

INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.

Integrity

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Integrity

DROPPING SOME NAMES *(continued from page 18)*

few hours, when this issue goes to press, he will be on the job again. Remember him—along with numerous others who at present must remain unnamed—when you count your blessings. Such volunteers save us hundreds of dollars each month.

* * * * *

It was my privilege to participate in *Mission's* seminar on hermeneutics in Nashville recently. Other speakers were Norman Parks, Ron Durham, and Scott Bartchy. Scott, a New Testament scholar of considerable ability, is director of the Disciples Institute in Tuebingen, Germany. *Integrity* has sponsored him in three different weekend seminars in Michigan with excellent results. Ron, as editor of *Mission*, is making an important contribution to restoration thought. His journal, at

\$6/year, is a bargain and, if you are not getting it, I suggest you send an order to 1710 W. Airport Freeway, Irving, TX 75062. Norman, a retired university professor, is well known to our readers. Our next issue will include an article from him entitled "Restoration and Models of the Church" which you should not miss.

* * * * *

One of our readers is conducting extensive research into the question of divorce within a Christian framework and therefore seeks the aid of all who are willing to share their insights and experiences. Any contribution, of any length, would be appreciated, and replies will be kept in strict confidence. Send yours to *Integrity* in an envelope marked "divorce research" and we will pass it on.

—HL

Editorial: Dropping Some Names

Hoy Ledbetter

Man's Experience of God

Laquita Alexander Higgs

Male and Female He Created Them

Robert M. Randolph

Tests of Communion

W. Carl Ketcherside

Round-Squares, Ideas and the Incarnation

Bill Bowen

To the Church of God of Resurrection Hope

Don Reece

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FROM THE EDITOR

DROPPING SOME NAMES

This issue includes articles from Laquita Higgs and Robert Randolph, whose writings, unfortunately, have not been published heretofore in *Integrity*. From her study of an important religious phenomenon Laquita has gleaned material which will speak to the concerns of many. We happen to know that her personal communion with God argues against a merely academic interest in the subject, and, although we suspect her article will have to compete with the preconceptions of some readers, it deserves our careful attention.

Bob's article is actually an address delivered to a Massachusetts church earlier this year, a fact which should heighten our interest in it, since it not only speaks to us but also serves as a reminder that congregations are being increasingly challenged by such material. Despite all that has been said, there is still a keen hunger for more information on the subject it treats, and this article, although it will not please all of us, will provoke us to further thought about how to relate our role in contemporary society to our religious roots.

* * * * *

I am writing this on the nineteenth anniversary of our fellowship with God's community in Grand Blanc—a body of people who have shown us a remarkably persistent love and acceptance and to whom every reader of *Integrity* is in debt. Of course, the group has changed a great deal over the years, and is somewhat like the ax whose owner boasted that it was over one hundred years old—despite the fact it had had three new blades and seven new handles! But one who greeted us on that first Sunday was Norman Fisher, who soon became a dear friend, and who has contributed more time to this project than anyone outside my immediate family. Although not a printer by trade, he has spent innumerable hours operating and maintaining our old press. And in a

(continued on back cover)

Man's Experience of God

LAQUITA ALEXANDER HIGGS

Dearborn, Michigan

All Christians experience God in one way or another—that is what conversion is all about—but Christians are honored, in the words of Peter, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Indwelling God. Paul writes that this Indwelling is a proof that we are God's children (Gal. 4:6), but one does not have to read Paul very long before realizing that the relationship between God and man is much more than a "proof." It is a relationship between persons, though not in any ordinary way; it is a continuing and deepening experience between Infinite Creator and finite creation. Just as he lovingly comes to us as more than mere "proof," so we have the privilege of relating to him in an intimate way. God is more to the Christian than an object of belief; he is to be known, experienced, and loved. Knowing the spirit of God within brings life and peace (Rom. 8:6), two commodities which are ever in short supply in this world, in the church, and within ourselves.

In history we find outstanding examples of persons who have known God in no ordinary way, and I should like for us briefly to look at such experience, for I believe it can be instructive. The most intense quest for a personal relationship with God has been practiced by those we call mystics. The word "mystic" calls to mind all sorts of strange ideas, but a look at some who are considered to be the

greatest Christian mystics in history dispels many of the strange notions about mysticism. I wish we could examine specific mystics and mysticism in great detail, but space does not permit so we shall have to rely upon many generalizations.

. . . a religion of the heart . . .

I am in no way advocating a return to mysticism—I believe it to be a practice primarily of the past, of a past when the Catholic Church held sway over Western civilization. Christian mysticism in the traditional sense did not successfully transfer into Protestantism or the modern age, although isolated people here and there are still labeled as mystics. Because the greatest mystics were Catholic, you may object that they have nothing to say to us because of our differences in doctrine. Although the great mystics were truly sons and daughters of the church as they knew it, and they never attempted to leave the church from which they drew strength, mystics were nevertheless notoriously nondoctrinal in their thinking; they were concerned with a religion of the heart, and for the most part they left doctrinal matters to the theologians. Mystics were often at the center of reform, however, though not usually in matters of doctrine. Their concern was to bring to the church the throb of personal exper-

ience with God, without which any religion is dead. Great mystics came to the fore at times when the church had fallen into its worst periods of dryness, formalism, and materialism. Any religion which is over-organized is most vulnerable to staleness in its relationship to God, and the mystics played an important role in attempting to combat such low periods in the Catholic Church.

... practice of the presence ...

Mysticism has been defined as "the practice of the presence of God." Evelyn Underhill, probably the best scholar on the subject, defines the mystic as "the person who has a certain first-hand experience and knowledge of God through love . . . a person for whom God is the one reality of life, the supreme Object of love."¹ The mystic's aim is union with God. One might consider the desire for "union" with God to be an arrogant presumption on the part of man, but an investigation of the writings of mystics reveals that they were not trying to achieve deification or to be totally absorbed into God (as in Oriental mysticism), but as R.M. Jones writes, "The union is one of likeness in love and in spirit, not oneness of being."² The mystic retains his identity; his will remains intact. Man or woman could not, in fact, know God nor love God if personality did not remain separate. A Protestant German mystic of the early 17th century, Jacob Boehme, likened the union of God and man to a bright, flaming piece of iron. The iron was of itself black, but the fire so penetrated and shone through that the iron gave off light. Yet, the iron did not cease to be, nor did the fire take the iron into itself.

1. Evelyn Underhill, *The Mount of Purification* (London: Longmans, 1960), pp. 231, 235.

2. Rufus M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (1909; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), p. 313.

The mystic believes man or woman to be capable of a special relationship with God, because, with the coming of the Word, each follower of Christ could be "God's temple, where the spirit of God dwells" (1 Cor. 3:16).³ The Christian mystic believes, with Paul, "that through faith Christ may dwell in your hearts in love" (Eph. 3:17), that God "has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22), through whom "we are inwardly renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Mystics are not overly concerned usually about whether one labels the Indwelling as God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit, but they have confidence that the Presence is within, the immanent God. His closeness does not invite a cheap familiarity, however, for God, though present in his creation, is always transcendent to it.

... a stormy and difficult path ...

That which pulls the mystic toward God is love. The true mystic is not seeking for reward or happiness; he is not searching for knowledge or ecstatic experience. He only knows that he is called by love and that he must find the essence of reality which is in that love. He cannot evade it if he is to have peace, yet his is a stormy and difficult path, often involving the complete remaking of character. Underhill notes, "Those who suppose mystical experience to be merely a pleasing consciousness of the Divine in the world, a sense of the 'otherness' of things, a basking in the beams of the Uncreated Light, are only playing with Reality. True mystical achievement is the most complete and most difficult expression of life which is as yet possible to man. It is at once an act of love, an act of surrender, and an act of supreme perception."⁴

3. All Bible quotations are from the New English Bible unless otherwise noted.

4. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (1910; rpt. New York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 84.

Although one may draw general conclusions about mystics, it should be stressed that there is no definite pattern in the mystic way, and each mystic has found a somewhat different path to God, just as each Christian's relationship with God today is unique. Yet, the Christian today follows, in broad outline, the same general steps as those of the mystic in the quest for God. The traditional mystic way has been divided into three steps: purgation, illumination, and union. Purgation, the beginning stage, aims at purity of heart and freedom from selfhood in every form. For the mystic, it usually involved a period of detachment from the world, often compared to Paul's three years in the Arabian desert. Some mystics spent many years in this first step of purgation, with an ascetic discipline which we today consider extreme and even ridiculous. One of course has to recognize his or her own unworthiness before God and the need for purification. Though he may practice much self-discipline, yet he does not purify himself, for purification is not only a preparation for God, it is a fruit of having met God already. Even with God's help, though, it is a state of pain and effort, an intensive form of self-conquest, one which most of us are all too willing to bypass if possible.

... illumination ...

The stage in the mystic way called illumination, which may coincide with purification, brings a certain apprehension of God resulting in a new perception of the true values of life and a peaceful certitude of God. The period of illumination includes many of the states of contemplation, the degrees of orison, or prayer, which the mystics like to write about. Underhill lists five divisions of prayer, starting with vocal prayer and going up to the "prayer of quiet."⁵ The most dangerous possibilities for extremes and aberrations exist in the period of illumination, with the most obvious dangers lying in the trances and visions which some mystics experience in this period. Again and again the mystics caution others against uncritical acceptance of visions and ecstasies; some, notably the Spanish mystic, John of the Cross, go so far as to say that such phenomena are most probably real hindrances in the path to God. A more typical approach is that of Walter Hilton, a 14th century English mystic:

If you are led to set too much store by these experiences and to enjoy them for their own sake, thinking that this sensible experience is a part of the joy of heaven and the happiness of the angels, so that you do not want to pray, but all your thoughts dwell on these experiences and all your efforts are to preserve the enjoyment of them. In this case, however great the attraction, do not assent to them, for it is a deception of the enemy. . . . On the other hand, it may be that these experiences will not hinder your spiritual life, but make you pray more devoutly and fervently, and feed your mind with holy thoughts. And even if you are somewhat taken aback by them at first, nevertheless you soon find your heart quickened to a greater desire of virtue, your love of God and your neighbor increased, and your opinion of yourself lowered. In that case you may know that they come from God. . . .⁶

... visions and ecstasies ...

Underhill has an excellent discussion on whether visions and ecstasies are psychological or religious. Many are mere "hallucinations of the senses," she comments, "but there are some, experienced by minds of great power and richness, which are crucial for those who have them. These bring wisdom to the simple and ignorant, sudden calm to those who were tormented by doubts. They flood the personality with new light: accompany conversion, or the passage from one spiritual state to another: arrive at moments

6. Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, trans. Dom Gerard Sitwell (London: Burns Oates, 1953), pp. 16-17.

5. Underhill, *Mount of Purification*, p. 167.

of indecision, bringing with them authoritative commands or counsels . . . confer a convinced knowledge of some department of the spiritual life before unknown. Such visions, it is clear, belong to another and higher plane of experience. . . ." Underhill notes that some test must be applied if we are to distinguish "real transcendental activity" from those "which are only due to imagination raised to the *n*th power, to intense reverie, or to psychic illness." The test: "their life-enhancing quality."⁷ By their fruits ye shall know them. The mystics often warn against taking delight in such phenomena as ends within themselves; they even caution followers about their "feelings" of exultation, lest they confuse Reality itself with the joy given by contemplation of that Reality. A real perception of God is not accompanied by sensational phenomena, but, as Bernard of Clairvaux described it, by a perfect rest and repose in God which gently invades the soul and gives it new vigor.

. . . tricks are possible . . .

Another pitfall for the mystic is the contemplative stage called "quiet," where consciousness is allowed to sink into God's silence (this is not to be confused with the higher stage of "union"). Many would-be mystics choose to stop in the "quiet," enjoying this meaningless state of absorption in nothing and then claiming an exemption from the duties of human existence. The great mystics deplore this perversion of the spiritual faculty; they would never deliberately try to enter the orison of quiet, believing it to be a supernatural gift, not a self-induced psychic trick. Such "tricks" are very possible and are to be guarded against.

The prayer of quiet is to be only a state of preparation for entering into contemplation proper where the mystic is raised above himself and is conscious of

7. Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 269-270.

being in the presence of God for a brief time. With "the flash of one trembling glance," Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*, he "arrived at THAT WHICH IS."⁸ The mystic has now come to union with God, an immersion into the life of the Spirit and directed in all his actions by the indwelling love of God. He has reached the consummation of the spiritual marriage toward which his long training in the mystic way has been leading. Often this point of complete surrender has been preceded by the "dark night of the soul," a phrase first used by John of the Cross. The "dark night" is a period of dryness, of negation and misery, when God seems far away. It is apparently a necessary educating process, a school of suffering, constant love to bring the mystic to total surrender, but the result is transmuted humanity, the new man whose life is one with God. The experience of union is not attained, but is given by God; it is an active, participating apprehension, not a passive observation.

. . . the unitive life . . .

Having the tranquility and assurance of the perfectly surrendered soul, the mystic then enters into the "unitive life," in which he becomes very active in the affairs of the church or the world about him. Absorbed into the interests of God, he is conscious of sharing divine strength which urges the self to some form of heroic spiritual effort or creative activity. He becomes a center of energy, a source of spiritual vitality for other people. Here in the unitive life we observe the extremely active lives of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross in their attempts to reform monastic life in Spain, the political and spiritual leadership of Bernard of Clairvaux and of Catherine of Siena, and the spiritual revival of Germany led by the

8. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. E.B. Pusey (1838; rpt. Mount Vernon: Peter Pauper Press, n.d.), Book I, p. 9.

preaching of Master Eckhart and John Tauler. Here, then, is one of the criteria of a true mystical union—it leads to a life of action. As Underhill writes, "Not spiritual marriage, but divine fecundity is to be their final stage."⁹ Again, by their fruits ye shall know them. Mystics repeatedly stress their service to others as the best proof that they are of God. Master Eckhart, the 14th century preacher, intellectual, and mystic, often said in his sermons, "Even if a man were in a rapture like St. Paul, and knew a sick man who needed some soup from him, I should think it far better you left the rapture for love and would serve the needy man in greater love."¹⁰

. . . active and dynamic concern . . .

Space does not allow even a brief recounting of the lives of the outstanding Christian mystics. Certainly we owe a debt to them. Not only did they keep alive the idea of a personal relationship with God, but some mystics (the German school) directly influenced the break from Catholicism, and some (in England) were Bible translators and early advocates, even before Wyclif, of the move to make the Bible available in the language of the people. Though we may strongly disagree with the doctrinal context within which they worked, we must admire their single-minded pursuit of oneness with God which resulted, not in a foggy spirituality, but in an active and dynamic concern to meet the needs around them. The true mystics, moreover, never exalted their personal experiences over historical revelation; rather, they interpreted their insights in the light of Christian beliefs as they understood them. These were exceptional people, of course, and few of us

9. Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 172.

10. Master Eckhart, "Spiritual Instructions," from Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Master Eckhart and the Rhineland Mystics*, trans. Hilda Graef (New York: Harper, n.d.), p. 79.

have the will or ability to match even a portion of their devotion to God. Yet, in our own way—but, I stress, in the context of God's kingdom—we must each find our own relationship with God.

. . . a few gleanings . . .

I shall here presume to reiterate and emphasize a few gleanings from my study of historical mysticism which might be helpful in your own devotional life, as they have been in mine. Foremost is that the only true path to God stems from love, love for Himself alone, which seeks to give, not to get. Paradoxically, it is love given by Him (Rom. 5:5). Here our will and desire enter in, for God honors our desire for love with greater love. The Psalmist knew such desire: "O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee" (Ps. 63:1, *RSV*). "Strike that thick cloud of unknowing with the sharp dart of longing love,"¹¹ advised an anonymous 14th century English mystic. We have the assurance that "the Lord is good to those who look for him, to all who seek him" (Lam. 3:25). Augustine wrote, "Narrow is the mansion of my soul; enlarge Thou it, that Thou mayest enter in."¹²

But desire alone will not reach God; we must aim at purity of heart. "How blest are those whose hearts are pure; they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). That statement deserves an exclamation point! purity of heart can give far more than all of this world of materialism and sensuality. The mystics found their way of purification in bare feet and hair shirts; we must find ours.

The mystics, who practiced prayer and meditation so effectively, can teach us much about it, for the working expression of mysticism is prayer, not intellectual speculation. "Prayer oneth the soul to

11. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. Clifton Wolters (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 60.

12. Augustine, Book I, p. 11.

God,"¹³ wrote Julian of Norwich in the 14th century. The mystics teach us that there may be periods of "dryness" in one's relationship with God; he may seem to be far away at times, but, as John of the Cross tells us, we must have "dark faith" that God is working in us even though we may be miserable in our times of negation. God's purposes are not always clear, but they are sure. Again, it is John of the Cross who would caution us most strongly that a "feeling" or phenomenon is not our goal; our aim is God himself. The mystics can enlarge our view of God. Centuries ago, Julian of Norwich, with a much broader view of God than many even in our own generation, wrote, "As verily as God is our Father, so verily God is our Mother. . . . we have our Being of Him—where the Ground of Motherhood beginneth,—with all the sweet Keeping of Love that endlessly followeth."¹⁴

. . . communion with God . . .

Though our pattern for a relationship with God today is not mysticism in its traditional sense, yet there are those among us who have something of a mystical relationship with God. Because of the connotations which the word "mystical" brings to the modern mind, however, I would choose to call today's relationship a "communion" with God.¹⁵ Communion with God is, I believe, normal in the life of the seriously committed Christian, but some temperaments are far more open than others to such communion and we should treasure those people. It is they who give to the church much life and vitality, for they are links with God. Too

13. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. Grace Warwick (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 90.

14. Julian of Norwich, p. 147.

15. Georgia Harkness makes a distinction between union and communion in *Mysticism: Its Meaning and Message* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973). She also has an excellent chapter on neomysticism in which she discusses the Jesus Movement and Zen Buddhism among other things.

often the church has been afraid of those who are the most committed, those who know God most intimately, for they are threats to others who fear to know God in his fullness.

. . . ways of meeting God . . .

There are as many ways of meeting God as there are people on earth, and a set way for that most exalted of relationships should never be imposed, but James advised, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8, *RSV*). We may find communion in joyful worship, in fresh insights from God's word, in loving peace in prayer, in quiet assurance that we are God's children, in deep satisfaction at having met a human need about us, or even in painful suffering. Communion with God in our inner life can be deeply sustaining without being startling, though God has been known to do startling things in and with our lives if given the opportunity.

Like the mystic's "union," communion with God is not attained; it is a gift from God. All we can do is to love God and dispose ourselves for whatever he may do. It is so simple, yet so profound. To know God, to experience God is to be transformed. Those who claim the privilege of His acquaintance and, yes, even the glory of His love, are those through whom the vitalizing force of God has emerged during the ages of Christian history. Paul's prayer should be our own; do read it carefully: "that out of the treasures of his glory he may grant you strength and power through his Spirit in your inner being, that through faith Christ may dwell in your hearts in love. With deep roots and firm foundations, may you be strong to grasp, with all God's people, what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, and to know it, though it is beyond knowledge. So may you attain to fullness of being, the fullness of God himself" (Eph. 3:16-19).

Amen and Amen! □

Male and Female He Created Them

ROBERT M. RANDOLPH

Wellesley, Massachusetts

Those who have carefully read the book of Genesis have noted that there appear to be two stories of creation. In the first, which runs from 1:1-2 to 2:4, the Lord is pictured as saying:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And the account goes on to tell of the dominion given them over land and sea, closing with the summary comment:

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

The entire narrative is brief and to the point. There is no editorializing, no elaboration. The writer has as his purpose a broad, creedal introduction to the history of Israel. It is his contention that the God who had led Israel through its history, the God who had directed the lives of the Patriarchs, led them into bondage and out again, entered into the Covenant with the house of David and the dynasty at Jerusalem, was the same God who had brought creation out of chaos. The story was not a unique one. There were similar stories of creation in Mesopotamian mythologies and the materials here are very similar to those stories, but with an important difference. Other stories involved many gods and the God of Israel was one. He was Yahweh, the Lord of history, who stood over the course of human events with ultimate concern for his chosen people.

The second account of creation is a bit more elaborate. Again drawn from materials common to the people of the Middle East, it places emphasis upon the

nature of the deity. God is singular, but the tradition which embraced this story elaborated upon the creation and included the common story of the Garden of Eden and placed it squarely in Mesopotamia near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The creation here of man and woman is elaborated upon:

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

The Lord placed man in the garden to oversee the garden. He is the first recorded live-in gardener. His responsibilities are many and the hours long. He becomes lonely and God concludes: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." God then formed the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Man names them, but not one of them is a fit mate of man. God then determines to double the work staff and creates a helper for man. In a sense woman is not only lower than the angels, but she comes after the beasts of the field and fowl of the air. The rib is taken from the man and God brings the new creation to Man. The response is somewhat more expressive than English allows:

Then the man said,
This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called woman,
because she was taken out of man.

The English equivalent of the "at last" phrase might be better introduced with the exclamation "Zowie, at last." Such is the emotion inherent in the word. The passage continues and includes the classic

phrase included in many marriage ceremonies, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." Nothing is said about the woman leaving her father and mother, and the reason is clear. The focus is on man and the woman is not only secondary, she is inferior and ultimately the cause of man's sin.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband and he ate.

The results are straightforward. Eden is ended. The snake will always crawl on its

It is a bitter paradox that one of the church's contributions to western society is that it has raised the status of women while never affording them equality within the institution itself.

belly and be despised. Man will have to work for a living and woman will suffer the pain of childbirth. Now we have not only learned the order of creation, but have the explanation for the lowliest of reptiles and the human condition. Parenthetically one might add that in our day we have discovered that snakes are not so bad; childbirth can be a high occurrence in a marriage; and the curse of work is not the toil, but boredom. But the message of Genesis remains the same.

The book of Genesis, and the remainder of the Pentateuch, did not emerge full blown from the heart of Israelite history and a handy Xerox machine. They were slowly crafted and lived to emerge as we know them late in Jewish history. Editors and storytellers played an important role as they always play in societies where the spoken word is more important than the written word. And so our accounts of creation. Both place emphasis upon the nature of creation. God brings order

out of chaos. He creates man in his image. And the elaboration in the second account tells us that woman is secondary, an afterthought. Untrustworthy. Weak. She is the cause of sin.

The description echoed the social reality. Women were little better in the ancient world than beasts of burden. They were to bear children, contribute to the well-being of the family, and generally stay out of the way. In terms of Israel's religious life, woman played a role. Miriam, the sister of Moses, was an important figure for both good and evil. Women participated in the festivals of Israel. The priests, however, were men, and women could not serve.

In the Christian era, the attitude of the church toward women was in keeping with the accepted view which in turn was reflected by the Old Testament. Women were of inferior status and that inferiority was accepted, and became the source of illustration. The virtues women were to exhibit were domestic virtues, the virtues of service rather than of speech. In fact, in worship they were to be silent (1 Cor. 14:34-36). They were not to usurp man's position by teaching (1 Tim. 2:12). Their piety was to be quiet, supportive and definitely in the background.

In theory this was fine, but in fact throughout the ministry of Jesus, and in the life of the early church, they played an important role. Mary the mother of our Lord, and Mary and Martha, who were important in the life of the Lord, were later matched by others. There were Priscilla who with her husband instructed Apollos in the faith (Acts 18:26), the unnamed deaconesses who served with Phoebe (Rom. 16:1), and Eunice and Lois who shaped the young man Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5). Women endured prisons with the men of the young church. Their blood was spilled as martyrs for the faith and the history of the church since has been shaped by the lives and contributions of women who did not take the

back seat and allow their piety to be expressed in terms of domestic service and childbearing.

It is a bitter paradox that one of the church's contributions to western society is that it has raised the status of women while never affording them equality within the institution itself. We are equal, says the church, only as we approach the judgment seat of God.

How could this happen? The answer is simple, and yet profound in its implications. In a way the unfolding of history parallels the story of creation as recounted in the two traditions noted. The simple statement that God created male and

I suspect that women ministers will not be unknown by the end of the next quarter century.

female was later elaborated to affirm the inferiority of women. For the Christian faith there is the reality that in Christ there is neither Jew, Greek, male, female, slave, nor freeman. They are all equal before God and of equal worth. It is that message that has triumphed over Paul's concern with the secondary status of women. It is that concept that underlay the participation of women in the life of the church through the ages.

The elaboration of Paul reflected the social order of the time, but it is the doctrine of equality in Christ that has lifted the status of women in the West, and that ultimately has brought the issue home to us in the church. Women are now demanding formal recognition of their role in the Christian community, and like any conservative institution the church responds slowly, negatively; but it must recognize reality and that means that it will change. And my prognosis is that over the next several decades our church will change. Women will take an increased role. Their leadership will become evident, and I suspect that women ministers

will not be unknown by the end of the next quarter century. Our view of scripture has always bent before changing social norms, else women would have long hair today as they were told to have by Paul. Or they would only pray with their heads covered. Or they would in fact be silent in our churches as Paul told them to be. Change will not come easily but it will come. The vested interests that prevail now will have to retreat.

But in the meantime what must we do? We certainly can wait until change comes in other groups and then quietly give in, but I'd like to see our fellowship move ahead because what we are talking about is the right thing to do. I like to think that we can take a place behind the Episcopal Church, but slightly ahead of the Catholic Church, because what they have done, and will do, is right. To do that we need to remember the message of Genesis, the first of the recorded traditions and recounted in the foundation of our faith: male and female, he created them. That is the message and to go beyond that by assigning status and worth is to enter the realm of subjective interpretation.

Secondly, it is important that we recognize that no change of this sort comes easily. My recent copy of *Reflections*, the Yale Divinity School publication, contains an article entitled "Ye That Are Men Now Serve Him or did we really sing that in chapel this morning?" The familiar verse is from "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," and it was an eye-catching title for an article regarding sexism at the Yale Divinity School. Sadly, for some, tinkering with the liturgy—our hymns, prayers, etc.—becomes the end all of concern. As a result, the entire concern slides off into the absurd as it did at a women's college I am acquainted with. After trying to revise the liturgy by changing all references to the masculinity of God, they threw up their hands in dismay and retired to rethink their concerns. Raising such issues may help, but the "sexist" liturgical forms

we use are the products of a tradition that has contributed to the current climate, and I imagine they will remain unchanged. I wonder if they need to be changed. New hymns may be written—we certainly need them—and the issues of “personhood” may come to the fore, but I think the open acceptance of women in the public expression of worship will do much more to create a healthy climate.

Finally, getting our theology in order and avoiding extremes are important, but the prayerful espousal of the opportunity of women to participate in worship should be embraced by all. The notion that a stranger by virtue of his being male is

better qualified to pray, read, or exhort is a notion that must be set to rest. Our congregation and many others would be but a memory but for the godly women who have served here over the years. They may choose to remain in the background, but opportunities for public expression need not, and should not, be denied them. The church of the future will be the church of our daughters as well as of our sons. And I am confident that the “Faith of Our Fathers” can be the “Faith of Our Daughters,” too. “In spite of dungeon, fire and sword,” our hearts will still beat high with joy when “e’er we hear that glorious word.” □

Tests of Communion

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When the particular movement which eventually crystallized into a distinct and separate entity now universally denominated Church of Christ was launched, its advocates turned their guns against creeds. Those written formularies, some of them hoary with age, were regarded as dangerous to the spread of the kingdom of the Messiah for at least two good reasons. First, they dammed the stream of human thought, making further honest research impossible, and creating stagnant sects behind them where the scum of tradition gathered upon the surface. Secondly, they kept apart those who should be together in Christ Jesus by making demands of orthodoxy to which sincere minds could not prescribe.

Every written creed bears upon its face the time of its origin. Even though not dated by the calendar, the perceptive stu-

dent can determine its approximate period by the statements contained and the verbiage employed. Every creed simply marks the progress of human rationalization about the will of God until its day. It gathers up and weighs the debates and mental deductions of the past and moulds them into a “recognized church order” which is bound upon every person who from that time on seeks identification with its makers and adherents.

The word creed is from the Latin *credo*, I believe. In reality there can be nothing sinful about an individual writing his personal creed. It is no more wrong to write a statement of what one believes than to present it orally. The mistake lies not in writing a creed but in ceasing to write. To assume that at a given time in one’s life he has arrived at the place where he has learned all there is to know about

the divine-human relationship and that he should lock up his opinions at that time and throw the key away is not to demonstrate the degree of his intelligence but to reflect against it.

Humanly written creeds are useful only when they can be abandoned. One who is in college does not try to cram his body into the suit he wore in kindergarten. A high school student does not attempt to go to the shopping center on the tricycle of which he was so proud on his third Christmas. A thing which served a useful purpose in the past may become a distinct

**The mistake lies
not in writing a creed but
in ceasing to write.**

hindrance in the present. A jacket is useful if it is not allowed to become a strait-jacket.

The creed announced by heaven is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. This is the prime fact of the universe, the propositional statement involving ultimate truth which, in its essence, is not propositional but eternal and personal. When one confesses this fact and validates his trust in it by submission to one act inducting him into the relationship involved in the fact, he has responded to the Good News. He is a member of the family, a citizen of the kingdom, a living stone in the temple. Our creed is Christ.

No one has a right to ask a believer in the fact of Jesus, as a term of his reception, what he thinks of instrumental music, one cup or multiple cups, or Sunday School classes. No one has the right to judge his loyalty to Jesus upon the basis of what he thinks about sponsorship of a radio or television program, or the means of its support. To do so is to create a sectarian creed and try to impose it upon a child of God. Such creeds are schismatic and divisive as are all human tests of fellowship and communion.

We have not only lost sight of God’s majestic revelation of the divine purpose for union of all who believe in His Son, but we have also denied by our actions the basis upon which we began as a movement to plead for that union. As the sectarian world about us gives up its written creeds we proliferate our unwritten ones. At the most auspicious time in almost two centuries for our use as a catalytic agent to “unite the Christians in all of the sects” we are unable to receive one another in our own ranks.

In his debate with N.L. Rice on human creeds, Alexander Campbell said the reformers opposed creeds “because old parties were sustained by them, because they made new parties, and because they were roots of bitterness and apples of discord.” Every party among us has sprung from a creed. Whatever one must consent to in order to be a member of a party is the creed of that party. In reverse, whatever is used as a means of discharging one from a party is the creed of that party. The grounds of excommunication determine the basis of communion.

A “loyal church” in our current parlance is not one whose members are faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, but one whose adherents are gathered around a party flagpole, a factional standard. They demonstrate their “faith” not by imitating the mercy and compassion of the Savior but by unquestioned allegiance to the position which separates and divides them from God’s other children. Faith and trust in the redeemer and reconciler goes for nothing unless one also pays obeisance to the opinion out of which the faction grew. It will be difficult to get the rest of the world to unite with us when, the more they learn about us, the less they want to be like us. Most of them will hesitate about leaving a sect to become even more sectarian and exclusive. Our only hope is to keep our real motive under wraps until we can get them in! But deception is a sin! □

Round-Squares, Ideas and the Incarnation

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The noted British philosopher of religion, Professor John Hick, gave a lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary recently which had as its subject the Incarnation and the central logical problem surrounding this Biblical doctrine. The solution he offered, as a means of making the incarnation more palatable in a philosophical sense, is to reduce the incarnation to the status of a myth. Of course, in the context of his speech, myth does not mean false, but rather it would have a sort of poetic truth. That means, in other words, the incarnation is neither true nor false.

Just from a point of logic, however, such a view creates a serious problem and calls the whole Christian faith into question. Any time there is a factual proposition of the type, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14), there are only two logical possibilities. The proposition is either true or false and one cannot avoid this logical rule by verbal gymnastics of the type suggested by Professor Hick. To say it is neither true nor false is essentially to say the proposition is meaningless.

The reason those like Professor Hick try to reduce the incarnation to the status of a myth and to free it from all factual claims is because they believe it is a logical contradiction. The argument goes something like this: Jesus was a man located in time and space, while God is neither in time nor space, and so to identify Jesus with God is like identifying a circle with a square. And clearly it is a contradiction to speak of a "round square."

But the question we ought to ask is simple. Are the two propositions, Jesus

is God, and a circle is a square, analogous? The mistake Professor Hick has committed is a common one: he has assumed that they are analogous, and then he used the assumption to draw a conclusion. Furthermore, what threw him off the track is really quite simple: he has confused an inexplicable mystery with a contradiction. You see, the basic difference in the two things is that a contradiction, though beyond human understanding, cannot occur under any circumstances. An inexplicable mystery, on the other hand, though it too is beyond human understanding, can and does occur.

Thus if we take the incarnation and remove it from the realm of contradiction and put it instead into the category of the inexplicable, we can see how it could occur. A common example of the latter and one which occurs in the mind of all of us each day is the electrical-chemical reaction in the brain which becomes an idea. Is there anything in the universe more mysterious? When we analyze the various constituents of an idea into an electrical charge, a brain wave, and chemical elements, nothing could be more unlikely than to find that one causes the other. And yet it happens nonetheless.

Notice the further problems involved here. Electrical-chemical reactions and brain waves are located in space; they may be spoken of as fast or slow moving; none of which can be said of ideas (except possibly in a metaphorical sense). Now if we take God as a perfect Being without location in space and time and compare Him with Jesus of Nazareth, it

seems impossible for one to become the other; but it happened all the same.

So Hick's mistake lies in his choice of analogies. He chose the round-square and therefore turned the incarnation into a contradiction. If he had seen it instead as what it is, an inexplicable mystery, and used an idea—the word became flesh—for his example, he could have retained both the mystery and the truth of the incarnation.

*The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats through unseen among us,—visiting*

*This various world with as inconstant
wing
As summer winds that creep from flower to
flower,—
Like moonbeams that behind some piny
mountain shower,
It visits with inconstant glance
Each human heart and countenance;
Like hues and harmonies of evening,—
Like clouds in starlight widely spread,—
Like memory of music fled,—
Like aught that for grace its grace may be
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.*

—P.B. Shelley.

TO THE CHURCH OF GOD OF RESURRECTION HOPE

"The Church of God of Resurrection Hope
At Lenoir, North Carolina"—as these words
Came on the air the heart within me heard
From out the distant past with start of joy,
Like distant Church bells chiming faint and dim,
The chorus of an ancient funeral hymn
I heard my mother sing when but a boy:

"We shall rise! Hallelujah!
We shall rise! Amen!
In the resurrection morning,
When death's prison bars are broken,
We shall rise, Hallelujah, we shall rise!"

O unknown Church, of ancient Christian hope,
In these dark days of doubt and unbelief
Proclaim to all whose hearts are bowed with grief,
Who in the night of death and shadows grope,
The Hope clear seen by Holy Prophet eyes
That "In the day of glory dawning" we shall rise!

—DON REECE