

Integrity

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PUBLISHED BY a nonprofit Michigan corporation, INTEGRITY seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and deed, among themselves and toward all men.

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Integrity

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MINI-TOPICS

DEAN A. THOROMAN

PURPOSES: *In hope of stimulating some thinking about and reacting to a few matters, the following is presented.*

CHURCH BIG BROTHERS NOT WANTED

In spite of their avowed good intentions, I cannot accept the "big brother" tactics of self-appointed religious censors and decision-makers. Go away, Big Church Brothers! I intend to reserve the right to think and to act for myself. The books I read, the faith I support, and the preachers I listen to are going to continue to be my own choices.

Your neurotic newsletters and paranoid tabloids depress me. Why do you insist on forcing your views on everyone else? You really have no right to do that—even in the name of righteousness. In fact, too much of what you do smacks of self-righteousness, and that's difficult for anyone to approve, or even to tolerate. Have you ever really thought about the ridiculousness of your position? You compass church and pew to make (or keep) one proselyte and lo, he's tenfold more obnoxious than you!

You hint at "conspiracy" while doing everything in your power to round up all your fellow Big Brothers to conduct a variety of vigilante tactics directed toward anyone who doesn't want your "protection" or sanction your position.

Honesty, ethics, and love are topics which you talk about, and as long as you act within

the framework of your definitions of these matters, others feel helpless in efforts to reason with you. However, please be advised that your threats and hostile behavior are not having the effect you seem to desire. The more noise you make and the worse you behave, the greater my determination to investigate for myself, to think for myself, and to do whatever I believe God wants me to do.

Brothers in Jesus—*Yes!* Big brothers in the church—*No!*

IS THERE AN ADULT IN THE HOUSE?

Christianity is a way of life which includes processes necessary to the development of individuals, from emotional and spiritual immaturity to responsible maturity. The Scriptures include many statements from Spirit-filled persons which indicate God's expectation that his children should grow according to their ability, knowledge, and opportunities. From Peter we hear, "Desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby." The writer of Hebrews says, "When for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that someone teach you again what are the first principles . . . therefore, leaving the first principles, let us go on to perfection." Jesus taught that responsibility is directly related to ability (Matt. 25:15) and that individual accounta-

bility is tied to one's knowledge (Lk. 12: 47-48). Paul argues that opportunities to do right things cannot be ignored by disciples of Jesus (Gal. 6:10).

An excellent expression showing the relationship between an individual's growth and the exercise of intelligence is found in Hebrews 5:14: ". . . even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil . . ." Christian maturity must ultimately lead each of us along an independent path in search for personal belief because no one has the right to make spiritual decisions for anyone other than himself. Exercising one's own mind is both a right and a responsibility, neither of which ought to be consciously surrendered.

Independent study will encourage great diversity in thoughts and actions, but responsible persons do not fear such differences. Instead the differing views will be looked upon as further opportunity to grow—something that is difficult when no effective stimulation occurs. Who would be inspired in an atmosphere in which mental gymnastics consist largely of stifling original thinking and strangling open expression?

Maturity is needed in every age. Seek it for self and encourage it in others. We will *all* grow thereby.

PERSONAL PROGRESS

It is my conviction that little, if any, personal progress will come about without self-analysis. Taking a good look at self can be both painful and profitable. Part of the pain comes with increasing awareness of one's own shortcomings and the seeming impossibility of overcoming apparent weaknesses in attitudes and behavior. In addition, we may feel deeply hurt when we realize

that previous generations have deprived us of encouragement and experiences which might have strengthened us at critical stages in our development. The anguish which self-examination produces causes most of us to stop short of the kind of evaluation necessary for progress. Thus, we may never face truth we need to face about ourselves.

Rationalization is one of the mental processes we use to avoid reality. It helps us in some ways to be capable of excusing ourselves, but when this mechanism is used so much that we never accept personal responsibility for anything we say or do, it is time to work on being more honest with ourselves. After all, if conscience serves a useful purpose, we cannot always excuse ourselves for failure to do what we know is right for us or for deliberately doing what we know is wrong for us.

There are other psychological processes we use to keep from having to face what really is fact and truth. These mechanisms may be helpful at times in that we may be able to function in productive ways by using them. However, there comes a time for each of us when the world of "let's pretend" cannot substitute for the world of "let's face it." Then, in spite of the agony which may occur, the spotlight must be turned on self and each one must face whatever is shown because accountability demands it. If we are complacent or hypocritical, or hypercritical, or indifferent, or whatever, we must see ourselves as others see us and especially as God sees us.

This is no time for being neurotic. We will suffer additional harm if we become so obsessed with looking at self that we continuously debase and castigate without charting a path for improvement. Extreme self-hatred is at least as destructive as excessive self-love. There is need for realism as well as

idealism, and brutal objectivity ought to be tempered with compassionate understanding.

Two large corporations have slogans which seem appropriate to this topic. One says, "Progress is our most important product," while the other emphasizes its response to "better ideas." Individually and collectively we must recognize that progress *is* important and that we *do* need better ideas. Do you think it is possible to move forward without improving our thinking? Conversely, will anyone think creatively unless improvement is encouraged?

Personal progress is essential to a happy and productive life and we need to do whatever can be done to stimulate individual growth. Let's begin by taking a good look at self, then determine to help others as we search together for a more abundant life. Think independently, speak freely, and encourage others to do the same. In such an atmosphere we may find the minimum essentials for better ideas and personal progress.

IMAGINATIVE USE OF CHURCH-OWNED BUILDINGS

How many times have you heard someone say, "The building is not the church. The church is made up of people."? Have you noticed how difficult it is to be consistent about such a stand? Far too often, the *practice* of a group is almost exactly opposite to the *preaching* that same group hears. An objective observer can't keep from thinking that church-owned buildings are looked upon as sacred places, reserved for sacred activities by people who give the impression they are the only sacred ones alive.

If it were possible to re-think the matter, do you believe the heavy capital outlay for

church buildings could be justified in terms of present purposes and uses? For example, if the emphasis were removed on such seemingly important issues as group loyalty, increasing numbers, competition with other groups, and satisfying the desires of the "in" group, would present types of church buildings be considered so necessary?

On the other hand, if Christians were committed to responding to the needs of people, it is possible that present church structures could be converted in several meaningful ways. Some might be remodeled to serve as temporary free or low-cost apartments for families who require housing but are unable to take care of their needs at a given moment. Other church buildings could be changed to provide office and working space for welfare-oriented agencies. Some might become among the best recreational facilities in their area. Consider other possibilities which would allow the citizens of a community to view church-owned buildings as the center of meaningful activities. Who knows? Some people just might want to *worship* in such a structure!

Obviously there will need to be several other changes before such uses can take place. Most of us would have to modify our attitudes so that we could listen attentively before trying something different. There would also need to be an involvement of as many as possible so that imaginative ideas would come from several sources. Some would have to get used to the concept of group ownership and control. Once the process of change gets under way, there's no telling what might happen in buildings now largely vacant and unused. One final question: As things are now going in most places, what possible harm could come from trying something different? □

"What Shall I Say?"

JOHN SMITH

Wichita, Kansas

He was what you'd call a nominal but doggedly faithful Christian. He attended regularly, joined in the singing (especially when that young brother led some of those spirited songs, both new and old, with such gusto), led in prayer, passed the emblems, and conformed to the basic church dogmas.

Being a Christian had come quite natural for him. His parents were Christians, and during his adolescent years he had found most of his boyhood friends in the church. By attending a church-sponsored school he had met a lovely young girl of the same background and married her. But all of his years in the church—all of his Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, gospel meetings, training classes, ad infinitum—had left him quite unprepared for that Thursday!

He had a good job as an administrator in a well organized and reasonably successful business which had recently obtained a number of government contracts. The contracts had given a tremendous boost to both the economic status and the prestige of the company. They were now "doing business with the government," and of course once that gets started, it never ends; it only gets better. Because of this substantial increase in business, a great many new people had to be hired and trained.

Now one of the necessary, but often distasteful, aspects of receiving government contracts is that the receiver must abide by certain hiring practices in relation to some very touchy matters. Consequently, some six months before that crucial day, Charlie

Waters had come under his supervision—a bright, educated, personable, but somewhat militant and very black young man! He was placed in our young friend's department, and so began the rather successful, if not always smooth, process of indoctrinating young Charlie into the "eight-to-five-stay-alive" life of Syndrome Plastics, Inc.

The worst thing about Charlie—the absolutely, positively most unbearable thing about Charlie . . . that one characteristic above all else which was just intolerable—was his likableness! Everybody liked Charlie. He was different; he was alive; he was fresh off the campus, and he breathed a type of zest for life that most of the other employees were drawn to like bees to sweetness; and he smiled a lot. And that ultimately was his downfall. Because Charlie was different in other ways, too, he often was gone two hours for lunch, his coffee breaks sometimes lasted forty-five minutes, and his whole attitude toward his work was disgustingly off-handed. Not that his work suffered; on the contrary, Charlie's work was always done, rather well and sometimes very efficiently.

Now I must add here that Charlie's popularity had not extended to the supervision. They liked him well enough, but he posed a serious threat to their general well-being, because after only six months Charlie was having an effect on his fellow employees. Many of them were beginning to take longer lunch breaks. They were beginning (like Charlie) to call their supervisors by their first names. They were even beginning to smile a lot (like

Charlie), and their whole attitude toward their work was changing. It was almost imperceptible at first, but gradually it grew until it could not be overlooked any longer. That cold, impersonal, completely professional facade had disappeared; the workers were openly friendly with each other and were beginning to share family and personal experiences.

The results were devastating. Work was done efficiently and well, but it was compacted (as most work can be) in some instances and spread out in others. But work had become part of the greater arena of living. Even those ever present, ambitious, efficient, always busy, dedicated, social climbing, upwardly mobile position seekers began to relax and open up. Some of them were even heard to commend their employees' work and to give proper credit to the ideas and contributions of others. And they too began to smile a lot, like Charlie.

On Thursday morning our young Christian friend was called in by the general superintendent of his division. He knew immediately that this was no morale boosting, back slapping, "you're-doing-a-great-job-keep-it-up" type of meeting.

"Have a seat there, Sample. How're things going over in Engineering and Dynamics?" He didn't wait for an answer, and Sample knew he wasn't asking a question anyway; it was just the tried and true way of opening conversation.

"Let's see now, Sample, how long have you been with us at Syndrome, 'bout six . . . no, let's see now . . . it's eight years, right?"

Again it wasn't a question, but it was closer to what the conversation was about. Sample was frantic. Perspiration was beginning to be apparent on his face, and in his mind the red buttons were flashing warnings that he was overloading his memory banks

in searching for what he had done wrong. Had someone overheard him say he thought the general superintendent was a carry-over from World War II army intelligence?

"Well now, Sample, you've done pretty well with us in those eight years. You've moved into first line supervision, and the word is that you'll probably be moving up again soon."

It was the way he said *probably* that upset our friend Sample the most.

"Sample, let me get right down to brass tacks with you. We've got a very touchy situation, and we feel that you're just the man to handle it. This Charlie Waters—I'm sure you're familiar with him—well, we've decided to wash him out. Nothing personal, or against his work, you understand. He just doesn't seem to fit into our pattern here. Now, Sample, you understand about this government contract business. We can't afford to just dismiss Waters, and supervision really doesn't want to be involved. What I'm saying, Sample, is that we want Waters to quit. Now we feel that you're the man to get the job done. Now it's not as though we're asking you to be unkind, or barbaric, in any way; just make his job more unpleasant. Isolate him from the other employees. Well, you understand things like this, Sample. That's why you'll be moving up soon. We've had our eye on you for some time now. Listen, I've got another appointment . . . man from Cincinnati here on that repeller contract. Wish I had more time to spend with you. Good luck, Sample, I'll be in touch. Oh, say hello to Nancy for me, will you?"

Sample's wife's name was Carol, but at that point it was insignificant.

Sample left the superintendent's office in a daze. His predominant thought was, "Why me?" He slowly made his way back to his

department. He had never, not once in his whole life, been called on to do anything like this, not deliberately, not with premeditation. Sample was not fond of hurting people; in fact, he was very much against it. He went out of his way to avoid relationships which would bring pain to anyone, himself included. This was a major crisis for him, and he already felt the weight of the decision. He was thoughtful enough to see that if he did it, he probably would have to do it again; and he also knew the consequence of not doing it. He shuddered. He thought of calling Carol, but decided against it. He thought about calling his Dad, then his brother, and even the preacher, but decided against all of them.

"Hi there, Sample. Man, you look worried. It can't be that bad. Listen, my wife and I are having a little party Friday eve-

ning, and we'd really like for you and Carol to come."

He really did mean it, too. That was another thing about Charlie: you never doubted his sincerity. Sample mumbled some excuse and when Charlie left, he closed the door to his office, told his secretary to hold his calls, and did something, almost by pure instinct, that he hadn't done since he and Carol had nearly broken up once several years ago. He knelt down behind his desk and began to pray!

The words came slowly, and he repeated them several times fervently: "Holy Father, let them realize they've made a mistake, and let them find someone else to do this!"

And what shall I say?

"Father, deliver me from this hour"?

No! For this purpose

I have come to this hour. □

OUR THANKS TO YOU!

WE HOPE the gift you appreciate most this year will be the one you have already received—the one that God gave when he "so loved the world." To us he is the richest blessing of all. But as we give thanks to him and our Father, who have made this year such a wonderful one for us, we also thank you—our readers and constant supporters—for your help. We try not to make a big point of it, lest we be thought to be too mercenary, but it is a fact that our work will stop the very minute you quit supporting it with your contributions. So we thank you all once again. And we will add, as a practical matter, that each contributor will receive, shortly after the year ends, a receipt for his total contributions this year. We hope it will be for enough to make paying your income tax a little more pleasant.

—THE EDITORIAL STAFF

The Quest of the Magi

DON REECE

We have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!
—2 Corinthians 4:6

They gazed on the heavens and studied the stars,
The movements of planets, of comets, and suns;
They followed the journeys of Saturn and Mars,
And noted the course that the Orion runs.
And they read in the Books of the Seers of old
Of a King who would come "in the latter age,"
Who would bring to the earth its "Age of Gold,"—
The noblest and greatest of all its sage.

And when the stars in their mystical sheen
Were joined with the Star of Palestine,
And a bright, new Star shone clear between,
And the heavens were lit by the Oracle-Sign,—
"He has come," they said, "who shall bring the Day;
Who shall teach us his Dharma and Gospel true!"
And they mounted their camels and rode away
To find and worship the King of the Jews.

The journey was long, and the wind was raw
As they pressed their way o'er the Zagros steep;
And the roads were wet with the melting snow,
And the rivers of Persia were cold and deep;
And oft when they camped in the twilight dim,
And the clouds of winter hung heavy and black,
A voice from the shadows would whisper to them:
"This journey is madness! Go back! Go back!"

But they would not be turned from the Holy Quest,—
But still for many a weary day
They pressed ever on and into the West,
Till the Land of Canaan before them lay,—
Till crossing the Jordan, past Jericho fair,
They came at last to Jerusalem,—
Till they heard the Sages of Israel declare
That the King should be born in Bethlehem,—

Till the Star that now shines when the Christmas bells ring
By faith in our hearts and on fir tree and pine,
Went down and stood where Eternity's King
Had been born in a stall with the asses and kine!
And there on a poor, common workingman's floor,
(Ended their journey, attained their Quest!)
The Lords of the East knelt down before
The Lord whose Kingdom would rise in the West.

They gave him their gold, their incense, and myrrh,—
And the myrrh foreshadowed his death of pain,
The incense proclaimed that a Priest was near,
And the gold betokened an Endless Reign.
Then back to the lands from whence they came
O'er deserts and mountains again they trod,
But never again would they be the same
Because they had looked in the face of God!

And still, today, men gaze on life's sky,
Where they see, by faith, that Star as of old;
They read in the Books of a King Most High,
Who shall bring to our earth that "Age of Gold";
And they turn from fortune, and honor, and fame,
To tread the path which the Wise Men trod;
And never again will they be the same
Because they have looked in the face of God!

The Obsession to Be Different

F. L. LEMLEY

New Shrewsbury, New Jersey

And here is another parable he told. It was aimed at those who were sure of their own goodness and looked down on everyone else. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood up and prayed thus: 'I thank thee, O God, that I am not like the rest of men, greedy, dishonest, adulterous; or for that matter, like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all that I get.' But the other kept his distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven, but beat upon his breast, saying, 'O God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am.' It was this man, I tell you, and not the other, who went home acquitted of his sins" (Lk. 18:9-14 NEB).

Somewhere along the way, we of the churches of Christ have acquired an obsession to be different. So strong is this obsession that we are completely blinded to likenesses we hold in common with not only the denominations, but with other churches of Christ. We teach lessons on our uniqueness, pointing out distinctive qualities that are not really distinctive at all. We have an exaggerated idea that, "The only reason we have for existence is that we stand for something that no one else stands for. If the church occupies common ground with any other group it has no real reason to exist. The church must offer the community something that it would not be offered if the church did not exist there."¹ We speak of the "Lord's church" in an exclusive manner. We speak of "the denominations" with a superior air. We are known by putting undue emphasis on "THE" in speaking of the

church. We cannot cooperate with any other body of people in any project, not even to opening our homes for hospitality to groups not our own.² There is no way we can cooperate with the Key '73 or Explo '72 movement.³ We are different! We do not deny the sincerity of those making such statements or the fact of their convictions, but let us study together this fancied difference between churches of Christ and the rest of the Christian world.

What about our view on the authority of the Scriptures? Note the following quotes:

Inspiration carries with it the divine authority of God so that Scripture is binding upon the mind, heart, and conscience as the only rule of faith and practice for the believer.

[The Scriptures] are to be received as the Word of God, and are to be believed and obeyed.

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without mixture of error for its matter . . .⁴

Shall we thank God that we are not like other men in these points? Do others preach Jesus Christ as the Son of God? Anyone who has ever listened to Billy Graham knows we are not the only ones who preach Jesus Christ as God's Son, including his vicarious sacrifice for our sins, his death, burial and resurrection. Must we preach different to this? Are we the only ones preaching repentance in the name of Christ? Let's get the blinders off; our morality is no better

than that of other churches on the average.

But what about baptism? Again let us quote: "The gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Romans 1:16). Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to earth, was born of a virgin, died on the cross, rose again and ascended back unto heaven. Faith in his death and resurrection brings forgiveness of sin. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Mk. 16:16). Those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord should follow him in baptism. This is symbolic of our union with him in death, burial and resurrection to a new life in God (Rom. 6:3-6)."⁵ Must we quit teaching these things in order to be different?

But we have the right name, "Church of Christ." Is that so? Then what of the other names in scripture like "church of God," "church of the firstborn," etc.? We say that any scriptural name is OK with us, but the one who dares put some other name on the sign out front is in for trouble, notwithstanding the fact that hundreds of churches not affiliated with our noninstrumental group use "our" name. Must we really be different?

Oh, but here is a difference: we have no clergy! Really? And who are we kidding? Our preachers, ministers, or whatever you call them, serve much the same purpose as the pastors, priests, rectors, etc., of other churches. While some duties may differ, the fact is that ours are as much "clergy" as theirs, and ours draw as many special concessions as theirs, including store discounts! Neither are we the only ones who have elders, deacons and members! Must we rid ourselves of the membership too in order to be different?

We are not a denomination, or so we say. We find it difficult to hide the superior air when speaking of "the denominations," "the Lord's church," "denominationalist,"

etc. The "separatist whang" is easily detected in our tone and manner of speaking, and it is noticed by others outside our fellowship. Our exclusiveness cannot be hidden. There are three points to consider in denying our denominationalism. The first point has to do with our separation from other churches of Christ. Every faction or segment of the Restoration brotherhood manifests the same attitude, viz., that "our" segment is the one and only one, and is to be equated with the *body of Christ*. We are "IT," and there is no other! So when "converts" (?) come from other factions to join us, we speak of them as having renounced error and come into the "Lord's church"!⁶ Let us unite ourselves first, then the other two questions can be examined. We are the most sectarian of all!

There are only two major differences between churches of Christ as I know them and other Bible believing Protestant bodies. While every item we teach is taught by some other somewhere, our two major points of difference are that we do not use instrumental music and that we have a distinctive formula for baptism. We are not exclusively singular in the non-use of the instrument, but we make it a test of fellowship whereas others who do not use it do not make non-use a condition of brotherhood. Our baptismal formula is purely a human interpretation originating with Dr. Thomas in the mid 19th century.⁷

The obsession to be different has led us into such a rigid Phariseeism we are becoming known for our arrogance and proselytizing. We need to see ourselves as we truly appear to others. Any who teaches the Messiahship of Jesus Christ, the facts of his death, burial and resurrection, calling people to obedience to him, and magnifying the scriptures as God's Holy Word are preaching

the truth! We should recognize it! But the objection is raised that they do not teach the truth on baptism. Even so, others as described preach the gospel in its fullness, for baptism is not a part of the gospel. Proof of this is found in 1 Cor. 1:17: "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel." If baptism is a part of the gospel, it would follow that Paul either did not know what the gospel was or else he was mistaken. If it was a part of the gospel, then of necessity Paul was sent to preach baptism, but since Christ did not send him to baptize, baptism becomes the correct and scriptural *response* to the preaching. Paul had a different emphasis from what we have. Since baptism is the human response, it is not a part of the gospel. The gospel is the *good news* about Jesus. It is not a system of doctrine!

Let's quit kidding ourselves about having to be different. If all congregations in every

city were identical in doctrine, organization and worship, we would still need to spread the good news and begin other congregations. We don't have to be different to be right. (As an afterthought, we are not saying that Christianity should not be different to paganism. Those who believe in Christ Jesus are not pagan even though they may be wrong on a few points.) We *must* be different from the world (Jas. 1:27), but Bible believing disciples of our Lord are not in this category (Acts 19:1-6). □

1 Editorial, *Firm Foundation*, Sept. 5, 1972.

2 See *Restoration Review*, May, 1972.

3 Private correspondence with one of our beloved editors.

4 Harold Lindsell, "The Infallible Word," *Christianity Today*, Aug. 25, 1972, p. 9.

5 Statement of faith, Trinity Church, Texas.

6 Various church bulletins (names furnished on request).

7 Belcastro, *The Relation of Baptism to Church Membership* (Bethany Press), p. 31.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We regret the impossibility of printing all letters received. They should be kept as short as possible; longer ones may be condensed to fit space if that can be done without altering the sense.

The Nashville Sound

Your first article in the October issue ("Banned in Nashville") really struck a "note of identity" with my husband and myself. It almost sounded as if you were describing us—he has been a deacon, and 1½ years ago I had a vision (*wonderful!*), and we both soon thereafter received a greater infilling of the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues. As yet we have not been "banned," partly because we've gone about our way rather quietly, but God has led us into "contact" with . . . other families in the congregation here so we are able to talk fully and freely with them. We do not know, at present,

how many in the congregation "know about us"—but, of course, more do and it is very possible action will be taken one of these days.

We are continuing to pray—putting the entire situation into God's hands, knowing he can meet every need of, not only us, but also the members here. NAME WITHHELD

"Banned in Nashville" was an intelligent, spiritual approach, in my judgment, to the problem at hand. I believe you are being used of the Lord and I pray His special anointing upon you.
Redondo Beach, California WALTER TRENT

The article "Banned in Nashville" was tremendous!! I appreciate your unbiased views and I'm hoping articles like that will help open our "spiritual eyes." I'd like to think that the Nashville incident would *never* happen again, but unfortunately it is happening in many places when our people receive the "fullness of the Holy Spirit." Most elders, I fear, *do not* believe we each have a right to interpret scripture for ourselves and live as "free men in Christ," as you say. Your article was a classic. NAME WITHHELD

It was with a heavy heart that I opened the October issue of *Integrity* and read the article concerning the Nashville brother and sister who were recently excommunicated because of their belief that they had received some kind of spiritual experience. I had hoped, and indeed was beginning to think, that the storm concerning such things which has raged throughout the Church for the past two or three years was finally beginning to blow itself out and that a measure of sanity and reason was starting to return.

While I personally do not believe that experiences such as they described are actually the work of the Holy Spirit, but rather am persuaded that they are more likely psychologically induced, I cannot but feel as you do that to make them grounds for excommunication is nothing short of sectarian, for they certainly do not come within the scope of those things which the Scriptures lay down as reasons for such expulsion. I also feel that this, and kindred action along this line, represents a serious betrayal of our historical heritage.

This problem is really not new among Churches of Christ, for even from the early beginnings of the Restoration Movement there have been those among us at various times who believed either that the Holy Spirit had done, or that he might conceivably do, more than others believed to be scriptural. A case in point is Barton W. Stone who witnessed the experiences (or *exercises* as they were called) at Cane Ridge; who seemed to be favorably disposed toward some of them, particularly the singing exercises; and who, while stating that much of it was the result of "eccentricities" and "fanaticism," put himself clearly on record as believing that the overall effect had been good. But while many, probably most, of his co-workers disagreed with him about this, it does not appear that they thought it necessary to damn, denounce,

write up, or publicly censor, much less to excommunicate him;—and that in spite of the fact that the enemies of the movement later tried to make his published comments a source of embarrassment to it. On the contrary his biographer merely devoted a section of his biography to a rather thorough discussion of the subject; and, when pressed into further comment by the works of a partisan historian, said simply: "I do not think that the views of B.W. Stone, on the subject of the exercises, were altogether correct, yet they were such as the system in which he was educated suggested, and such pretty much too, as his quondam brethren in the Presbyterian Church entertained." And why can we today, with such a rich heritage to build on, not take an equally tolerant attitude toward those few brethren among us who believe that the Spirit has done or does more than we understand him to do?

May God bless the efforts of *Integrity* to bring about such a spirit of greater understanding.

Radford, Virginia

DON REECE

. . . while I actually shed tears for the martyred couple being "excommunicated" from the True Church (?), I thank God for publications like *Integrity* who dare to print such actions for the purpose of seeing ourselves as others see us, self-righteous and unyielding.

Wait until it happens to you, or someone you love dearly, then the full impact of intolerance will be heavy in your heart. A minister and his family, whom I loved dearly, were read the "letter of excommunication" and, as if that wasn't enough, letters were sent to churches in surrounding states to notify the "Brotherhood" of their actions. I still love this family and they still love the Lord. While I have never "spoken in tongues" or had "direct communication with the Holy Spirit," while I have never heard anyone "speaking in tongues," I can still love these people and they still love me.

Now I would like to ask some questions. How can elders hush-hush the bailing out of jail of a drunken brother? Ignore the actions of a brother that was arrested three times for indecent exposure? How many illegitimate babies can one bear before someone becomes concerned? Why do the elders make such strong issues on instrumental music and the Holy Spirit but show no concern over divorce and remarriage? Have elders the duty, or right, to ask one to leave the congregation for

reading *Good News for Modern Man*? How can all of these exist (and they do) without excommunication, yet the very mention of the "Spirit" will bring down the wrath of the righteous? Is it really a sin to sing hymns of praise that are not included in *Great Songs of the Church*? My copy is dated 1937!

NAME WITHHELD

Commendation

I just read my first copy of *Integrity*, and I am glad to finally read a publication from the brotherhood of Christ that is interested in returning to first-century Christianity. The article "Community in Worship" ought to be given to every child of God.

Abilene, Texas

GENE SHEETS

Responses to Responses

I submit this letter with some reservation, feeling that the never ending ping-ponging of religious viewpoints is a futile exercise which rarely produces understanding or tolerance. Exposure in the Church "trade journals" seems to be particularly counterproductive. In the final analysis Christianity is a life to be lived, not an argument to be won. However, an article by Mr. Don Haymes (*Integrity*, June 1972) and the response by Mr. James Bales (Letters, August 1972) touched upon subject matter which is of some importance for fellowship within the Church. I would like to address myself to that repartee.

In my judgment Mr. Bales failed to grasp the fundamental issue raised by Haymes' article—freedom of expression within the Church. It would seem patently obvious that any institution (including a Christian College) has the right to release employees whom they deem do not conform to the institution's stated policies and principles. The institution may be the poorer for it—both in quality and in spirit—but it has the right. The real issue is within the Church. Individuals should have the freedom to express their opinions, theological observations, and insights into the Christian faith. Denial of this right through repression, recrimination, and threat of punitive action does not conform to the spirit or the letter of Christianity as expressed in the New Testament documents.

Mr. Bales, in his enthusiasm for purging, bandies about some scriptures in support of his thesis in a very disturbing fashion. Taken in context the scriptures he quotes underscore the following points.

Matt. 3:12—John the Baptist is painting a vivid picture of *Christ's* role in accomplishing the purging of mankind.

John 15:2—Christ emphasizes the *Father's* role in purging his people.

1 Cor. 5:7—Paul states that Christians should separate themselves from the grossly immoral who glory in their immorality.

2 Tim. 2:21—This passage emphasizes that the *Christian* is to purify *himself* from flaws so he may be fit for useful service.

Heb. 9:14—This passage contrasts the superiority of the blood of Christ in purging man from dead works, as compared with the blood of bulls and goats.

These scriptures provide rather negligible support for our penchant for division and for fracturing the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. In reality, withdrawal of fellowship as practiced among the Churches of Christ is alien to the concept of fellowship in the New Testament community. We practice a punitive action which we justify by the inappropriate application of the phrase "those who walk disorderly," loosely translating it to mean those who disagree with me or traditional consensus opinion.

Mr. Bales's statement that Mr. Haymes has "appointed himself to wield the axe on the axe-wielders" is an unfair distortion of Haymes's position. When Mr. Haymes states that "it is time to bring an end to the tyranny of self-appointed axe-wielders who have terrorized free and open inquiry in the Churches of Christ," he is simply stating what should be an obvious fact and is not saying that they themselves should be axed. This tyranny may be ended simply by recognizing one of the basic tenets of Christian fellowship—that we are not to judge another man's servant, because he stands or falls to his own master (Romans 14). There is no suggestion in Mr. Haymes's article that he has usurped the role of policing discussion within the Church.

I would like to suggest to those in search of Biblical truth that it leads us to a Person, not a series of correct theological propositions. When one is in Christ the Truth has him, although he may not have the truth on every issue. When we find ourselves confronted by truth not previously

known (or recognized), it means that the time has come for a fuller understanding of Him who is Truth. In any event, any composite body of "truth" is bigger than any one man's grasp of it. I assume that no man is arrogant enough to presume that he has attained a perfect understanding of all of the subtleties of the New Testament documents, or that he fully grasps the significance of God's revelation in Christ. Consequently, maintaining an open mind and a receptive heart as we pursue our studies is essential for growth. To repress ideas and discussion is to cease to learn. We need not be afraid of ideas, for if they are faulty they will ultimately be discarded.

All men should be allowed to express their views in open forum within the Church without threat to their continued fellowship at the Lord's table or an attempt to suppress their individual expressions of concern, study, or ideals. This may be summarized rather bluntly in the language of our unfortunate and misleading labels as follows. The conservatives, the liberals, the scholars, the pseudo-scholars, the intelligent, the ignorant, the educated, the uneducated, the tolerant, and the bigot should all have the right to express their views within our fellowship. What one hopes is that the self-appointed axe-wielder (from whatever quarter) will not be allowed to ply his trade, although he should never be prevented from expressing his opinion.

Flagstaff, Arizona

LANNY HUNTER

If I may be permitted to reply to Don Ledbetter's reply to my letter, I would appreciate it.

It seems Mr. Ledbetter and Williams are highly critical of my statement, "we preach truth." What I should have said to appease their wrath was, "we think we preach truth, but who can be sure?" Mr. Ledbetter bemoans the fact that I am unloving. But, after reading his tirade, my letter looks "Heavenly" when compared to his. He talks about "harsh and judgmental" and then judges me to be (1) harsh, (2) judgmental, (3) unloving, (4) resentful, (5) hateful, (6) a Pharisee, (7) self-righteous and (8) arrogant. Of course he allows himself off the hook by saying, "They may say I have contradicted myself and was judgmental toward them, and I could well have been, but not intentionally." I don't think brother Bales or I have to say anything about Mr. Ledbetter's attitude!

It seems strange to me that brother Bales and I

are some kind of demon or Pharisee because we criticize Haymes' article and believe he is in error on the points stated. Either we are in error and Haymes, Lewis, Williams and Ledbetter have the truth on this matter, or we have the truth and they are in error. If Haymes, Lewis, Williams and Ledbetter have the truth in this matter, does that make them harsh, judgmental, unloving, resentful, hateful, a Pharisee, self-righteous and arrogant toward us?

Mr. Ledbetter states Warren Lewis has truth when he accepts Christ as Lord. True, if you mean by "accept" the same as the Bible defines the term. Of course Jesus said something about, "Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord . . ." Matt. 7:21. Some people's idea of "accepting Jesus as Lord" is not the Lord's idea. I really doubt if Mr. Lewis has accepted Jesus as Lord, for he admits in his January article in *Mission*, "One is left in the dark as to who the 'real Jesus' might be, what he did, and what his thoughts and feelings were. Yes, they all point to a Jesus; but, one wonders which Jesus to believe in." Mr. Lewis does not know which Jesus to believe in! Now, am I really being harsh, judgmental, unloving, resentful, hateful, a Pharisee, self-righteous and arrogant by pointing out Mr. Lewis' error? If so, you had better not write another letter, my friend, or you will be guilty of doing what you condemn me for!

East Gadsden, Alabama

RAY HAWK

Another Man's Answer

Stan Paregien's announcement of his decision to leave the churches of Christ and affiliate with a congregation of the Digressives is truly regrettable. Like most others who have taken such a step, he will probably find himself as unhappy among those folk as he was in his former association. Inner peace and spiritual fulfillment is not found in running away but in staying where God has placed you, in lovingly and patiently assisting brethren who need to grow, and in staying as close to the scriptures as possible. One does not better himself, or others, by affiliating with those who have taken a soft and compromising attitude toward modern religious error. I pray that this talented brother and others like him will live to see the serious mistake they have made and come back to where they belong.

Phoenix, Arizona

TED CLINE