. God intends to bring about a restoration of family love among all human beings.

Jesus attacked the habit of flocking together in homogeneous groups. In doing so he sought to restore the vision of universal brotherhood God had entrusted to Israel. Early Christians were expected to leave behind merely living for themselves. Instead, they were to bear one another's burdens and to care for others in deed as well as word. Those lengthy genealogies (Gen. 4-12 and Lk. 3:23-38) we tend to skip over remind us that "of one the Lord has made the race." This common ancestry unites all people. Skin color, cultural traditions, physical strength, and mental capacity should help only to describe us, rather than rank us.

This commitment to universal brotherhood has enabled Tom and Carolyn to reach out to their newborn child with family love.

Christian faith provides the Elkins with a theological rationale and motive to welcome Ginny into their home. Does our understanding of Christian faith move us to welcome Ginny into our community? our neighborhood? our church? our home? No doubt most people, if asked, would say "Welcome" to the Ginnys as fellow sharers in humanness and fellow members in our society.² Such a salute should not be casually offered. An initial "yes" to the Ginnys must be more than a polite but detached greeting. This juncture reveals how deeply imprinted the bias against the handicapped remains. A genuine "welcome" involves many more tangible "yesses" that send ripples through a lifestyle formerly at ease only with normalcy.

When welcomed, the Ginnys pose a challenge to a *quid pro quo* definition of personhood. We can no longer simply do for others so that they will do the same or more for us.

When welcomed, the Ginnys call unavoidable attention to the limits faced by all human beings. We can no longer act as if we alone control our lives.

When welcomed, the Ginnys infect those around them with inspiring determination. We can no longer be satisfied with half-hearted efforts to reach easy goals.

When welcomed, the Ginnys tear down the pro-

tective hedges around assumptions about life commonly held by the privileged. We have to reexamine our values, our priorities, our definitions of "the good life," and our responsibilities. *When welcomed*, the Ginnys make necessary a critical and radical restructuring of economic habits and policies. We must finance an economic safety net under the disadvantaged and those who provide their long-term supervision.

When welcomed, the Ginnys better insure protection for all the powerless against abuse by the powerful.

Tinkering with the embroidery of a garment is one thing. Remaking the garment is quite another. The latter best illustrates the impact of deciding to truly welcome the Ginnys. Jesus not infrequently seemed to discourage persons, taken with his ideals, from following him. In doing so, he revealed not uncertainty about his vision, but certainty about its price. What then is expected from us who are compelled by Christian faith to say "yes" to the Ginnys?

To begin, *Christians need to repent of intentional or unintentional signals to the Ginnys that they are not welcome*. How often have church buildings kept them out? How often have our interpretations of Scripture left them out? How often have our prayers and sermons only pointed them out? How often have our political and economic preferences cut them out?

On one occasion Jesus scolded his disciples for not permitting some children to come to him (Mk. 10:13-16). He explained that anyone so insensitive to children could not understand or enter the kingdom of God. Similarly, if we do not seek out and fully welcome the Ginnys, we cannot experience nor can the world clearly see the kingdom of God. As though having fire in our bones, we must be possessed by God's vision of all human beings rejoicing and weeping together as one family. In this way, our congregations will stand out in this society as convicting examples rather than as carnival sideshows.

More specifically, *Christians responding as health care professionals to the Ginnys face stiff resistance from colleagues who find their commitment to health incompatible with support for the incurably disabled*. Some professionals are apparently so opposed to the Ginnys that they pass on inaccurate information about them to emotionally confused parents. They support the decision to withhold all therapeutic intervention for the Ginnys, including such basic needs as liquids and warmth. Other professionals are only slightly more accepting. They offer technical assistance to stabilize the condition of the Ginnys, but wash their hands of any responsibility toward

welcoming them into society.

One skeptical parent of a Down syndrome child complained in an editorial to the *American Medical News*:

I feel an increasing frustration with the attitudes of some of the medical community . . . You cite the physician as the professional most qualified to make such a life-and-death decision. I ask all physicians to examine their background in treating handicapped children. Most medical school texts today devote less than one full page to the diagnosis and treatment of an infant with anomalies such as Down syndrome and spina bifida. The average . . . physician treats maybe a handful of severely handicapped or retarded children in his career. Is this the professional whom you consider to be most capable of counseling the parents and making a proper decision? I'm asking you to listen to the real professionals—the parents and teachers of the handicapped and mentally retarded. . . . It is these parents and professionals who are supporting the (Baby Doe) legislation.³

The Baby Doe regulations legally mandated medical support for the Ginnys. But how long can such action endure without a refreshing motive? Compassion cannot be legislated. Dr. Rieux, in Albert Camus' critically acclaimed novel *The Plague*,⁴ represents many professionals. He attempted to keep on fighting a plague in his city without knowing why he did so. Ironically, when pressed by a friend to admit he had no reason for his action, Dr. Rieux slipped into the condition he found so objectionable in the city's population. He avoided thinking about why he fought the plague. Christians in the health care community must prod their peers to find a rationale for treating the Ginnys and to participate in concern for them.

The biological conditions that burden the Ginnys should be fought and, as possible, eliminated. However, in the numbing circumstances of medicine, the distinction between the Ginnys and their biological diagnoses easily becomes blurred. The Ginnys are most basically persons, not cases to be discussed as problems. Christians in health care are called to leave their vocation with the compassion and acceptance Christ showed the unfortunate.

Finally, *Christians are called to help the family members of the Ginnys discover the life and personhood present in these children.* Pain and fatigue frequently threaten those responsible for the Ginnys. Tranquility can appear to be forever eclipsed by their children's disabilities. Though too often hard to grasp, the door opened by the Ginnys to the grace

manifest in Jesus Christ can in time bring meaningful life and calming peace. It has been for the Elkins.

When Tom and Carolyn look at Ginny, they remember her happy eyes and wide grin as she tore into birthday packages, holding each item high and screaming "Yea!" They remember a lunch table perfectly set for a little girl gleaming at them with a pert smile and folded hands under her chin. They remember her laughter as she sat cross-legged while the family puppy crawled all over her and licked her face.

When they look at Ginny's friends with Down syndrome, they see their crooked teeth, their awkward gait, their inability at times to stand, their strange sounds when they are not able to speak. But then they see those broad smiles and are touched again by grace.

The experience of Tom and Carolyn is not unique. A survey of 101 parents with Down syndrome children revealed that most viewed their experience as overall rewarding.⁵ Few felt their family or social life had been significantly disrupted. Several had children after the birth of their Down syndrome child, with few indicating they would have aborted a second Down syndrome fetus.

This parental profile does not imply that all parents can do more than cope with their child's Down syndrome. But it does challenge the habit of writing off such claims of love and affection as anecdotal. It does suggest that more parents would find, beyond coping, some rewarding experience with their Down syndrome child if encouraged by the medical and religious communities.

Lamentably, some of the Ginnys do not live beyond infancy and learn to play, to laugh, or to love. Does this mean there are situations when the most loving thing to do for the Ginnys is to hold them, care for them, and allow their gasping to cease? This question is unavoidable. Babies are born with no brains, with no kidneys, with a skeleton of broken bones. The answer in these cases (or cases functionally equivalent) may well be yes, but *only when intensive care proves useless for them and only if such a decision is made in grief by more than a few persons after all avenues have been explored.* Only then should the bit of grace the Ginnys represent be allowed to slip away.

Death leaves the living to cope with the loss of loved ones who will no longer love back. In too many circumstances short of physical death, similar loneliness has imposed itself. Perhaps the most pained are those who have little or no opportunity to be loved back by the child they love. Tragically, our society has all too often responded to such families with detached and politically motivated governmental in-

tervention, with misinformation, and with courtroom attacks.

Christians ought to be among those determined to counter such impersonal responses. Christian faith spawns an interest, a compassion, a love for the Ginnys and their families. With this disposition, we can assist those related to the Ginnys to see more clearly, in the midst of their struggle, the unique dimension to meaningful existence the Ginnys bring.

American mission doctors in Africa face the contrast between the American newborn nursery and a children's ward in Nigeria. Yet both settings have at least one thing in common — use of the word "doe." American health care professionals, religious leaders, governmental representatives, and parent groups heatedly debate questions about a group of babies many of them have never seen and know only by the name "Doe." At the same time, a doctor or nurse kneels to place the feverish body of a small child into the arms of a desperate Nigerian mother. They simply say, "Doe." What is the difference? In America, "Doe" tends to be a depersonalizing *noun* that clinically isolates certain babies. In the Urhobo language of Nigeria, "doe" is an all-encompassing *adjective* that unites human beings bound together with emotions from joy to sorrow to compassion.

Most often, we ask questions about the Ginnys. However, as our experience with them increases, we discover that by their very presence they reverse the roles and put a profound question to us about our character as a people: How will churches of Christ be remembered in reference to our care for the weak? the poor? the powerless? the disabled? I believe we are called so to respond to the Ginnys that we prick the conscience and leaven our society to treat each "Baby Doe" as a fellow struggler before God. What

will your verdict be? _____ MISSION

NOTES

¹J. Birney Dibble, *The Plains Brood Alone* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1973), pp. 1-20.

²George Will, "For the Handicapped: Rights But No Welcome," *Hastings Center Report*.

³S. Cash, "Court's Role Welcomed in Baby Doe Decisions," *American Medical News* (October 12, 1984) p. 6.

⁴Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, Vintage Books Edition (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 117-126, 194-95.

⁵T.E. Elkins, T.G. Stovall, S. Wilroy, and J.V. Dacus, "Attitudes of Mothers of Children With Down Syndrome Concerning Amniocentesis, Abortion, and Prenatal Genetic Counseling Techniques," *Obstetrics and Gynecology* (in press).

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(EULOGY, continued from p. 29)

in eternal life and I believe it more strongly today than ever before, for I expect to see Jay again. I know where he has gone. Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you for I go to prepare a place for you that where I am you may be also." I hold to the word of our Lord and look forward to being with Jay and those we have loved long since and lost awhile.

James Weldon Johnson in *God's Trombones* talks of being asleep on the bosom of Jesus and in his powerful cadences draws an image with great comfort, but it is not the image of Jay I want to leave you with. I think Jay slept only when he came to my house to study. Do you remember how Jay loved to

dance? He could dance with you or by himself. If someone said real men don't dance solo, he smiled and redefined what it meant to be a real man. Given his propensity, and the times, I on occasion wondered what would have happened if Jay had announced he planned to go to the prom and dance by himself. I want you to know now, as surely as you know anything, that Jay is dancing still. We cannot hear the music, but one day we will and he is going to have a few steps to teach us.

Almighty God: Be present in our sorrow and heal us, for we have much to do. Amen.

_____ MISSION

Someday I'm Going To Fly

Letters From The Retarded

By WILMA C. BUCKNER

Author's Note: On the evening of the day I was baptized I was walking home from the drugstore and met a neighbor boy walking up and down the sidewalk crying. Ivan, Jewish and retarded, lived across the street from me but stayed at a boarding school for retarded people most of the time. I stopped to talk with him (he was about 12 and I was 17) and asked why he was crying. He said his uncle (who was about 20) had told him he would never be able to work. Thinking how cruel his uncle was and how unnecessary that Ivan be told that, I cried bitterly that he wanted to work. And that very night I made a commitment to do something someday for the Ivans of the world.

Later after college and marriage and the births of my own children, that dream came true. For four years I substituted as a classroom teacher and RN at a development center for retarded persons. Then I became the fulltime center nurse. Later still, I worked for two years in the pediatric unit in a major medical center hospital; there I saw and cared for many "FLK." "FLK" stands for "funny looking kids" (a term used by the genetics specialist there but not recommended for general use). Thinking the term to be cruel at first, I came to realize that the characteristics of children that elicit that description are those that initially evoke suspicion that there is something wrong with the children.

As I worked with the children in these places, it soon became apparent that solving problems or curing physical ailments for these children were bitter-sweet experiences. For no matter how many times we were able to determine what was needed and provide it, the basic disability — retardation — is uncorrectable.

Retardation always involves some form of language deficiency. For the mildly or moderately retarded individual, the deficit may be in reasoning, comprehension, retention, or syntax. The more

severely retarded may be without speech or speak only in two- or three-word phrases because of cerebral palsy, deafness, brain dysfunction, or other physical defect. Communication, therefore, becomes a major problem in meeting the needs of mentally handicapped citizens.

The following letters are among those that grew out of a need to examine myself and society in light of our responsibility to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. The names I use and the situations I describe are not real. Each letter does, however, represent a group of persons who have the problem described.

Some of the letters have happy endings. Some do not. They are all designed to ask questions and stimulate thought, not to give final answers. It is my hope that through these letters the mentally handicapped will find understanding advocates and that through my words they may speak.

Dear Mother and Father,

You were weeping as you left today. I saw you out the window by my bed. I know I'm the reason for your tears but you really need not cry. I don't mind being here in this special hospital. I need the care, day-in, day-out, midnight and midday care. I must be turned and bathed, changed and fed. It's really a lot of hard work taking care of me.

The people here are kind and it really doesn't matter if the nurses change from year to year. You see, Mother and Father, my mind doesn't hold ideas for long. I know only about now. If I'm fed well, changed and bathed tenderly and gently, I'm satisfied.

My life is good. Out the window I watch the changing colors. Gold and red colors are drifting by the window now. There is a sound in the air that makes me feel good. Music, I think it is called. I know no words, just sounds. The sheets on the bed are soft and smooth. I could ask for no better home.

You must not grieve for me. Your life would be destroyed were you to take me to your home. All your love could not answer my needs. My needs are

Wilma C. Buckner is an active wife, mother, grandmother, and churchwoman living in Gray, Tennessee.

physical. My needs are constant, unchanging in a dozen years now. No miracle of love can make it different.

Go home in peace, my parents. You made no mistake when you brought me here. There really is no better place for either of us. Thank you for coming today. Tomorrow I will not know you were ever here. I love you now.

Your unforgotten daughter,
Annie

* * * * *

Dear Daddy,

Mama's right, Daddy. I need some help. I can't walk. I can't talk. I'm not potty-trained. I don't know how to play. Please, Daddy. Don't be upset. It's all right. It's not your fault something went wrong. You are still a good daddy and a strong man. I need you.

You know that school Mama wants me to go to? I want to go, Daddy. There're lots of kids there. Some of them are four years old, just like me. They can help me learn there, and they won't make fun of me.

I need you, Daddy. I love you. Please don't go away. I am retarded, Daddy. Please love me anyway and give me a chance to learn.

Just four,
Johnny

* * * * *

To my MOM,

We fooled them, didn't we? You and I, Mom. We did it — together. Tricked the death angel out of one imperfect kid.

The nurses didn't think I was worth the fight — thought it would be easier for you if I just slipped on out of this world before you got a chance to get attached to me. They didn't know that you and I got attached way back when — when only God knew that I would be born a mess.

Or did you know then, too, that I'd need a whopping big supply of love to pull me through the problems I'd have facing me. You must have known for you were so quick to embrace that bundle of physical abnormalities you had thrust upon you at my birth.

You didn't have the foggiest notion what the doctor meant when they told you I needed surgery for esophageal atresia. But you understood right quick that I had a real problem when they explained that the tubes to my stomach and lungs were joined. You knew that food and air don't mix. And when they said I had hydrocephalus, you simply said, "Do what you have to to fix him."

That should have been enough, but I got an infec-

tion from hanging around the hospital so long. My heart couldn't handle all that and the doctors thought for sure they were going to lose me.

But we fooled them, didn't we? You and I, Mom. You were a lover and I was a fighter. How could such a combination lose?

There's talk around the hospital that I'll be retarded. Maybe so, but then, maybe not. But who cares. We're a winning team and somehow or another, we'll come out on top.

Oh, by the way, thanks, Mom.

Your unique kid,
Josh

* * * * *

Dear Mama Johnson,

Thank you so much for being my mama. I love you. I know I'm kinda funny looking and my legs just don't work at all, but you took me when even my real mama didn't want me. Thank you again.

Hugs and kisses,
OOOOO and XXXXXX
Your foster child,
Joe

* * * * *

A Note To Miss Sloan
From David

Lady, If you lock me in that closet one more time for crying, I promise you I'm going to lie down and die just so you'll get in a lot of trouble and maybe you'll get locked up too.

I've been trying to tell you for two weeks now that my ears are killing me. The pain is piercing. Can I help it if I can't tell you I hurt? If you bothered to pay attention, you would have noticed that I've had a fever for the last three days. Contrary to your belief, I am not behaving like this to torment you. I am behaving like this because I am tormented myself by a pain I can't identify or tell you about. I have been asking for help in the only way I know how.

One more time in the closet and you will wish you had listened.

* * * * *

Dear Jennie,

It's no use. We can't be married. You know it's what I want but there's just no way.

You see we just aren't the same. I was born rich and "not quite right." You were born poor and "not quite right." You were only slightly different in intelligence from your parents, so they accepted you and expect you to marry someday.

How great the void between me and my parents! They are so intelligent they cannot comprehend that it is possible for their son to be "not quite right," and at the same time be almost normal. I'm quite capable of holding a simple job but in their eyes I don't need to work — they have plenty of money. I have no right to marry they think. I couldn't make a good enough living to support a family. Perish the thought that their son should apply for SSI or food stamps.

So they have wrapped me in a cocoon of deep carpet, satin drapes, TV and stereo sets, and plan to keep me that way forever. Their friends speak to me and occasionally include me in some social invitation; but among the bright and beautiful, I have no peers.

Little do my parents realize that with you I have beautiful butterfly wings. Remember the beauty of the days we shared when we were in school together? With you I felt whole and worthy. Oh, sure, we knew there was a gap between us and the normal world. We weren't stupid. But we also knew that when we were together, we had a world of things to talk about and a lot of love and respect to give each other.

Oh, my Jennie, I hate the thought that you will meet someone else at the sheltered workshop. My love for you tells me that I must set you free to do just that. Fly, my butterfly, fly. Somewhere in your lovely flight, light a moment and think of me.

Your loving Robert III

* * * * *

Dear Grandma,

Today I heard a lady sing. It was a beautiful song, and I think she sang it just for me. It said, "Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary." When I heard it I cried and laughed inside. Someday I'm going to walk, run, and even fly. That's really going to be something, Granny!

Thank you for the money you sent me. Momma could tell by my eyes how much I liked the lady's song so she told "Sis" that she would buy me the record with the money you sent.

I go back to the clinic tomorrow. The doctors won't find anything new. They will find I still can't roll over, sit, walk, hold anything, feed myself, hold my head up, or anything else to amount to anything. They will say, (as they always say), "He sure has a pretty smile and look at his eyes. He sure looks bright." (I've got your eyes.) For the shape I'm in, they will find that I'm in pretty good shape. They won't see much new tomorrow, but I have a secret they don't know about. Someday I'm going to fly.

Granny, do you think you could find a picture of an eagle and send it to me in your next letter?

Love you,
Mikey



BOOKS

Bruce Edwards, Book Review Editor

He Came Preaching Peace. By John H. Yoder. Herald, 1985, 140 pp. **Waging Peace.** Edited by Jim Wallis. Harper and Row, 1982, 125 pp. Reviewed by Craig Hergert.

Recent events such as the acceleration of the Strategic Defense Initiative research on one hand and the apparent thaw in arms negotiations between the superpowers on the other may have dated these two works somewhat, but they remain of interest to those who believe that Christianity and the proliferation nuclear arms are irreconcilable.

As in his 1972 work, *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder stresses throughout the book that Christianity must have a social application. He makes this clear in the preface for whom this collection of short pieces is intended. Originally sermons delivered between 1968 and 1984, the chapters are "directed to those already sharing in the body." More specifically, he calls them "'peace church' in-group communications" which are not intended to argue to outsiders.

Despite this claim, several of these "Bible lectures" (Yoder eschews the term sermons) deal with the issue that is presumably the most common stumbling block for Christians who might otherwise consider themselves members of the "peace church" — the Russian threat. Chapter one, entitled "The Way of Peace in a World at War," presents the recurring theme of the book, that Christians are obligated to love their enemies because that is what Christ did. When they do, they are not unrealistic dreamers who believe their objections will end all wars. Rather, says Yoder, it is the soldiers who are unrealistic because "they think they can put an end to wars by preparing for just one more."

Yoder clearly anticipates disagreement to his call for Christian pacifism.

He deals directly with the argument that it would be unrealistic for entire nations to follow Christ's example of non-violence. Such a view, says Yoder, is inconsistent with Christian teaching on other matters. "In our teachings about moral purity and holiness in any other realm," he explains, "we do not wait for the world to be ready to follow us before we follow Christ. We know clearly that to be called by Christ means being different from the world."

The basic strategy in each chapter is to begin with a particular Bible passage and then apply it to contemporary problems of war and peace. In some of the chapters (chapter six, "Glory in a Tent," which deals with John 1:1-18, is one example), Yoder intersperses considerable historical background and detailed explication with the modern application. The strategy works well enough, but does lead inevitably to repetition. Given the anthology nature of the book, the repetition was perhaps inevitable, but it is annoying nevertheless. Still, Yoder speaks eloquently for his cause. Those who already consider themselves to be Christian pacifists will find these Bible lectures moving.

Waging Peace, by its editor's own admission, also preaches to the converted. The editor, Jim Wallis, the founder of the Sojourners community and editor of *Sojourners* magazine, writes in his preface that *Waging Peace* is an expanded version of a 1981 Sojourners publication, *A Matter of Faith: A Study Guide for Churches on the Nuclear Arms Race*. The new volume, writes Wallis, "is offered both for those who are just developing a concern over nuclear weapons and for those who want to become more thoroughly informed and involved."

The book's purpose is three-fold: to inform the reader of the nuclear problem, to present a theological view of the problem and to present examples of

Christian responses to it.

Taken by itself, the first section, "Our Perilous Situation: The Nuclear Arms Race and Its Consequences," is not religious. It consists of articles outlining the grim reality of the nuclear arms race. Some of these essays, such as "The Medical Consequences of Nuclear War" by Howard Hiatt, professor of medicine at Harvard, are seminal material on the subject. In his article, adapted from a speech, Hiatt describes in detail the likely results if a one-megaton nuclear weapon were exploded over New York City. As a whole, the section attempts to refute the views that the U.S. build-up is a reasonable response to the Soviet threat, that a nuclear war is winnable, and that the arms race is good for the economy.

Part two, "Responses of Faith: A Biblical, Theological, and Historical Approach," is similar in purpose to Yoder's book. (Yoder's first chapter, in fact, appears in this section under the title "Living the Disarmed Life.") The table of contents for this section reads like a who's who of prominent evangelical theologians: there are essays by William Stringfellow, Ronald Sider, and Jaques Ellul, among others. One of the main issues in the section is the conflict between pacifism and the notion of a "just war." In "Who Shall Suffer Injury at Our Hands," E. Glenn Hinson accounts for the shift in the early Christian church from pacifism to the just war theory as worked out by Augustine. Helmut Gollwitzer then charges, in "A Biblical Call to Non-cooperation," that just war theory cannot apply to nuclear war.

The third section, "Faith at Work: Christians Rise to the Historical Challenge," is comprised of first-person accounts of how some Christians are responding to the nuclear threat. The essays cover everything

from making prayer for enemies a regular part of the eucharist to witnessing at nuclear weapons plants to tax resistance. The section ends with Wallis's epilogue, "A Dream," which presents a picture of Christian activism slowing the arms race.

The book is definitely aimed at Christian readers who are concerned about the nuclear threat, but who haven't yet read much about it or thought much about what the issue has to do with their faith. The book's structure is appropriate to its audience. After convincing its readers of the problem and providing the kinds of hard facts that are necessary in order to discuss it with others, the book proceeds to Christian discussions and finally Christian calls to action. The structure also matches the book's prescription: the nuclear dilemma as presented appears grim to the point of requiring God's help.

Waging Peace gives the Christian pacifist almost all he or she could ask from a handbook for arms reduction. Besides the three main sections, there are useful appendices, bibliographies and a glossary of key terms. One of the problems with the book is simply that so much has happened in the nuclear arena in the four years since it came out that it already appears dated. Because of its 1982 publication, it could not include Carl Sagan's theory on nuclear winter, an excerpt from Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth*, or anything on the Strategic Defense Initiative.

But to fault a book for coming out before a complex, changing issue has been completely discussed is, of course, unfair. To fault it for omitting material that was available to it is

another matter. What is missing here is a presentation of alternative views in sections one and two. To really qualify as a handbook, *Waging Peace* would need to offer essays such as Charles Krauthammer's defense of mutual assured destruction or a conservative theologian's rejection of pacifism in the nuclear realm. To include such pieces would be to give the reader the views of the opposition in its own words, which is presumably the way the activist will find them out in the trenches.

Craig Hergert is a doctoral candidate at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.

Making Sense Out of Suffering. By Peter Kreeft. Servant Books, 1986, 172 pp., \$5.95. Reviewed by Bruce Edwards.

There have been a number of evangelical books in the last decade dealing with the problem of evil, particularly the mystery of suffering. Among those that come to mind are Phillip Yancey's *Where is God When It Hurts?* and John Wenham's *The Goodness of God*. More recently, Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote his *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, providing a non-Christian viewpoint that has been widely circulated among Christians. These books and this present one by Peter Kreeft examine one of the central paradoxes of Christian discipleship, one which hovers around the question, "If God is good, and He loves us, why is there suffering?" In this new volume by Kreeft, there are no new "answers," but there is a refreshingly new framework placed

around this traditional, troubling question.

Kreeft is a philosophy professor at Boston College, who has written a number of well-received Christian books on such subjects as heaven, death, and "the good life." In this book his deep Christian faith is informed by the twenty centuries of Christian wrestling with the vexing question of human suffering. Kreeft rejects Rabbi Kushner's conclusion that God is good, but is helpless to assist human beings because he is not omnipotent. Part of the "problem" of suffering, Kreeft points out early, is the way the issue is framed. He declares that it is more helpful to think of suffering as a "mystery" than as a "problem" which demands a "solution" — logical or otherwise. This theme set, he proceeds as a theological detective searching for "clues," not answers to the mystery. Along the way, Kreeft acquaints the reader with these clues from three groups of people: philosophers, artists, and prophets. The "final" evidence, however, is supplied by the life of Christ, as Kreeft eloquently weaves together the events in the seemingly tragic but ultimately triumphant life of Jesus as He accepts his father's will and takes to his cross the world's suffering.

This is not a "scholarly" book but a devotional one that will provoke the reader to think more deeply about the mystery. Kreeft wears his philosopher's robes lightly, taking his cue from C.S. Lewis, the master apologist in the 20th century in defending God's goodness in the face of human suffering. All readers will benefit from reading this compelling treatment of the subject matter.

Recommended For Readers Of Mission

Those who are not already subscribers will find interesting, helpful, and challenging writing in the following journals:

Integrity, 2919 Lafayette Ave., Flint, MI 48507. Subscription is free on written request.

Restoration Review, edited and published by Leroy Garrett, 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, TX 76201. Subscription Rates: \$5.00 per year or two years for \$8.00.

Letting Go, Continuing

By BOBBIE LEE HOLLEY

From the first, Mission has proposed to print various viewpoints. The "Editorial Policy" found in the first issue contains this statement. "We will not limit our contributions only to those whose religious outlook is the same as the editors." We have two reasons for this policy. First, we do not claim to have powers of imprimatur over all views expressed by individual Christians. Second, we do not claim to see every matter alike ourselves. The most that can be claimed for material which appears in Mission is that the views expressed are those of the person who wrote them.

The articles most disapproved have been written by brothers in Christ. The editors do not propose that all these views are true to Scripture and healthy for the church. But they are entertained by people in the church. Since this is the case, they need to be heard and confronted openly . . . We have no intention of foisting anything upon the church, and we do not see what purpose could be served by doing battle with those who claim we do.

Thomas H. Olbricht, Editorial Board 1969

. . . the very presence of an honest and open press can act as a deterrent to evil. . . .

To be sure a journal—religious or otherwise—could attempt to capitalize on criticism for its own profit. . . . This is a dangerous temptation which responsible journalism must avoid. But the words of Edward Fudge about dissident brethren are appropriate:

. . . if you feel you must criticize, please stand by our side while you do it.

These words express well the ideal of responsible religious journalism which openly and honestly attempts to "tell it like it is." At least in the case of Mission, any criticism which is offered, explicitly or implicitly, is offered by those who stand by the side of others within the churches of Jesus Christ. Editorially speaking, we offer such criticism only because we love the church—and him who found it—and those who by his grace constitute its membership—and those who some day may find their home in it.

Roy Bowen Ward, Editor, 1969

Mission must be a place, a paper, a movement, where faith continually seeks understanding.

But faith must seek understanding always "with the world in mind," and this is true for two reasons. In the first case it is quite apparent that all reasoning is conditioned by the milieu of one's own time and place. . . . Secondly, "the world" is in the mind of the church in that the church by its very nature is directed away from itself toward the needs of the world. . . . Because the church should always have the world in mind in these two ways, Mission's theological enterprise should always revolve around these two fundamental questions: What? and So What? . . . The formulation of coherent statements of faith is never sufficient in itself, and any journal

S ometime early in 1967 a prospectus for a new journal—one with an ambitious agenda indeed—was sent to a "select" group of persons believed by the promoters to be sufficiently progressive and forward-looking to see the benefits of an open, literate, intelligible, challenging magazine. (In the first issue it would be said that "the literary heritage of the Restoration Movement is a rich one . . . which has always welcomed a new voice dedicated to confronting men with the Christ of the Scriptures.") Critique was invited.

One almost always optimistic young man who received the letter immediately wrote back to say, "The last thing the Church of Christ needs is another magazine!" He went on to note that there was a graveyard full of more such ventures than anyone could imagine. Walter Burch, one of the dreamers, replied tactfully, thanking the young man for his interest and asking him to subscribe.

He did—and he read. Four years later—"as the world turns"—the young man's wife became the first woman elected to the Board of Trustees of that "new magazine" called *Mission*. Not only was the magazine successful, but there was one more bitter pill to swallow: in 1982 his wife became editor. (God really does have a sense of humor, doesn't he?) And now she has the task of laying this periodical to rest.

Both that now-not-so-young man and the editor have turned grayer in the last five years. Yet he has been wonderfully supportive, encouraging, and patient with a wife often oblivious to him and often away from home. Now, I think, he'd just like not to have to cook *all* the meals or to run the sweeper *every* time.

* * * * *

The writer of Ecclesiastes affirmed and a modern song popularized the truth that for everything "there is a season." To the ancient list might well be added "a time to hold on, to keep reaching, to keep pushing against the obstacles," and a time "to let to." It isn't easy to let go; yet it seems that life is for the most part a series of "letting-go's"—letting go of our teddy bears; letting go of the hand as that little person steps on the school bus for the first time; letting go as our children grow and struggle, marry, move into personhood; letting go of dreams in the face of reality;

Celebrating And The Journey

letting go of youth and vigor; letting go of one stage of life to enter another and ultimately of life itself.

What is true of our personal lives is also true of the church and life in community: letting go of the little church with the pot-bellied stove to move on to a grander building with all its possibilities—but losing the warmth and closeness; letting go of a “Sunday-school” faith to move into the deep waters of trust; letting go of the bonds of legalism, self-righteousness, pride, and dogmatism and taking hold of the glorious freedom of Christ’s love and mercy.

Letting go is bittersweetness. That is where those who have worked so closely with *Mission*—who have been a part of its ongoing life whether as early visionaries, Board members, editors, writers, artists, staff, readers, friends, critics—find ourselves: in the bittersweet moment of wanting to hang on but needing to let go. However, we believe that, even as it was in God’s grace that the enterprise was conceived and begun, it is also in God’s grace that it ends. We have prayed for His guidance and tried to listen for His voice.

* * * * *

And while we feel a sadness, as of losing an old friend, we also find reason for great rejoicing. We want to let go with celebration. We confess our humanness and that we have often made mistakes, had unloving feelings, displayed arrogance and pride, been uncompassionate and unloving. We do not celebrate that but ask forgiveness and give thanks that we sometimes grew through the experiences and became more sensitive to persons and more aware of the great responsibility of publishing a journal.

Just recently a reader called to say, “Where is the next installment? Send it quick—you have turned my world upside down!” We celebrate the times when we have turned someone’s world upside down; when we have rubbed healing ointment on deep wounds and touched hurting places with God’s love; when we have caused individuals to think, to question, to see more clearly, to draw closer to God, to find victory in struggle. And we celebrate the honest critics who have called us to task and made us rethink our own ideas.

We celebrate that we have grown into a community where we could wrestle with the complexities

which fails to entertain seriously the “so what?” question is trivial at best and demonic at worst . . . the matter of faith is inseparable from how it matters, and *Mission* must not address the one problem apart from the other. . . .

[I see *Mission* as a vehicle of hope for the future. As such, it must commit itself to the religious and worldly realities it is intended to reflect and one that is expressive of responsible freedom and genuine hope. . . .]

Theological language is always a language of response. . . . Because of this it must remain free to explore, retract, and change in the ongoing, open experiment of life. . . . [But *Mission* must not allow itself to be bewitched by its language. Too often we have transformed things in consciousness through the use of language and have supposed that we have transformed them in reality. . . .]

Mission should be personal in keeping in touch with local communities of faith. In theology, theory and practice should be married. In a journal, theory separated from the actual realities of the church is worthless. On the other hand, in the churches, action without theory is idiocy. *Mission* can be a place where theory and practice are brought together for the good of both the journal and the church.

Victor L. Hunter, Editor, 1972

Newly charged with the editorial guidance of *Mission*, I feel keenly the challenge of the body’s need for clothing of a wordful sort. The Word-become-flesh is our pattern for enlivening theological theory in body-life. The cross is our reminder that religion apart from people is dead, being alone: the life is in the blood. We must speak of the great events which called the body into being. And this verbal adornment must be of the kind of simple grace which bespeaks our love for the body. . . .

Christian journalism is . . . more than “telling it like it is” (although it includes that). It is more than mere openness” (for it knows the vacuum of being cleansed of a demon, but left open for seven more deadly than the first). Christian journalism is the task of adorning, verbally and visually, the body, where men and women meet God through Jesus Christ.

. . . if the infusion of the Spirit is what can save the church from degenerating into mere institution, the agenda of this journal . . . must consist mainly of assenting to his work. It may also include healthy dissent. But it must perceive that our most insidious enemy is not the shape or structure of the body. It is that we ourselves may foil the Spirit’s work in the world through the body. [Dissent therefore becomes a critique of current fashion and style, not of the body’s reason for existence. . . .] Our journalistic juices can flow however fulfilling to the author; if they are not enpeopled, it is a gift misused. . . . All of which brings us back to our beginning point: *Mission* must be clothed with words that give life to the body.

Ron Durham, 1975

of faith and doubt, finding strength in each other and hope in the insights of fellow strugglers, knowing that we were not alone and that we would not be cast out. We celebrate the times we were able—in the words of those who first had the vision—to translate “the message of the church for the world of our day,” “confront all the challenges of life with the biblical faith,” contributed “to the renewal of the church so that she may more nearly attain her identity as set forth in the Scriptures,” and held up the ideal of the church as “a fellowship—sharing a common faith, sharing a common hope, sharing a common love, and sharing a common mission.”

Most of all we celebrate the loving God who created us, the Christ who came to us, and the peace and comfort of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

There are so many to whom thanks are due. I cannot mention them all, for it would take another issue of the journal. But I must express deep gratitude to all of those Trustees who through the years have kept us afloat and given so much of themselves; most immediately to Bob Randolph who—to fill an old cliché with new meaning—has gone far, far beyond the call of duty in unstinting service for the journal and unflagging encouragement to its editor; to Kitty Jay, who has handled so well the difficulties of bookkeeping, circulation and mailing, prodding the donors, and facing the creditors with equilibrium. Finally, I must say a grateful and heartfelt thanks to Jeanie Scott, of A & J Printing, who has been unfailingly gracious and helpful even when the editor has been irritable and unhappy.

It seems appropriate to say in the end some of what I said in the beginning of my editorship. For it was not only a dream and agenda for *Mission*, but it is my vision of what our life together in the risen Christ should be and can be through his loving grace and mercy.

*Will you walk with us in the “company of the committed,”
creating “centers of loving fellowship,”
where we can touch “person-to-person,” heart-to-heart?
We would draw into love for one another—
making allowances, bearing burdens, confessing sins,
upholding and sustaining.
We would work and worship and serve
in oneness of spirit
and as one in the Spirit.
May we so experience the Presence that
our hearts will burn within us!*

*We would pray that the words
be “fleshed out in the everydayness
no less than in the crisis of our own experience.”
But we would ask for awakened consciousness
and enlarged capacity
to do what we wouldn’t dare,
say what we couldn’t voice,
without the Presence,
freeing, activating, empowering.
May the mystery of Incarnation continue
as we keep faith with the realities of our own life,
reach beyond in love,
surrendering our vacuums and wills
to His filling.*

*We would call each person
to confession of what we are:
broken, wretched, sinful, helpless.
But we would hold up the cross:
that “flawed, failed love”—
proclaiming that here is great good news.
We would tell the story of love and forgiveness,
newness and freedom—
for Sarah and Dick and Ron
and even the soldier who drove the nails.
We would ask
not for ease,
but for challenge and suffering.
We would acknowledge the cross-person as crucified Savior
and resurrected Lord.
We ask for the sensitivity and openness
to listen
as he speaks meaning into our journeys.*

The top priority of *Mission's* agenda is the proclamation of the good news that we are loved in spite of our unloveliness, accepted in spite of being unacceptable, forgiven in spite of our guilt, secure in spite of our misunderstandings, and endowed with meaning in spite of the seeming meaningless of human situation. For only a theology that takes seriously human misunderstandings and imperfections on the one hand, and the saving grace of God on the other, can truly legitimate a journal dedicated to the open exploration of the meaning of our faith . . . *Mission* will be indispensable reading in the months ahead for those who want encouragement in their faith, information on their roots, and lively debate on issues that matter.

Richard Hughes, Editor, 1979



TO THE READERS OF MISSION JOURNAL:

This is the last issue of MISSION JOURNAL. I know, because I have heard *from many of you*, that the decision to cease publishing is regretted. We too regret the decision and we have made it for two primary reasons. The first is that the energy for MISSION came out of a time of ferment and change. The situation today is different. Things have changed in Churches of Christ, and we recognize that much more needs to change. The history of MISSION seems to be baggage that hinders us from being part of that change. The initial impulse may well have spent itself in a righteous cause, but it has spent itself nevertheless. The second reason for the demise of the JOURNAL is more difficult to articulate, but possibly even more significant. There is a tendency we all share to believe that what God would do we must do or it will not be done. God is working in our world. MISSION has been a part of that work and has served well. Now in new times God continues to work. MISSION may not be needed. It is hard to believe that God can get along without us, but it is a truth we affirm.

What of the future? Some of us connected with MISSION will direct more of our time to local congregations or special projects we deem important. Others of us are committed to publishing a journal of opinion from within the Churches of Christ that will speak to the issues we are confronting while building faith and ministering beyond our narrow niche in Christendom.

To do this we will need the help of MISSION readers and supporters. Financially a new journal will be costly. We need broad support. Recently you received, and probably will receive again, an appeal for help. We will not begin a new journal unless we have retired the debts associated with MISSION and have financial commitments that will give us a foundation to build upon. The latter is the most crucial issue since the debts of MISSION JOURNAL are not great. We will seek to have any new endeavor be based as MISSION has been based on a broad coalition of readers. Dependence on a narrow base means limits on a magazine's content that can prove stifling.

A new journal will need participation in setting policy and content from a wide spectrum of our movement. Men and women with a commitment to the church and ministry will need to be involved. There is a shrinking sense of identity within our fellowship. MISSION recognizes that our institutional connections have become increasingly limited. There is a spectrum of loyalties within the Churches of Christ and an even broader spectrum within the Restoration Movement. To minister effectively to these strands of experience and to learn from them will demand a convergence of effort. We hope to make a new journal a reality. We will need your help and will draw on the current subscription list from MISSION JOURNAL. Watch for further information.

Finally, we of MISSION wish you a grace-filled New Year. It is easier to create than it is to bring to a close something you care about; it is easier to live than to die. Part of us is dying with MISSION's passing, but we see the presence of God in what is happening and we pray that you will too.

—Robert M. Randolph
President, *Mission Journal*



CAMPBELL LECTURES



"IF ALL OUR GOOD CHRISTIAN BRETHREN COULD ABANDON EVERY OTHER CENTRE THAN CHRIST, AND DRAW NEARER AND NEARER TO THIS UNSETTING SUN OF AN ETERNAL DAY, HOW SOON WOULD ALL THESE ROOTS OF BITTERNESS AND ALIENATION WITHER, AND LANGUISH, AND PERISH: WHAT A BLISSFUL CO-OPERATION AND HALLOWED CONCERT OF ACTION WOULD ENSUE."

A. CAMPBELL

All three branches of the Stone-Campbell movement—the Churches of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the Christian Churches—have a shared heritage in the persons of Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone. But of the great men who founded the movement, no one has had a greater impact upon the movement than Campbell himself. He is claimed by even the most anti-establishment and fervently isolationist groups among us. Not that everyone understands "why Campbell" nor that everyone agrees on what "Mr. Campbell" really had in mind when he spoke of the New Reformation which arose in Western Pennsylvania and spread across the Old Northwest Territory. No matter. The time has come to celebrate the Bicentennial of Campbell's birth in three major sections of the country: Fort Worth, Texas; Claremont, California; and Indianapolis, Indiana.

A series of Campbell Lectures, focusing on Campbell as a national figure as well as a religious leader, has been planned by the trustees of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. As a previous issue of *Mission* indicated (January 1983), DCHS, in its Nashville, Tennessee, location, contains the primary archives and literary records for the Stone-Campbell movement and sponsors lectures related to the movement's history.

Five historians from the movement itself will speak at all three locations while each of three historians outside the movement will appear in one of the above cities.

Historians from within the movement and their topics are:

Robert O. Fife

"In the Spirit of the Prophets: Alexander Campbell as a Social Thinker"

Richard L. Harrison, Jr.

"Nailed to the Church Door: How Protestant Was Alexander Campbell's Reformation?"

Thomas Olbricht

"Alexander Campbell as an Educator"

William J. Richardson

"Alexander Campbell as an Advocate of Christian Unity"

D. Newell Williams

"The Gospel as the Power of God: Alexander Campbell and Experimental Religion"

Speakers from outside the movement and their topics are:

T. Dwight Bozeman

"Alexander Campbell, Child of the Puritans"

Samuel S. Hill

"Campbell-Stone on the Frontier: The Only

(Continued on pg. 11)

FORUM



Alcoholism and the Church . . .

I was very pleased to read your February 1987 issue on "Alcoholism and the Church." The articles were timely and well-written. I was also very interested by the letters that appeared in the Forum column protesting the use of the word "disease" in reference to alcoholism. I have been involved in an alcohol and drug ministry in my church for several years and know from personal experience what a controversial issue the disease concept of alcoholism is.

"You can't tell me that alcoholism is a disease; it's sin, pure and simple!" Many Christians do feel this way. To them the disease concept of alcoholism is no more than a humanistic ploy designed to relieve the alcoholic from his or her actions. After all, Paul refers to drunkenness as "an act of sinful nature" in Galatians 5:21.

Certainly no one would deny that alcohol abuse and its ramifications are sinful. The damage the alcoholic inflicts on others as well as himself (or herself) is devastating. The fact that alcohol abuse is involved in the majority of murders, assaults, child abuse cases, and traffic fatalities clearly demonstrates its immorality.

How then in view of these facts can alcoholism be a disease as opposed to a sin? To answer this question it is important to differentiate between alcoholism and alcohol abuse. While alcohol abuse is a primary factor in the development of alcoholism, there is a big difference. Alcohol abuse and drunkenness are symptoms of the disease of alcoholism. Many people who abuse alcohol have the ability to choose whether or not they drink; alcoholics have lost that choice, they are drinking not for pleasure but survival.

The American Medical Society has recognized alcoholism as a disease since 1956. The AMA states that in

order for a condition to be classified as a disease it must have a definable onset, symptoms, and a predictable outcome. Alcoholism starts when the individual loses the choice of whether or not to drink; its symptoms include alcohol abuse, drunkenness, denial, low self-esteem, and compulsiveness; untreated alcoholism results in death or insanity. It is chronic and progressive and we now know that there is an identifiable chemical basis for alcoholism. Alcoholics actually metabolize alcohol differently than other people do. Research is also strongly indicating a genetic predisposition to alcoholism.

Dr. Anderson Spickard, author of *Dying For A Drink*, states, "An alcoholic's recovery is usually connected to his ability to perceive his addiction as a disease." When the alcoholic accepts his disease he must accept its symptoms as well as its untreated outcome. By working the twelve step program of recovery, the alcoholic can start to deal with the symptoms and learn what to do to start to live again. An integral portion of this recovery process involves the alcoholic's becoming responsible and accountable for past and present actions. By accepting the disease concept, the alcoholic also knows the end result on not recovering, and that result is death.

Of course any recovery program is not a substitute for a relationship with Jesus Christ, but it is impossible for the chemically dependent individual to have a healthy relationship of any kind. It is also very hard for any individual affected by chemical dependency to have the vibrant, joyful Christian life promised until these issues are dealt with.

I was a practicing alcoholic and drug addict for 15 years, much of which was spent in the church. I have been recovering for 4½ years and am active in my church as well as in several recovery programs. While I was in treatment, I found a relationship with God. I discovered that all the years I turned my back on God, He never turned His back on me. I became a Christian about 4 years ago and began to experience the joy of becoming a new creature in Christ. I feel that my

alcoholism and recovery are God's gifts to me. My experience as a practicing alcoholic and addict has given me a large measure of empathy for those affected by this disease; my recovery has enabled me to give them a message of hope.

Anselm L. Davis
Round Rock, Texas

The Meaning of Mission . . .

The July-August issue of *Mission* and your editorial have pricked my conscience. I could not even guess how many times during the past 20 years that I have thought about writing a "letter to the editor" about this or that article that had particularly impressed me, or had made me stop to examine my beliefs. Yet this is the first time that I have ever stopped and actually followed through on my intention to convey my thoughts about *Mission* — and it may be too late . . . I can only speak for myself when I say that I believe that the magazine's "mission" must continue to instruct, uplift, challenge, and seek to unify His people.

Betty Goyne
Westminster, California

If *Mission* can find a way to continue publication maintaining the timeliness of topic, the quality of writing, and the freedom from pettiness that is its current character, I believe that it has a definite role to play. If change is to come to the church at large there must be hardy, dedicated souls willing to work sacrificially within the existing framework. The grass is not necessarily greener on the other side nor the labor easier.

Name Withheld By Request

I hope it will be possible for you to continue printing *Mission Journal*. I believe it is needed . . . The recent articles on Power and Theology of the Family were penetrating along with a recent article on worship and many others.

It offers an opportunity to material that is not available to those who are not in personal contact with writers of this level — knowledgeable and dedicated and informed on the Bible as well as current affairs and problems It offers thoughts that cannot be presented in 30-minute class periods and brings the knowledge that I am not alone in some of my own ideas.

Name Withheld By Request

Mission has meant a great deal to me over the years the articles have often encouraged me. I've found scholarly explanations for beliefs and understandings that I had reached intuitively. And I've found that I'm not the only Christian who has wondered about our reasons for doing things the way we do them or believing things we believe. That has been reassuring The articles on the role of women in the church have been most helpful.

Donna V. Carlton
Edmond, Oklahoma

Power and Theology . . .

The articles by Scott Bartchy are worth more than words can say. If you continue to publish this kind of pertinent and relevant material, only God knows the influence you will have.

I must stress the import of this particular article. I am one of these Christian woman—a grandchild of an elder, child of an elder, wife of an elder, sister of an elder—need I go on. Roots are deep. However, I see terrible discrepancies, injustices existing, passed on to other generations.

I thank God that Mr. Bartchy was not afraid to speak to closet issues—and that you were open enough to print it. Inevitably, when the Spirit moves one person, He is moving many others in the same way, in different areas of the nation, the world. I have been seeing evidence of movement in recent years regarding woman's role in the church. As someone has said, Satan must have a real fear of women to work so hard to keep her suppressed. . . .

How this world needs every Christian operating in the fullness of the Spirit of God. Just think of talents and

gifts that are tied up, spirits dried up and hurting. And yes, physical and emotional cruelty as well, and all in the name of our blessed Lord. . . .

Doris Lipscomb
Harrison, Texas

Mission hit it high with Part I ["Issues of Power and a Theology of the Family, Oct. 1987] It is a beautiful piece of research in Bible text in showing that Christ totally repudiated the concept of power as control, but rather centered it in *serv-ing*.

Norman Parks
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Looking To The Future . . .

Mission has indeed fulfilled its purpose and could retire with honor. But another publication is certainly needed. The fellowship of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (North American Convention), or "direct support disciples," is in turmoil and internal conflict. The "A cappella disciples" are not merely divided by the older disagreements (from one cup to the cooperative-anti debacle) but also now are clearly gearing up for a new campaign against the "discipling" movement or whatever label is being hung on it. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is experiencing some internal conflict on leadership styles and denominational priorities for the next decade. All three fellowships have experienced no significant growth in membership in more than a decade, according to the 1985 Forrest F. Reed Lectures at the Disciples Seminary Foundation in Berkeley by a Pepperdine sociologist. A successor to *Mission* is needed to address the churches' needs for the next twenty years.

The issues, as I see them, include: spirituality or devotional practices (I am currently writing a book on the subject), the place of intellect-oriented churches in a society converted to the "touchy-feely" culture, faith amid affluence, disciples and pacifism, inter-restoration conversations, public worship, hymnology, ministerial education, foreign missions, the military chaplaincy, and other subjects related to the way congregations function. . . .

. . . I need something to help me talk with my son about the pacifist heritage of the Stone-Campbell movement as he nears the age of draft registration. . . . how is the progressive wing of the a cappella fellowship going to provide ministerial training and what are the significant issues in domestic and foreign missions for these congregations? Now that the "youth rebellion" is over, what can we do to avoid a loss of integrity with what we really believe?

If the successor to *Mission* could address issues such as these even though I am a cooperative clergy person, that is, an ordained minister in standing of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I would gain quite a lot from the journal. And more: my wife might begin reading it!

There is a lot of death out there. Let there be life!

Dan Griggs
Carmel, Indiana

Disciples and Bureaucracy . . .

In reply to Brother Griggs' rebuttal of my comments on his letter [Oct., 1987] which in effect stated that the Disciples of Christ have rejected their historical background in America . . . , let me say that I am not angry over the hierarchical institutionalization which has taken form in recent decades, only sad. The disciples of Christ have survived for two millenia inspite of institutionalization, not because of it. The evils of institutionalization are well reflected in the following myth.

Jesus said to Satan, "I will defeat you, Satan, because I will fill the hearts of my followers with the highest ideals." The Prince of the Underworld replied, "And I will win in the end, for I will institutionalize each of your ideals."

I am a member of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. I accept Disciples as fellow Christians. But I regard power, whether personal or institutional, as wholly alien to the Kingdom of God. And I do not believe that our goal is to present an institutional presence in the world, rather it is to present the transforming presence of Jesus Christ in our lives.

Norman L. Parks
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

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M.L. "Pat" Ball, Austin, Texas
 Joyce Barton, Dallas, Texas
 Pamela Haddock, Durham, North Carolina

(SPIRIT OF CHRIST, continued from page 20)
among you" (Lk. 22:26).

At one of our seminars various speakers carefully analyzed those verses that appear to restrict the ministry of women, and the more they analyzed the more restrictive they became. Finally, an older brother in the audience humbly pointed to the role women have in our modern world, whether in business, professions, or politics, and noted that in our churches little boys can pass out visitor's cards but not little girls, and suggested that something might be wrong with our interpretation of those verses. Or perhaps we make more of them than was originally intended. The brother had a point. He was coming within understanding distance, and he sought to submit the question of a woman's ministry to the spirit of Christ.

There are always those verses that can be quoted to justify rejecting those that we want to reject, whether we divorced, those "in error," the liberals, or those in other churches. If nothing else, one can always quote, "Come out from among them and be separate, saith the Lord," and never mind that that verse is referring to the idolatry of pagan Rome. We use the Bible to separate Christians from each other and to reject those whom Christ receives. We should accept the divorced because Jesus does. We should accept the rejects of society because Jesus does. We don't have to be in the business of drawing lines on people because Jesus isn't. Our interpretation of those verses that cause us to separate from other believers and lead us to suppose that we are the only Christians rather than Christians only must be judged by the spirit of Christ. That spirit is such more open than the Churches of Christ usually are. When the apostle John brought his narrow view of acceptance to Jesus, it did not pass the test. When he told Jesus he had rejected the man who was doing good works in His name because he was "not of us," the Lord responded, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is for us" (Mk. 9:39).

We see the spirit of Christ on the Cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." We see it in the accepting, forgiving spirit of the father who welcomed home his prodigal son, as he was, no questions asked.

When we have the spirit, we are in tune with what the Bible is all about. If the spirit of Christ rules our hearts, all other rules of hermeneutics will be no problem. Paul goes so far as to suggest that when one has his spirit God will safeguard him from any serious error: "Therefore, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you" (Philip. 3:15).

This I choose to call "the hermeneutical advantage," an advantage that reaches far beyond what any commentary may do for us. It is the advantage that is referred to in Psalm 25:12: "Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall God teach in the way He chooses." _____ MISSION

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