

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

A DOG'S OBEYED IN OFFICE (continued from page 66)

in the church. But, as Shakespeare noted,

Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at
a beggar,
And the creature run from the cur:
There, thou might'st behold the great
image of authority;
A dog's obeyed in office.

I hesitate to expound this imagery, lest I appear to be too harsh, but I have seen some very ignorant, unspiritual, and unpleasant individuals obeyed simply because they were in office. Why is this?

One of the great champions of ecclesiastical authoritarianism in modern times was Leo XIII, who claimed that the church's authority is "the most exalted of all authority," that "the highest duty is to

respect authority," and that "to despise legitimate authority . . . is rebellion against God's will." But what constitutes "legitimate" authority? The hierarchy, of course.

The extent to which we have taken in this unscriptural teaching is frightening. It can be used to excuse all tyrants, from Diotrefes to Hitler. It causes us not only to abandon our rights, but also our responsibilities. And it is a denial of the word of the Lord upon which authentic ministry is based: "You know that in the world the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority. That is not the way with you . . ." Or is that directive no longer operative with us?

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"A DOG'S OBEYED IN OFFICE"

It may be said that history is one long story of tension between liberty and authority. Knowledge of this struggle accounts for a great deal of concern that some Christians feel about such movements as Moral Majority, for we all know that when the minority becomes a majority and seizes authority, it sure can hate the minority. And profession of religion has never guaranteed that those in authority will uphold the liberty of all.

Within the church today there are two abuses of authority which threaten the liberty of Christians. One is that which husbands claim the right to exercise over their wives, and the other is that which elders (or whatever the leaders are called) assert over their fellow Christians. Against both of these we must exercise constant vigilance if the will of the Lord is to prevail among us.

As an old proverb has it, "If you wish to know what a man is, place him in authority." When one is given the right and power to command, to exact obedience, and to make determinations and judgments for others, he is likely to expose a side of his personality which will surprise even those close to him.

As I look over my past sins committed in ignorance, I think one of the greatest wrongs I did to some of my friends was to help ordain them as elders in the church. Dressed in the authority which the churches then imposed on their elders, they seemed to feel obligated to become dictatorial and intolerant. We might be inclined to say that power actually corrupted them only in the sense that it gave previously restrained tendencies a chance to break out, yet in fact I can recall at least one brother who was extremely uncomfortable with the authority he thought it was his duty to exercise and was in a constant state of tension. Power did indeed corrupt him, and he, along with others I have known, became a completely different man when he resigned his "office."

In view of Jesus' rejection of the exercise of authority among his disciples—not to mention the Jeffersonian notion that "all authority belongs to the people," which is part of the very foundation of our country—it seems strange that we put up with so much abuse of "office"

(continued on back cover)

Christian Ministry

CRAIG M. WATTS
Nashville, Tennessee

Christian ministry is the Christian life for others; it is no more and no less than this. The specific ways in which the Christian ministry is expressed are numerous and diverse: from the proclamation of the gospel to pastoral counseling; from feeding the poor and supporting the cause of the oppressed to teaching and writing. Ideally Christian ministry encompasses all that the Christian does for others. Certainly Christian ministry is not the vocation of the professional minister alone, but is the right and responsibility of the church as a whole. This is not to infer that a trained, specialized full-time ministry is not valuable to the church. Rather it is to maintain that ministry cannot be limited to the professionals. I believe Henri Nouwen is correct in seeing the essence of ministry contained in the statement of scripture that "a man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Hence I find myself in sympathy with Nouwen's contention that, "Ministry means the ongoing attempt to put one's own search for God, with all the moments of pain and joy, despair and hope, at the disposal of those who want to join this search but do not know how. Therefore, ministry is in no way a privilege. Instead it is the core of the Christian life. No Christian is a Christian without being a minister" (*Creative Ministry*, p. 114).

While it is true that there is no Christian life without Christian ministry, it is in fact not the case that everything a Christian does constitutes Christian ministry. An act, even an act of service, is not automatically Christian ministry simply because the person performing the act is a Christian. In order for something to be properly designated as "Christian ministry" it must (1) grow out of and be defined by the Word of God, (2) be an activity permeated by prayer and (3) not be an individualistic enterprise.

The Word of God

Christian ministry proceeds from and is defined by the Word of God. Therein lies its distinctiveness, its identity. Christian ministry is the embodiment of the gospel. If service is motivated and guided by anything other than the gospel then it is less than Christian. It is the Word of God which calls Christian life into being; it is inconceivable that Christian life in ministry could continue apart from the Word.

How then is the Word of God present in Christian ministry? Clearly the most obvious manner in which the Word is present is in the proclamation of the gospel. However aside from this straightforward "ministry of the Word," its presence in Christian ministry is also manifest in other ways.

First of all it defines the situation in which ministry is to take place as one which is in need of redemption. As the doctrine of the Fall has indicated, the world is not "normal," something has gone wrong. This wrongness has traditionally been designated by the word "sin." Sin, as autonomous will which stands in opposition to God and the limits he has set for humanity, has resulted in a far-reaching ambivalence in human existence and in a pervasive alienation which deeply affects not only the relation of the human to God, but also interpersonal human relationship, and the relationship of humanity to the physical environment. The presence of sin is detected in both personal and structural evil. The Word of God defines the situation in such a way that the minister dare not minimize the enormity of evil.

The Word of God not only defines the situation, but also clarifies the task: Christian ministry is a ministry of reconciliation. Thus St. Paul writes that "God, through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." The Apostle continues by stating this appeal: "On behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Proclaiming this message of reconciliation is the primary task of the church. Yet the ministry of reconciliation is not only a word spoken, but life-style as well. One might say that *reconciliation is the theme of the Christian life*. The ministry of reconciliation takes place when the church and individual

Christians support legislation which is in opposition to inequalities and economic and social injustice. The ministry of reconciliation takes place when the church and individual Christians urge upon the country a peaceable foreign policy. The ministry of reconciliation takes place when Christians support ecologically sound technology and oppose any technology which is not sensitive to the environment and human well-being. The ministry of reconciliation takes place every time a Christian feeds the hungry, comforts the suffering and is simply compassionate to other human beings. Certainly the message of reconciliation is central in Christian ministry, yet ultimate reconciliation can take place only when persons are reconciled to God. Still, the Christian as one reconciled to God is, in Jesus' words, "the salt of the world," and as such preserves the world from unrestrained evil and alienation by exerting whatever influence is possible.

Finally the Word of God defines the one to whom Christian ministry is being directed. That is to say, our anthropology is informed by God's Word. Christian ministry demands a Christian understanding of human being. Briefly stated the Christian sees the human person as valuable, but this value resides, not within the self, intrinsically; rather this value is derived from the Creator God. Thus the human is in "the image of God." As a creature of God the human person is good. However, as noted above in regard to the situation of ministry, something has gone wrong. Evil has entered into human existence. The human is a creature of possibility, one created good, one in which evil resides, one which evil oppresses. Thus, redemption

is not a human possibility, but it is a divine possibility for human being.

Prayer

An activity is Christian ministry only if it is permeated by prayer. A helpful and constructive activity detached from prayer may be a humanitarian service, but it does not qualify as Christian ministry. It can be properly designated as such only insofar as the intent of the action or activity is "in the name of Jesus." Viewed in this way one might say that Christian ministry is couched in and is an expression of the worship of the Most High God. Apart from this the identity of any action as Christian becomes blurred; its distinctiveness is lost and the activity tends to become an end in itself, valuable of itself rather than because of its relationship to the purpose of God.

Christian ministry is *self-consciously* Christian. It is because of this that prayer is so important, for prayer is, among other things, an appeal to and an expression of dependence upon God. Christian ministry is to be done within this context of thankful dependence. There is no dependence without remembrance, and apart from remembrance there is rebellion. It is precisely this that the Fall narrative seems to convey. When the human person fails to continue to be in remembrance of God and consciously dependent upon Him, the creature usurps the place of the creator. In doing so a loss of identity occurs in which the creature no longer looks to God to answer the question, "Who am I?" Rather the creature rejects the very category of creature as applied to himself, and seeks to define himself, independently of God, as a creator in

his own right.

Prayer is an activity in which dependence is affirmed and remembrance is evoked. Through prayer the eyes of the believer are raised above self and above the task at hand in order to rest upon him who called us who were not his people and created of us "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that we may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2 Pet. 3:9). By remaining "constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12) the ministerial task is always seen as *relatively* important and does not become falsely exalted to the point of being an idol of activity. Its importance is always derived, just as the identity of the Christian is derived, from the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Community

Christian ministry cannot be an individualistic enterprise, for Christian existence is not an individualistic mode of being. Those who are called to be children of God are always called into the family of God. Since Christian life is a life of ministry, Christian ministry cannot be properly understood as an activity which takes place apart from the Christian community.

But what does the assertion that Christian ministry cannot take place apart from the Christian community actually mean? In what manner must the Christian community be present in Christian ministry? Clearly the church cannot be literally and physically present for every act of ministry that is performed by each individual Christian. Not only would this exclude the possibility of Christian ministry taking place in a secular setting, it would like-

wise lead us to conclude that if a Christian were sharing the gospel with another individual in an isolated location Christian ministry would not be taking place. Obviously such a position would be absurd. How then must the Christian community be present in truly Christian ministry? The church must be present in at least two ways: (1) in having its faith in some way represented, and (2) in giving its support and by providing resources upon which the one ministering can draw.

The faith of the church can be brought to bear in the act of ministry in the most unambiguous manner through the preaching of the gospel. But the presence of the church's faith can also be seen in the priorities and values which the Christian reflects in acts of service. The kinds of concerns which occupy the believers attention and the type of response which is adopted in light of those concerns should reflect something of the commitments the individual Christian shares with the church as a whole. Basic decisions should not be made in isolation from and without regard to one's place in the church and the goal which is shared in common.

In several ways the church can be supportive and can provide resources to one seeking to minister to others. The

community provides aid in reflection and self-criticism. It can provide encouragement and motivation. Bonhoeffer has insightfully observed that "the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure" (*Life Together*, p.23). Community is crucial because humanity is fragile. This is just as true for the individual Christian as it is for anyone else.

Christian ministry is the Christian life for others. Just as the Christian life is one which grows out of and is defined by the Word of God, so too is Christian ministry. Just as the Christian life is to be permeated by prayer, so too is the act of Christian ministry. As Christian life cannot exist apart from community, neither can Christian ministry. If the Christian must ask in reference to an act of service, "Is this ministry?" perhaps it might be more appropriate for such a one to look at his or her life and ask, "Is this Christian?" □

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The Declaration and Address Revisited

TOM LANE

Cincinnati, Ohio

Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* is one of the foundational documents of the Restoration Movement. It was one of the earliest, and certainly the earliest detailed and logically expounded, statements of the "restoration plea," the call for the uniting of all Christians in meticulous fidelity to the simple tenets of Christianity said to be found clearly revealed in the New Testament. When in 1909 a large convention of Disciples gathered in Pittsburgh to extol the restoration ideal, the occasion chosen was the centennial of the writing of the *Declaration*, acknowledged thus as a watershed of thought on Christian principles. Moreover, the *Declaration and Address* has come to be recognized by church historians of many denominations, not only as a formative document of the Disciples heritage, but as an early and paradigmatic expression of concern for Christian unity, a document ahead of its time.

The attempts made in the one hundred seventy years since its writing to put into practice the *Declaration's* precepts enable us to see the document and these principles in evaluative perspective. How, then, may we view the *Declaration and Address* today? Does Campbell's statement of concern for Christian unity, advanced for its day, suggest a method or spirit conducive to Christian unity in our

modern day of ecumenical action? Let's summarize the document's arguments, then test their validity in the light of the efforts by proponents of Restoration to carry out Campbell's ideas.

Where Campbell's Coming From

How, in an age typified by interdenominational intolerance, did Thomas Campbell come to compose a volume calling for Christian unity on what he hoped would be a nonsectarian basis? To understand the *Declaration and Address*, we must first consider the spirit of Campbell, for while it is carefully reasoned, the *Declaration* is a deeply personal expression in which one readily discerns the pastoral outlook of its author. Campbell's approach to Christian unity is the natural outgrowth of his temperament and experiences.

Campbell understood that "the grand design and native tendency of our holy religion [is] to reconcile and unite men to God, and to each other." His was a brotherly, irenic spirit, leading him to desire harmony and communion with Christians dispersed among the disparate denominations. "Tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of a party spirit," he desired to see his "brethren throughout all the churches" enjoying peace.

Campbell was concerned about the multiplicity of pointless divisions he saw

among Christians. As a minister in Ireland, before his migration to America, he had sought to heal the split among his Presbyterian brothers over irrelevant political issues. In America he observed, and in the *Declaration* lists, further examples of "the heinous nature, and pernicious tendency of religious controversy among Christians": contention, backbiting, undeserved excommunications; the fact that large tracts of the frontier were without a gospel ministry because the eastern churches were too absorbed or weakened by sectarian disputes to send evangelists; the fact that, where there were such shortages of preachers, the members of a denomination without an organized local assembly or preacher of their own were forbidden by both ecclesiastical convention and by conscience from attending church services conducted by preachers of a rival denomination. In his own preaching near the frontier, Campbell had invited Christians of other persuasions to attend communion services he held when no preachers of their own set were available. For this, the narrow-minded leaders of his own presbytery took him to task. Campbell often rises to heights of impassioned eloquence in the *Declaration* as he declares his love for his fellow believers and pleads their attention to the work of unity.

In addition to this charitable attitude toward all Christians, Campbell was moved to write because of his compassionate zeal for the conversion of sinners. He pleaded for Christian unity on the basis that the energy Christians channel into sectarian rivalries could be better employed in evangelism. Also he noted that division between Christians contradicts the Christian message of reconciliation. If

only contemporary Christians, like the Christians of the early church, demonstrated their faith by "humble, honest, and affectionate deportment towards each other and towards all men," unbelievers could not object to Christianity with their terrible but sadly incontrovertible charge of hypocrisy.

A further sentiment basic to Campbell's reasoning in the *Declaration* was his strong commitment to the Scriptures as wholly authoritative and a sufficient basis for all Christian practice. This led him to seek not merely a unity among Christians founded upon "voluntary compromise, and good natured accommodation," but "upon the solid basis of divinely revealed truth." The "good natured principle of Christian forbearance and gracious condescension" is, he suggests, important, but an appeal to an agreement in doctrinal and practical essentials he saw as also practicable.

Out of his sense of Christian brotherhood, his zeal for the conversion of sinners, and his zeal for things Biblical, Campbell was led to argue for the unity of all believers on the basis of the Bible with a view to the evangelization of the world.

Campbell's Analysis

Having observed in his own experience, and having pointed out in his treatise, the fact and disastrous results of Christian division, Campbell seeks to define the cause, and a corresponding cure, for division.

Summing up Campbell's famous "propositions": By Christ's intent, the church, composed of all men everywhere who profess faith in Christ and validate that profession by their conduct, is one. Though Christians

must live and fellowship in separate local assemblies, there should be "no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them." Division between Christians results from neglect of the written Word of God, or the substitution of human opinions and interpretations (creeds, traditions, etc.) for the Word itself in determining church life. There is no warrant for making creeds terms of Christian communion. Unity may be realized if Christians simply adopt the New Testament alone as their rule of reference, practicing as divinely required only what the New Testament specifically enjoins, discarding the pretention to authority of human opinions and traditions, and allowing liberty of thought and practice in matters upon which the Scriptures offer no express word.

To the possible charge that this granting of liberty is a latitudinarian stance — a charge his zeal for the Bible could not countenance — Campbell replied that there would be substantial unanimity of thought and practice if Christians diligently followed the New Testament. Campbell proposed in essence that the modern church adopt the doctrines and practices, and consequently the unity and vitality, of the first century church.

As a first practical step to such a reformation of the church, the *Declaration* proposed the formation of an association to promote a "simple evangelical Christianity" free from human tradition and opinion by supporting preachers devoted to primitive Christianity, by providing copies of the Scriptures for the poor, and by encouraging the formation of similar societies in other locations. The writing of the *Declaration* had been in

fact commissioned by the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania. In the *Declaration*, Campbell and (by approval) the Association were careful to disclaim the intention of founding a new denomination. But after two years of meager progress in promoting its reformation, the Christian Association of Washington reformed itself into a church in order to itself practice its conception of New Testament Christianity.

Not As Easy As It Looks

Campbell's analysis of the cause and cure of Christian division is appealingly simple. Upon close examination the contradictions and practical difficulties of his position appear, as they have, indeed, become manifest in the subsequent labors of the Restoration Movement to implement Campbell's ideas.

Campbell was optimistic at the ease with which a reformation of the church could be accomplished. He acknowledged that already in his day all the denominations were "not only agreed in the great doctrines of faith and holiness" but "also materially agreed, as to the positive ordinances of gospel institution; so that our differences, at most, are the things in which the kingdom of God does not consist, that is, about matters of private opinion, or human invention." Campbell may have had in mind the division of the Presbyterian church over political questions as he wrote. Campbell regarded the distinctions between faulty human constructions and the genuine New Testament pattern of Christianity as clearcut, so that by simple attention to the Word Christians could slice away tradition and opinions and practice in

mutual agreement and consequent unity the authentic doctrines of God.

Restoration thought subsequent to the *Declaration* maintained this view, and Restoration scholars set themselves about re-examining the doctrines of the churches in the light of the New Testament as they understood it. Eventually a particular set of doctrines came to be taught in the Restoration churches as the result of this analysis. A consensus appeared, and this in turn was taken as showing the truth of the principle that attention to the New Testament alone will lead men to embrace a single doctrinal corpus which constitutes the original apostolic Christianity.

Campbell urged that Christians cease from the introduction of human opinion into the life of the church as articles of faith,

by simply returning to the original standard of christianity — the profession and practice of the primitive church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred page of the New Testament scripture . . . And we humbly think that a uniform agreement in *that* [original italics] for the preservation of charity would be infinitely preferable to our contention and divisions: nay, that such a uniformity is the very thing that the Lord requires, if the New Testament be a perfect model — a sufficient formula for the worship, discipline and government of the Christian Church.

Campbell thought that Christian unity should consist in uniformity. All denominations in his day agreed that the whole church could be united if all Christians conformed to one list of doctrines and practices, but no two denominations agreed on what items should be included on that list. Campbell accepted the prevailing notion of unity as uniformity, but

sought to found such a unity upon uniform obedience to a common standard, presuming that all existing denominations had either added human opinion to or negated portions of the Bible. He believed that a uniform obedience to the Bible alone would constitute a nonsectarian sort of unity.

To readers who might object that Christians in the existing denominations already practiced the New Testament as their only standard of doctrine and practice, and assuming as he did the unmistakable clarity of New Testament teaching, Campbell responded: "Surely no; or else they would all profess and practice the same thing." Here, of course, he contradicted his observation that the churches were already substantially agreed in authentic Biblical doctrines and that only issues beyond the scope of Biblical revelation and requirement divided the body of Christ. Campbell's passion for the Bible led him to presuppose that the Bible is so plain that a complete platform of doctrinal agreement among Christians could be expected. He was thus led to underrate the passion for the Bible to be found among Christians in the various denominations. It was, moreover, naive of Campbell and his followers to imagine that their catalog of the "plain teachings" of the Bible would be any more free from human opinion and interpretation than any set of doctrines formulated by any other sincere Bible-minded Christians (cf. Hampton Adams, *Why I Am a Disciple of Christ*, p.32).

It has frequently been the confessed experience of proponents of Restoration that there are many Christians in conventional denominations who hold the Bible as their only authoritative guide to doctrine and practice, but who

even so cannot be argued into accepting some given doctrine characteristic of the Restoration consensus. While certain doctrines which have historically been strongly espoused in the Restoration Movement have earned widespread acceptance throughout evangelical churches in America (e.g., the rational nature of faith vs. a mystical definition of faith), other prominent Church of Christ doctrines (such as the saving purpose of baptism) have failed to win broad allegiance in the arena of Biblical discussion. It is evident that the Bible is, even in some salient teachings, not so clear that differences of belief are precluded between Christians who equally assent to the Bible's authority.

The rigorous application of Campbell's precept that the New Testament supplies a more or less complete blueprint for the church today has resulted in marked division within the Restoration Movement itself, over such matters as the use of instrumental music in religious services and the support of missions and benevolent projects through extra-congregational organizations. Restoration apologists contend that such division results from a philosophic disagreement about what to do where the Bible is silent: do we permit or prohibit? Yet each of the matters which divides descendants of the Restoration Movement one side or the other claims is clearly a place where the Bible *speaks*.

Liberty and Charity

It is plain that the attempt to forge a unity based upon uniform agreement to Biblical teaching founders upon philosophical and hermeneutical questions, and sometimes upon the opacity of

Biblical teaching itself. Yet an insistence on the authority of Scripture does, as Campbell noted for his day, have the approval of Christians in diverse denominations. As Campbell reasoned, the rejection of human opinions, traditions, and accretions upon Biblical teaching would go a long way toward reducing disagreement and tension between Christians. But it would not eliminate all of it. Where disagreement persists over Biblical teaching itself, Campbell's principle of liberty in interpretations may be applied, this principle being then broadened beyond Campbell's initial expectation but not beyond his fundamental conception. In the *Declaration*, Campbell expounded the principle of liberty in opinions at some length, but, believing as he did in the clarity of most Biblical teaching, he thought liberty would only be necessary to defuse questions about extra-Biblical matters, for questions of Biblical teaching could be easily resolved by Bible study. But disagreements over Biblical teaching that cannot be so easily removed may be kept from becoming sources of uncharitable dispute by appeal to the principle of liberty. Also, where careful study of the Word fails to produce the consensus that Campbell hoped for, that "good natured principle of Christian forbearance" which he mentioned but laid aside in order to argue the practicability of unanimity in beliefs, should be brought into play. The loving, fraternal spirit of Campbell in his own regard for his fellow Christians is here exemplary.

The *Declaration and Address* is a marvelous expression of concern for Christian unity. Its portrayal of the evils of division is still convincing.

While the thoroughgoing doctrinal unanimity for which it appeals is probably unattainable, its call for Christians to follow only the Bible as their guide for faith and practice is reasonable. By balancing and supple-

menting an appeal to the Bible as our standard with the principle of liberty in interpretations and with an appropriate measure of Thomas Campbell's own spirit of charity, the church may yet attain the harmony Christ intended.

Conservative Digression

NORMAN L. PARKS

Murfreesboro, Tennessee

I

There's a conservative trend growing in our country that's important to you and me as Christians. People everywhere are beginning to question the free-thinking, free-spending attitude of recent years . . . They're disturbed about too much government spending and government interference in business and private affairs. A poll by a well-known research group only a few months ago has revealed some very significant information: the conservative churches are the fastest growing churches in America.

II

In recent years the talented, trained and experienced have been under pressure to lead from the middle; to suffer fools gladly; to conceal their competence in the interest of extending democracy. Decisions are good, we are told, not on the basis of intrinsic worth, but in proportion to the number of people involved in making them . . . As soon as a man's head begins to pop above the crowd we shoot him down.

III

Elders are to rule in all things in the church — even to the color of the paint on the wall.

Perhaps nothing is more revealing about the nature of the new social

culture shaping the Church of Christ than its popular literature such as church bulletins and appeals, from which the quotations above are selected.

Once rural, once dispossessed, once poor, once blue-collar, once democratic, the church today is upwardly mobile, white-collar, urban, elitist, and indifferent to or hostile toward social reform, as the selected quotations imply. The first quotation, couched in the code words of the so-called Evangelical right pushing for the election of Ronald Reagan, set the mood of a national letter asking for financial support for a mass media TV program. The second quotation, which has the apparent vintage of a Federalist blast against the rising Jeffersonian tide, was actually a church bulletin defense of the right of elders to rule from the apex of power. The third quotation was a flat rejection of the idea that the ordinary members have a right to share in even the most insignificant decisions of the church.

The sharp break of the Church of Christ from its Restorationist past calls for sober reflection. It is a sober

reminder of what may happen to any movement which abandons any sense of history. The quotations cited above would shock Restoration pioneers like Campbell, Stone, John Smith, or Lipscomb. No one in his right mind would have labelled these men as "conservatives."

A conservative is basically a conformist. He views the basic doctrines, rituals, and practices of his church as settled and true. They are to be preached and promoted, of course, but not to be openly reexamined or challenged. The cultural values of his socio-economic class are to be defended and extended, and anything to the contrary is to be viewed with disapproval. Satisfied with the status quo and comfortable with his mind-set, the conservative is cool toward theological or any abstract inquiry. He accepts the reactionary as a brother, but finds the liberal unbearable, because the liberal is always demanding change. The conservative preacher fits his sermons to the ears of his audience, or at least to the ears of those who control his salary, and he must do so if he is to survive in that particular church. A fair measure of the man is more what he does not say than what he says.

Now it is evident that the Campbell-Stone Reformation was far from conservative. It aimed at the elimination of sectarianism, the overthrow of a dominant clergy, the uniting of all believers, the tearing down of religious hierarchy, and the restoration to the common man of the direction of his own religious life. In short, the Restorationists were seeking a radical change in religious America. The anti-elitism of the movement was matched by a passionate faith in the

dignity and worth of the common people and the trust that could be reposed in them to make the right decisions.

It is no accident that people who made up the Restoration Movement in its beginning decades were Jeffersonians and Jacksonians in politics. John T. Johnston, who ranked second only to Campbell and Stone during the formative years, led the radical paper money party in Kentucky and was a leading critic of the "aristocratic" National Bank in Congress. This writer's ancestors were a part of the Restoration Movement from its inception. Many of his relatives of those days bore the names "Henry Caly" and "Andrew Jackson." Never on any of the church rolls he has examined during the 1803-60 period did he find any male member named after John Quincy Adams or any other conservative politician.

In the post-Civil War period, the Restoration mind associated wealth with evil. Expensive church buildings were decried as vain display "to gratify the pride of life." The farmer, who was charged two bushels of wheat by the railroads to haul the third one to market, and labor, exploited by industrial power, found sympathetic treatment in David Lipscomb's writings, as did the Tennessee miners, whose efforts to protect themselves from hazardous working conditions were crushed by corporate power. Banking, which charged interest rates in this era as high as 40 per cent and foreclosed on the small property owner, and the legal profession, whose services were largely at the command of the upper classes, were seen as oppressive and un-Christian careers not to be chosen.

This identification with the struggles

of the oppressed and underprivileged is almost totally missing from the church's concerns of the present. Who, for example, has heard a Labor Day sermon from a Church of Christ pulpit in recent decades? The Bible is replete with pro-labor materials, God saw that his own labor in creation "was good." Jesus said, "My Father worketh until now, and I work." The present decade is marked by the struggles of the oppressed for freedom — women for equality before the law, the blacks for justice and an end to discrimination, the tender-minded for prison reform and modernization of criminal law, the concerned for conservation of the good earth and protection against pollution, the peace-makers alarmed over the dangers of an arms race and nuclear holocaust. And our church literature speaks only of "government interference in business and private affairs!"

Probably no religious movement has ever undergone so swift a transformation from lower class status as the Church of Christ has. We have become suburban middle class, success oriented, organization-minded, clerical, right wing in politics, and elitist with respect to power and leadership. Accelerated, perhaps, by the legalistic and non-grace orientation of doctrine, the new social culture has begun to remould our religious language and the nature of the church.

The elitism of the Church of Christ is far from the intellectual aristocracy of colonial New England and is some degrees lower than that of the Rotary Club, though business success is a part of the picture. It is more of an elitism of orthodoxy and conformity. The "eldership" is a recent construction, it being a collective body somewhat like both the corporate board of directors

and the Communist politburo. Like the politburo, it is becoming self-perpetuating, though there is not the slightest Biblical basis for elders selecting additional elders. The elite make the decisions and standardize orthodoxy, watchdog over the members to maintain conformity, and decide who may and who may not participate in the church's activities. An important part of the elitism is the view that the members are not to be trusted with even the smallest decisions, and are to be kept in perpetual tutelage.

The second quotation above is an expression of this growing elitism. It attacks the competence of the members to make decisions, whether it is a matter of hiring a preacher, setting his salary, formulating a budget, or determining the wisdom of a particular program. It asserts the right of elders to govern from the top without regard for Biblical teaching that elders do not have authority to rule, nor do they lead from either the top or the middle, but from the bottom.

Certainly this elitism is not a liberating theme. The third quotation above would reduce the members to children. But claims go even further. One preacher claimed for the elders authority to examine into the contributions of each member to determine if each was measuring up to the standards of liberality. Still another asserted that since elders rule, members must obey, and when elders set meetings for the church on Sunday and Wednesday nights, members who fail to attend are sinning and should be dealt with as disobedient.

Praise for the Church of Christ as a conservative church raises a fundamental question. Was Jesus a conservative? If not, then how can his disciples

be conservative? If Jesus was not a radical reformer, then why was he opposed by the Establishment — the clergy, the synagogue elders, and the religious elite? He did not seem to have the conservative's attachment to tradition when he declared, "You have heard it said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you . . ." His respect for the worth and dignity of the common man is reflected in the heroes of his stories: not the rich and powerful, but the Good Samaritan and Lazarus at the gate. His Nazareth Charter, with which he launched his mission, set the liberal tone of his whole ministry, and is one of the most radical documents of history:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release for captives and recovery of sight for the blind, to set at liberty them that are oppressed, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor.

In the field of social action may not Johnson's "War on Poverty" be good news to the poor? May not food stamps and Head Start be release for those captive to conditions which they themselves did not create? May not barriers to racial discrimination set at liberty them that are oppressed instead of being government interference in private affairs?

The word "free" echoes throughout the New Testament. One may search in vain to find the concept "conservative" in the language of the Christian Bible. Christians are urged to live the life of freedom. In a very real sense a conservative Christian is a contradiction in terms, unless it be held that he is to

conserve the values of freedom. It is tragic that the word "liberal" has become a dirty word in our religious vocabulary since the goal of Jesus was to "set at liberty."

The neo-conservatism of the Church of Christ runs contrary to the liberal mind-set of the New Testament and the teaching and examples found in it. The apostles did not choose the successor to Judas; it was the "Nazarene Synagogue" who chose the two from whom the Holy Spirit selected the successor. The apostles did not name the seven at Jerusalem; the church picked these servants of the church. The great doctrinal conference in Jerusalem was settled "together with the whole church." When the Apostle Paul directed that elders in Crete be "appointed" in every church, he used the Greek word that carried the connotation "show of hands" or election by the congregation. Phoebe was a deacon in the church at Cenchraea, but no woman serves the church as deacon in the mainline Church of Christ, in spite of the claim that only one example is sufficient for a mandatory religious practice such as observing the Lord's Supper on Sunday.

The conservative mind-set is making the church organizational instead of organic, hierachical instead of fraternal, enervated instead of dynamic, closed and hostile instead of open and loving, dully uniform instead of richly diverse as the scriptures teach that it should be. A denomination is in the process of being built, but at the price of losing its Restoration birthright and alienating many souls who want to be just members of the family of God. This need not be. Religion should reshape social culture, not the reverse. But the time for reexamination is now. □