

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

NY 10820. While I have not seen any of Genesis, those who have speak highly of it, and if it is as well produced and as edifying as the portions of Luke included in *Jesus*, it would be invaluable for Bible study for all ages, possibly in a coordinate Old Testament survey by all classes in a Bible School program.

The quality and accuracy of the portion released theatrically (*Jesus*) have the advantage of reaching unbelievers as well as believers, and is a tremendous opportunity to introduce all to our Lord (as seen by Luke) in a non-threatening atmosphere with a minimum of hype,

distortion or hypothesizing about Jesus and his disciples. The possibilities here for edification, education and evangelism are almost limitless; for it is a lot easier to get people, church-goer or not, to go see a movie than to read a book of the scriptures. The advantage of a faithful, quality production like *Jesus* (and hopefully the entire New Media Bible) is that it usually will stimulate interest in the original text, and viewers will return home to read the word and therein further encounter the Lord himself, Jesus our Savior, to whom be glory forever. Amen. □

Editorial: We're Back!

Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ
Hoy Ledbetter

Campbellites, History and the Bible
Jim Reynolds

Luke's Gospel Comes to the Cinema
Allen Holden, Jr.

June-July, 1980
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We're Back!

Now that God has enabled me to resume my work with *Integrity*, my first obligation is to acknowledge our debt to Joe Jones, who, with the help of Dean and Laquita, handled the editorial duties so capably during my absence. Next I want to thank those who have sent contributions without interruption, along with others who would have done so if they had not been unsure of what we were going to do. Since we are now committed to publishing regularly, we are confident that all will respond regularly. Because we have reached the point where we must depend far less on volunteer help, we also need to acquire some more financial partners. It is our intention to keep combining issues until we get back on schedule. We hope to have the next one ready by the time you receive this one. Please grant us your prayers and counsel.

Allen Holden's review of *Jesus* in this issue may be a little late, but it is important because so many have seen, or will see, this movie. My reaction to it was not as positive as his, although it did not thoroughly embarrass me as did one on "historical Jesus." Movies about Jesus seem to me to always stumble over the incarnation and/or trying to read the gospels as biography. We would like to hear *your* opinion.

Norman and Ella Rae Parks will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on September 13. Since one seldom meets such a lovable couple, about whom there are so many good things to say, I cannot resist saying a little. We not only highly respect them as really good people, but we also love them dearly and relish their friendship and guidance. All who rejoice in righteousness have frequent occasion to give thanks for their good works, and readers of this journal (and others) are indebted to them, certainly for many excellent articles, but just as certainly for varied and extensive help never publicly acknowledged. If longevity were based on merit, they would be assured of celebrating anniversaries long after many of us are gone. You may write to them at 404 Minerva Drive, Murfreesboro, TN 37130.

--HGL

Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ HOY LEDBETTER

We Americans, someone has said, have been eating our seed corn, which is a homely way of pointing out that our consumption has outgrown our productivity, with the inevitable result being runaway inflation. This phenomenon, along with some other persistent griefs such as the swelling shortage of natural resources, has forced us to face the necessity of making some substantial adjustments in lifestyle and to resolve a great deal of anxiety about the future. Thoreau's contention that "the mass of men live lives of quiet desperation" seems to be especially applicable to us as we confront our unique problems, for we are often much too worried about maintaining our lifestyle, or are too busy making a living, to really live.

The True Basis . . .

But the crisis through which we are passing, although at the moment quite painful, will prove to be a genuine blessing if it helps us to learn the true basis of happiness. It is said of the

pioneer congregations in Macedonia, "The troubles they have been through have tried them hard, yet in all this they have been so exuberantly happy that from the depths of their poverty they have shown themselves lavishly open-handed" (2 Cor. 8:2, NEB). Both Christian experience and Christian conviction affirm that one can be exuberantly happy in the depths of poverty, while facing troubles that try him hard, for true happiness comes — and can only come — from right relationships. And I am sure that if we could lean across the years and ask the Macedonians when they began to be so happy, they would reply that it was when they were called into the fellowship of God's Son, or, to put it another way, when they became members of the church of Christ.

I know that some are ready to say that it is precisely to the church that they owe the most miserable times of their lives. But what they speak of is the church in its failure to be the body of Christ. When an influential number in the church usurp lordship and say in

their hearts, "We do not want this man as our king," or when the individual wants to buy happiness too cheaply and is unwilling to make the necessary commitment, either to God or his fellow Christians, congregational life may be very unpleasant. But genuine happiness can be found in the true church of Christ. And because this is so — and very important — I want to share some reasons why I would not want to be anywhere else.

One of the most appealing things about the church of Christ is that it is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one. This fact comes home to me when I contemplate my own body, which, it should be noted, was also designed by God. I only have one body, and there is no way on earth I could have more than one. That one body is made up of many parts, or members, no two of which are exactly alike. It is a marvelous organism, with infinite variety and with its many members having diverse functions, and yet it is a unity. And that's the way it is with the church; or, as Paul would say, "so it is with Christ" (which is a more basic thought, since we are in the body only as — and inasmuch as — we are in Christ).

Baptism and Unity . . .

This idea of essential unity is related to the practical reason I am a member of the body. According to 1 Corinthians 12 (to which there are many allusions in this article), the Spirit at one point in my life moved me to be baptized into it ("by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"). In the Galatian epistle Paul asserts that because of our faith and baptism (the inward and outward aspects of our

initiation into Christ) we are all sons of God, and then he insists: "Because we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!'" It is the Spirit who determines who can call God Father, which is to say that the decision as to who is my brother or sister is not made on earth, but in heaven. The great advantage of this arrangement is that it keeps our status in the family independent of the whims of fallible men who may be bereft of the true family spirit.

The condition which prevails among baptized believers is this: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It is not that the distinctions of nature, law and custom are not recognizable in Christ (the church is not, and should not be, blind), but that they are transcended; they are never used to one's disadvantage. We need no equal rights amendment in the church, for equality is written into our constitution. And that unity which swallows up the common discriminations of humanity is expressed, and not denied, by the exercise of the various distinctive gifts we Christians have.

But the fact that the body is one does not mean that everyone who is in it is just like everyone else, for the very baptism by which we were initiated into Christ is a highly individualistic act, in which one makes up and expresses his own mind to be a Christian. When he exercises his right to choose what is right and to recognize Jesus only as his Lord, he acts in a manner fully consistent with the diversity and unity of the body to which he belongs. The variety of background and talent and outlook within the church is no less desirable than

variety in the human body. Can you imagine what a boring and useless and freakish phenomenon it would be if your body were all fingers?

This comforting idea, which the church steadily supports, provides us with a constant corrective to the tendency to think of ourselves as sub-spiritual, or even as unnecessary, when we do not possess the more conspicuous gifts by which we can contribute to community life. The true church always echoes Paul's assertion that the foot does not sever itself from the body by distinguishing itself from the hand, nor does the ear surrender its rightful place in the body because it differs from the eye. Not only does the Bible plainly contradict such crippling self-disparagement, but the church leads us to think of ourselves in a more constructive way, which not only brings us tremendous psychological benefits, but it also enhances our spiritual outlook and ministry.

Many Parts, One Body . . .

When we recognize that variety in the church is not only desirable but also highly necessary, then we can respect and esteem those who have gifts that are different from our own. I cannot think of anything more disconcerting than to be driving along a road at night and suddenly being compelled to ask myself, "Where did that bridge go over which I should be driving right now instead of dropping into the water?" In a very real sense we depend on someone else to provide us with eyes when we drive. If the bridge is out, or if the curve is sharp, we expect someone to have seen it for us, and to have provided a warning sign. When the Israelites left Sinai, Moses

said to his brother-in-law Hobab, "Come with us and we will do you good." But Hobab wanted to go to his own land and people, so Moses said, "Do not leave us . . . for you know how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us."

It should be obvious that those who serve as eyes in the church are maintaining a very useful ministry, of which we are the beneficiaries. Their work for us contributes immensely to our happiness. But there are other vital functions. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? As a matter of fact, these various members were not placed haphazardly within the body, but they became such by an act of creation: God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. What he did he did by plan, and he created unity, not uniformity. Consequently, all cannot be the same. If all were the same, i.e., a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Liberating Fellowship . . .

Belonging to a fellowship in which these truths are recognized and actualized in congregational life frees me from the desperate scramble for security, attention, and a sense of usefulness which characterizes the masses. It also frees me from extreme attitudes toward myself which frustrate right relationships. I know that if I am proud because I think myself to be a higher member of the body, or if I am unhappy because I am judged to be a lower member, then that is a sign of selfish individualism, of indifference to the welfare of the whole

church. Pride and discontent with respect to our positions within the body are not only selfish but are rebellion against God's will.

Even if I am a so-called inferior member, I know that my fellow Christians did not place me in that position, but God did. And he did it, not to please my brethren, but because it was his will, and his will is always right. This fact discourages me from withdrawing from the body under the assumption that I am unimportant, or even merely relatively important.

Independence Excluded . . .

The church helps me to do battle with depressing individualism by stressing the virtues of *dependence* and *subordination*, a stress which runs counter to all of my experience elsewhere. It is a hard lesson to learn that each member needs all of the rest, and that independence can be just as devastating to society as it would be to an organism. Moreover, the members are all necessary for their own sakes; they are not merely pawns to be manipulated by egocentric brethren who wish to have power. Those who think they can discharge all of the functions of the body and suppose others unnecessary are out of touch with both nature and theology. They are like the eye saying to the hand, "I have no need of you," and would turn the church into a paralytic, a veritable picture of impotence and misery.

That such wayward people exist hardly requires argument, but they are out of place, not fit for the kingdom, and serve as agents of the original insubordinate, Satan himself, whose fate they will ultimately share. That the fellowship of Christians normally rejects and

survives such deviants invites confidence in its ability to establish right relationships and to produce happiness.

In the church I am enriched by the graceful sensitivity of a family which will neither disdain me when I fail nor resent me when I succeed. We correctly say that a man has a pain in his toe; that is, the *man* has the pain, which is located in one of his members. So it is with the church. When one member suffers, all suffer together; when one is honored, all rejoice together. One can excel without boasting (a hostile word) or attracting envy and resentment; and one who falls short will be guarded by respect and shielded from contempt. There is no partiality, and no discord, for the members have the same care for one another.

The church is a society in which God is constantly creating and making adjustments, and his activity is acknowledged by the members. Consequently, when anyone manifests a superior ability to minister, all praise God for a gift which has been bestowed upon the whole group, through the one.

I belong to a fellowship in which contentment is not at the mercy of material wellbeing. If I cannot be exuberantly happy, like the Macedonians, in this atmosphere, it is only because I am constrained in my own heart. Occasionally someone will try to wreck the communion, and leave a trail of bitterness and doubt, but such damage is more apparent than real, for we have it on good authority that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. It is an eternal family which not only provides me with refuge from the uncertainties of the present, but is also my (only) defense against the ravages of time. □

Campbellites, History and the Bible

JIM REYNOLDS

Dallas, Texas

Imperfection of Apostasy

Within twenty years of the death of John the Apostle, Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote the following words: "Give heed to the bishop in order that God may also be to you. I am devoted to those who are submissive to the bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and may I have a part with them in God" (Polycarp 6). Again he writes to the Smyrnaeans: "All of you follow the bishop as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as the apostles . . . No one should do anything which pertains to the church without the bishop!" (Smyrnaeans 8). Because Ignatius spoke only of a single bishop, in contrast to the New Testament reference to a plurality of bishops, restorationists within the Churches of Christ have long argued that beginning with these words from Ignatius the Church fell into apostasy and was not to surface again as the Lord's Church until the Campbell led restoration of early 19th century America led us back to the New Testament Church.

The 20th century Church of Christ understands the church within history to be the apostate church (apostate means one who revolts against, renounces, and abandons a previous loyalty). According to Church of Christ views of church

history the Lord's church did not exist on the earth from A.D. 125 until 1809. Tertullian, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Anselm, John Calvin, Martin Luther and John Wesley were not members of the imperfect bride of Christ. They were members of an imposter church, masquerading as the body of Christ. The mindset I describe remains part of the very soul of the 20th century Churches of Christ.

In *Christianity Restored* (1835) A. Campbell identified the full development of the great apostasy with the Roman Catholic Church. He then described the Protestant Reformation as one of the most splendid eras in the history of the world. Continuing the work of the Reformation's emphasis on *sola scriptura*, Campbell describes the Back to the Bible movement as a "project . . . for united the sects, or rather the *Christians* in all the sects, upon a clear and scriptural bond of union." A. Campbell certainly did not read all of church history as apostate history.

Though many dissent from the prevailing mindset, the restoration movement of 1980 vintage separates itself from all other Christian groups. Whereas the Disciples of the 1809-1861 era optimistically worked at the uniting of all Christians on no creed but Christ,

the Church of Christ ministers of the first half of the 20th century had given up on the grand scheme of unity and now only worked alone to save the Christian world, not from disunity, but from hell. We evangelized the denominations. We did not try to unite them. First, they must be saved. We still look at the Baptists, Disciples and Methodists as fields that are "white unto harvest." Their history and their theology is a history and theology of death — they are (*all* of them) in need of the saving Gospel. Salvation history ceased with the Ignatian apostasy and did not begin again until the water baptism of the Campbells. Thus we no longer see restoration as a means of uniting all Christians. We understand restoration as the only way to save apostate denominations from the darkness of sin and hell. The movement from the 19th century motto "Christians only" to the twentieth century assurance that we are the "only Christians" reflects tragically a significant change in our reading of history and in our understanding of ourselves.

Yet can we not remain committed to going back to the sources, while refusing to pronounce judgement on the entire Christian tradition? Why must we confuse imperfection within the Lord's Church with a total abandonment of the Lord? If imperfection is synonymous with apostasy (and it is not), then what are we to say about the last 170 years of restoration history with its twenty-odd divisions? No Campbellite historian has written the tragic story of 1870 to 1980. One thing is certain: when we judge our actions in history with the same standard we use to judge the "denomination" in history we will surely condemn ourselves. The 145

years since the publication of *Christianity Restored* are riddled with failure. Though God's judgment is upon our petty sectarianism, does not his mercy outstrip his judgment? And if it is not so, then how can we even continue to make the effort to live the truth? History, including our history within church history, is saved by grace. Every generation of failure since the time of Christ has included those intercessory spirits who cried out, "God be merciful to us, your sinful Church!" Who are we to condemn and stand aloof from those dear Christian publicans?

Scripture, History and Apostasy

There are other reasons for not reading church history as apostate history. Some have employed New Testament texts to provide a rationale for the Restoration principle. The argument is: (a) The New Testament foresees a falling away; (b) this necessarily means that a restoration is called for. But from the New Testament point of view certain objections must be raised. The expression "falling away" appears in the King James Version of 2 Thess. 2:3:

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition.

The prediction of apostasy appears here, but the passage assumes the righteous will have a continuing existence until the end, despite the apostasy. In this text the apostasy is a time event linked with the man of lawlessness, immediately preceding the Day of the Lord. There is no suggestion that a restoration movement in history is to take place after the apostasy and prior to

the Day of the Lord. Such an interpretation would be a drastic misinterpretation of this material.

Other texts, such as Acts 20:29, predict heresy:

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert . . .

but this does not predict a wholesale departure. Neither does 1 Tim. 4:1:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times *some* will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

Another famous passage, 2 Tim. 4:1 ff., does not predict wholesale departure:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, be unflinching in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.

All of these passages assume that some will continue to preserve sound doctrine. The passages do not speak of a time in history when the Lord's Church "falls away" *in toto*; neither does it anticipate a dramatic restoration of the true church in history. The New Testament anticipates a continual struggle of faithfulness to the Lord with unfaithfulness to the Lord within the same historical churches; the presence of good and evil, God and the demonic within the same church on the earth. This vision more accurately describes the

historical church of the last nineteen centuries than does the dramatic unbiblical scenario which depicts a white Church of Christ horseman saving the black apostate horseman from the apocalypse. Such has never occurred in history except in the person of Jesus, history's only Savior.

History, Canon and the Church

The very nature of the Judeo-Christian faith demands looking back to the revealing event. The historically unique character of the salvation event is expressed biblically by the terms once (*hapax*) and once-for-all (*ephapax*). "The death he died, he died to sin once for all" (Rom. 6:10). Jude spoke of the faith delivered once-for-all to the saints (Jude 3). So also for Peter (1 Pet. 3:18) and the Hebrew writer (7:27; 9:26, 28) the once-for-all character of Christ's offering for us remains crucial.

One of the first significant heresies confronted by the early church was a history-denying heresy, Gnosticism. Generally the Gnostics held a Docetic view of Christ, denying that God had already revealed himself in any real historical event such as the death of Jesus. Although early Christianity displayed a certain variety in describing Christ and his work, it strongly opposed all efforts to strip the salvation event of actual blood and bones history. The strong mood of opposition against a beginning Gnosticism is seen already in John's writings.

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not

acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the anti-Christ. Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward. Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God, he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son (2 John 7-10).

The very nature of the Christian faith involves a looking back to the decisive and definitive acts wherein God revealed himself.

The recognition of the authority of the scriptural canon was in essence a recognition of the authority of the apostolic witness to the Lord Jesus. Apostolicity, not inspiration constituted the primary criterion for determining whether or not a piece of early Christian literature was included in the canon. But the search for the apostolic rule did not begin with the end of the 1st century. The early church at the beginning of the 2nd century, expectant of a coming Savior, was not concerned to recognize and collect her scattered sacred writings. Yet with the rise of heresy in the church, especially the developing Gnosticism, the question began to be asked: "What is the apostolic tradition? What originated from the witness of the apostles to Jesus?" These growing concerns led them to an explicit demarcation of that which is apostolic from that which is more removed in time and less faithful to the ancient apostolic witness. For example, it led them to distinguish the Gospel of Luke from the Gospel of Thomas, a 2nd century Gnostic gospel.

The church of the 2nd through the 4th centuries was concerned not only with apostolic origin of the documents (that is, the books must be traceable to

an apostle or to one closely associated with an apostle, e.g., John, Mark or Luke). The early church also included in the collection of scripture only those apostolic books which edified the whole church. The early church did not include all inspired books, nor did they include all apostolic writings, but only those apostolic writings possessing universal power to edify the church.

This responsibility for formation of the scriptural canon was one of the monumental tasks of the 2nd through the 5th century church. Is it not true that only those who have the Spirit of God love the word of God? And is it not true that only those who possess the Spirit of God are edified by the word of God? We must acknowledge to ourselves that the process by which the post-apostolic church recognized and collected her scriptures resulted from the church's hunger for the true apostolic witness to her Lord. The treasure hidden in the field exists even when no one acknowledges it as treasure. Yet it takes one with an eye for the treasure to recognize, collect and preserve the treasure. Is it too much to assume the presence of the Spirit in the lives of those who collected the words of the Spirit (see 1 Cor. 1,2)?

None of the New Testament writings claim the power of self-authentication to Christians, much less to pagans. Paul put responsibility for authentic response to the word on his readers when he said:

A man who is unspiritual refuses what belongs to the Spirit of God; it is folly to him; he cannot grasp it, because it needs to be judged in the light of the Spirit . . . and, because we speak of these gifts of God in words found for us not by our human wisdom but by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

The New Testament documents are the apostolic witness to Christ but only the caring, spiritually aware and hungry church will recognize their authenticity and receive nurture from such words. In the light of 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 is it conceivable that God would give a ministry requiring such spiritual yearnings and discernment to the unspiritual, much less to the spiritually rebellious?

Will somebody tell me how we can glibly describe the post-apostolic church as the rebel church and *continue to trust the scriptures*? If the post-apostolic church was the Babylonian whore of Christ and was in no way the bride of Christ, the very scriptural foundation of the church must be in doubt. We cannot remain confident of our scriptural foundations if we refuse to acknowledge the work of God in his imperfect, young bride. Yet careful examination of history actually moves us to thank God for his mighty works among his people throughout the entire period of the young bride's life. The Spirit of God worked with great power to help Christians mark off the apostolic witness from the Gospel of Thomas, the pseudo-Petrine epistles, and other heretical writings, thus preserving the very historical identity of Jesus Christ.

The magnificent process of the canonizing of scripture, accomplished by a church very much concerned with the threat of heresies, was simply not done by a rebel church. It was done by God working as he had repeatedly done, through his always imperfect pilgrim people. Some would argue that God works through unfaithful pagans (and he does), but are we to claim that God entrusted the identification and the

collection of scripture to a bunch of renegades from whom he had in fact withdrawn his Spirit? Such a thought runs counter to what we know of the character and ways of God, for he said, "I will be with you to the end of the age." The scripture, old and new, untiringly witnesses to God's presence within a faithful remnant in history. The lives of many of the early Christians point to their identity as the faithful remnant of God within history.

The process of canonizing scripture was itself a *restoration* of the primacy of the apostles' witness to its rightful place in the life of the church. The church clearly subordinated the authority of bishops, deacons, and evangelists to that of the authority of scripture; 2nd, 3rd and 4th century bishops were clearly placing themselves under the word. This submission constituted another crucial action within salvation history. Whereas sinful man had refused to honor God, worshipping and serving the creature rather than the creator, by contrast the early disciples of Christ not only freely placed themselves under the authority of God, but as part of their submission to God they placed the imperfect body of Christ in history under the authority of the apostles' witness to Christ. This act of worship to the God who acted once-for-all in their midst clearly reflected the authenticity of their conversion to Christ.

Our focus on the errors within the early church has blinded us to the spiritual vitality within the early church. Adolph Harnack in his book on the early church documented the mighty works in their midst which they attributed to the activity of God among them.* Biblically

*Adolph Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Early Christianity*.

speaking it is impossible to prove the cessation of the Spirit's activity at the close of the apostolic period. For the promise of God to the new age of the Spirit is simply put: "The promise is to you and your children all whom the Lord our God may call." Historically, the early church experienced no immediate cessation of the obvious presence of God within the Lord's church. The ministry of the twelve apostles had ceased, but the church, if her own literature can be trusted, continued living in the power of the Spirit. The rejection of Montanism as heresy did not mean the early church no longer believed God acted mightily among them. Rather, the early church, in rejecting Montanus' claim to be the Paraclete or Spirit of Truth promised in the Fourth Gospel, was only rejecting his claim to embody the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. I would not argue the Spirit worked in the 2nd or 3rd century in a manner identical to his 1st century activity. Yet the obvious spiritual power manifesting itself in the disciples' willingness to undergo martyrdom reflects answered prayer, and the process of the canonizing of the New Testament shows that the abiding Presence was making good his promise "till the end of the age." There is no reason to speak of the 2nd century as a new dispensation in which God no longer acted mightily. Certainly the apostles' witness marks the 1st century off from all other centuries, but the post-apostolic church clearly understands herself to be living in the power of the Spirit until the end of the age.

When we not only read a dispensational view of the Spirit onto the 2nd century, thereby limiting God's power-

ful personal presence to the 1st century, but also look on this post-apostolic church as apostate because it was imperfect, we fail to see what God did in the history of the early church.

Because of our narrow reading of the history of the greater body of Christ, we Cambellites have a great need for history. The scripture we quote with great conviction as identified, collected and preserved by brothers and sisters we have seldom acknowledged as brethren. More importantly, recognition of the work of God in the history of the post-apostolic church leads us to recognize our kinship with the wider Christian world of today. Much of our aloofness toward Christian groups all about us is called into question when we recognize that: (1) No total apostasy was prophesied in scripture, no total apostasy occurred in history and no total restoration occurred in history. (2) The early post-apostolic church, however imperfect she was, gave herself to the work of God and the canonizing of scripture with remarkable spiritual vitality. (3) While history reveals an imperfect tradition, of which the 2nd through the 5th century is one gloriously imperfect member, imperfection does not constitute abandonment of the faith. (4) Our failure in history, as a unity movement, read side by side with our successes in history, should remind us of our humble yet glorious kinship within the greater body of Christ of the 2nd through the 20th centuries. (5) Recognition of our indebtedness to the faithful saved sinners of the early church leads us to recognize our need to be one with all who pray to God, "Be merciful on us, your sinful church." □

Jesus: Luke's Gospel Comes to the Cinema

ALLEN HOLDEN, JR.

San Diego, California

"I have never seen the word of God more beautifully meaningful or more spiritually effective."

--W. A. Criswell, First Baptist Church, Dallas

In the theaters now is showing a most unusual movie, simply titled *Jesus*. Billed as "Jesus, the man you thought you knew," its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is a careful, literal picture of Jesus as seen by one man: the third gospel author, Luke.

The Lord has been the central or at least a pivotal character in numerous movies through the years. We've had the *King of Kings*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, and *The Robe*, and more recently the television movie *Jesus of Nazareth*. On a more musical note, and freer with the gospel material, has been *Jesus, Christ Superstar* and *Godspell*. Each of these presentations took a composite look at Jesus from the four gospels, as well as a lot of conjectural material, to come up with a commercial dramatic presentation. Robert Fulbright of the Southern Baptist Convention's Sunday School Board points out that "one weakness of the 50's religious stories is that producers felt a need to add to the Biblical story. The films could have had the same dramatic impact if they had stuck to the original plots." In *Jesus*, finally, the producer's aim was to add as little as possible to the gospel account.

Luke's story is told primarily from the *Good News for Modern Man*

(Today's English Version), although the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes are quoted from the King James Version. All the words of Jesus (well portrayed by British actor Brian Deacon), with the exception of an occasional greeting or blessing, are directly from Luke's account. Even the off-screen narration by Alexander Scourby quotes Luke directly.

This literal and precise nature of the film makes it more of a religious documentary than a traditional movie, which *Time* magazine calls its "weakness as well as its strength," for the movie "cannot help jumping from event to event without much narrative flow" as it closely follows Luke's chronology of events (*Time*, November 15, 1979, p. 91). There is little character development outside of Jesus himself, although Peter and Levi stand out as both believable and as possessing depth.

As a documentary, there is careful attention to detail. All filming was done in the Holy Land, usually as close as possible to the location where the events actually took place, and almost the entire cast, including 40,000 extras, is Israeli. A major task, consuming five years, was to consult with over 250 biblical and historical scholars on de-

tails of first century dress, customs, food, historical sites and the sets to be used in filming.

While this careful attention to authenticity is invaluable for students of the life of Christ and his times, it does make for some surprises for the viewer. Jesus is clearly portrayed as Jewish, reciting Jewish prayers, attending the synagogue with other Jews, and covering his head during prayer. Worthy of further investigation is the method of baptism shown in the movie. While John does immerse, it is more of a self-baptism for the initiates than anything else. This is difficult to reconcile with Luke's description of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, where Luke states that they both went down to the water, and "he baptized him" (Acts 8:38). The movie, on the other hand, has John as merely an onlooker as people in front of him bow and immerse themselves, one by one. Were this the case in the Acts 8 account, there would be no reason for Philip to go into the water with the eunuch, for the eunuch would be able to baptize himself without any aid.

A viewer is also struck by how ordinary and human Jesus, and his followers, appear on the screen. *Time* calls him a "less mystical, more appealing Christ than most of the previous celluloid offerings," and so he is. Dressed like other people around him, he does all the everyday things that humans do: he washes clothes, eats and sleeps, dresses and acts like an average first century Galilean. He is realistic, human and earthy, Luke's Son of Man: the Messiah, and yet one of us. While he is ordinary, yet he is extraordinary; human, yet clearly divine; fully man, and still somehow fully God. Whereas

the *King of Kings* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* erred in the "fully God" direction, presenting a not-quite-real Jesus who always wore a clean, white robe and walked two feet off the ground, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell* stressed too much the "fully man" dimension, omitting the miracles and not communicating clearly enough his divinity and power. Finally, in *Jesus*, we have a balance, an example with whom we can identify, and yet a clearly unique and divine Christ: human and divine, Son of Man and Son of God.

This quality production, costing six million dollars, generally preserves Luke's peculiar emphasis and colorful touches. The order of events is Luke's, and his additions to the other gospels, his omissions, and his theological purpose is evident to the careful viewer. From Luke's prologue to Theophilus to the post-resurrection accounts and the great commission, one is reminded regularly that this is Luke's story, for his particular (probably non-Jewish) audience, and fitting his particular theological purpose, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Luke's emphasis on the role of the Spirit, the place of women in the ministry of Jesus, Jesus' concern for the poor, and the place of prayer in the life of Jesus are all clearly evident. The order of the elements of the last supper is also Luke's, wherein the cup is served first and then the bread. Even Luke's omission of the crown of thorns at the crucifixion is faithfully adhered to. What we end up with is a perspective on Jesus that Luke had, so that we may react to Jesus as Luke did, and as he would intend that we do. Clearly Messiah and Son of God, he is also our comrade: feeling compassion for the

poor and the diseased, praying as we do (even all night on some occasions), depending on the power of the Spirit for his strength and for his ministry, and relating to women in a responsible, mature and kind manner, even being supported by them during his public ministry. Were it not for Luke, we might not have this clear and forceful portrait of the Lord; and were it not for this film, many might never have the opportunity to observe it and reflect on it.

Jesus (the movie, that is) is not without flaws, albeit minor ones. Billed as a precise presentation of Luke, occasionally material slips in from another source. After Peter denies Jesus, in addition to weeping he also utters a lengthy prayer of contrition, possibly a psalm. And during Jesus' time in the Capernaum synagogue, we find him *standing*, when he explains the scripture passage he has just read aloud, instead of *sitting*, as Luke clearly states. Finally, as much attention to detail as there is, it is bothersome that at the ascension Jesus, after giving Luke's account of the great commission (Luke 24:46-49), then gives a second commission, Matthew's (Matthew 28:18-20). Following this, John 21:25 is superimposed on a satellite photo of the earth:

But there are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one, I suppose that the whole world could not hold the books that would be written.

While this makes a stunning (and fitting) conclusion, it is not attributed to John, and a viewer unfamiliar with Luke and John might erroneously assume that this was Luke's conclusion to his gospel, and not John's. Another Johannine quotation, John 3:16-17, introduces the

movie, against a similar satellite photograph, but at least this one is clearly labeled as being by John.

Although the film runs two hours in length, one would also hope that more uniquely Lukan material could have been included, since this is supposed to be *Luke's* account of Jesus' life and ministry. Some of Luke's parables that are omitted include the lost coin, the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus, the rich fool, the barren fig tree, the great supper, the unjust steward, the importunate widow, and others. Significant events only told by Luke that would have been nice to see are Zechariah's encounter with the angel and his later song of praise, Anna the prophetess' meeting the baby Jesus in the temple, and the post-resurrection encounters on the road to Emmaus and in Emmaus (which in the movie are only briefly summarized in one sentence, after the fact).

Jesus is actually only one portion of the "The Genesis Project," an attempt to complete "the world's first audio-video translation of the holy scriptures." When completed in twenty-five years or so, it will be "The New Media Bible," "the Bible for the twenty-first century." This project has been underway for five years now, at a cost to date of \$22.5 million, and which will ultimately cost over \$250 million. It is hoped that profits from *Jesus*, both in theaters and on television, as well as from books and other materials, will help finance the remainder of the Bible. Most of Genesis has been completed, as well as Luke, and is available to churches and interested groups. Information may be obtained from The Genesis Project, 1271 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 730, New York,