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## Integrity

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# Integrity

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that definition some of the debates we have witnessed have really been make-bates.

These thoughts came to mind when I recently read an article in which the author tried to draw one of his respected brethren into battle, discussed his viewpoints with a bellicose air, and sought to force him to choose one of (only) two sides. I do not know what the brother thought of this writer's arguments, but I do not doubt that the distance between them increased as a result of the article.

Those who thrive on debates often belittle others who choose to avoid them. But the reason for abstention is usually not fear of the opposition, or even reluctance to join in argument, but an aversion to what such debates usually are — strife at work. Some people natur-

ally hold aloof from what Samuel Butler called

Petulant capricious sects,  
The maggots of corrupted texts.

Winning debates is not the ultimate Christian experience. At least as important is the "mild and gentle friendliness" the Bible repeatedly requires of us. We are to restore stumbling brethren "in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1). And the Lord's servant must correct his opponents "with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:25). The Greek word (*prautes*) may, according to Arndt-Gingrich, be translated by any of the following: *gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness*. When Paul used this approach at Corinth, it left him open to the charge of being soft; but he would still be a good model for us today.

—HGL

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Mar.-Apr., 1982  
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### Let Us Proceed

Most readers of these lines will claim some connection with a movement "to unite the Christians in all the sects." It is a unity movement, often referred to today as "the Restoration Movement," although "restoration" in the sense in which we use it was avoided by the pioneers in favor of "reformation." Reformation is much more conducive to unity than restoration.

Leroy Garrett's important new history of this movement is aptly titled *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches*. The fact that three churches have resulted from this unity movement has made some in our generation wonder whether or not it is so far off course that it should be abandoned. I do not agree with this inclination. On the contrary, I urge us to proceed, and I venture some suggestions which I believe will help us to succeed.

#### 1. Personal Commitment

Our forefathers in this unity movement did not merely discuss, in academic fashion, in church buildings or convention halls or hotel rooms, the virtues of unity, but they devoted themselves to whatever labors were necessary to cause people to recognize the essential oneness of the body of Christ. Neither were their objectives formulated in some detached corner, but they arose from intense personal grappling with the problem. When Thomas Campbell called upon his generation to "resume that precious, that dear-bought liberty, wherewith Christ has made his people free," he asked none to be a greater pioneer than he himself was willing to be.

If we today are to recover the ideals of this unity movement, we must also imbibe the revolutionary spirit that gave it life. We cannot successfully impress upon our generation the virtues of our plea without first establishing our credibility through obvious personal

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### Absurdity and Obedience

DAVID C. STEEN  
Bay City, Michigan

How absurd that a shepherd would lay down his life for his sheep! After all, sheep were made for humans and not humans for sheep, were they not? In the usual hierarchy of creation we place four-legged woolies at least a rung or two below humans. So a human life is a much more valuable commodity than that of a sheep, or even a flock of the critters. Surely young shepherds were regularly scolded by wise elders when they would risk their own lives against lions or wolves in order to keep sheep safe! They needed their priorities straightened and reordered.

On the other hand, the *sheep* thought it was just fine for the shepherd to protect them at such great risk. Better to keep supplying the textile industry than the grocers! When they had a shepherd who was crazy enough to abandon himself for them, they stuck with him. They responded to his voice when he called. They could tell him by his gait as he walked up the path to the sheepfold early in the foredawn. When he came through the gate, they were ready to go.

How absurd that Jesus would set aside the value and importance of his own life, giving it up in order that we might live it to the full. Surely when someone finally came along who could truly be called good, it would have been best if he would have made it last longer (we might think). Instead, Jesus set his life aside, threw it away, tossed it.

But this was no naive young shepherd with his lid screwed on crooked. Jesus had no problem of immature priorities. He told the reason why he seriously entertained the notion that seemed like such a bad joke. "This command I received from my Father" (John 10:18, NIV). "Oh," we say, not getting it yet. But after the Resurrection, we enjoy the last laugh — and the joke's on the wolf. He drew our Lord's blood, but now he'll go hungry for us.

Now the really absurd thing would be for us sheep not to follow our Shepherd's lead, thankfully laying down our lives in trust that God will also raise us to new heights — and greener pastures. □

#### TO BE A GARDENER

Lord, grant me grace to honor Truth  
As one would glorify a rose:  
Its matchless beauty share  
By turning other eyes to see  
The perfect beauty You put there;  
To show its faultless hue and form,  
A splendor all its own,  
That renders judgment on  
Each fragmentary understanding  
Of its purity.

Then help me, Lord, to proffer  
That which brings me close to You,  
Without constraint to my own view.

Elton D. Higgs

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# The Perfect Church

HOY LEDBETTER

One of the newer hymns in the church's repertoire is entitled "Renew Thy Church, Her Ministries Restore." The title is fascinating, and I wonder what the result would be if we commissioned a poet to study us and then write words for us to sing under that title. What do we have in mind when we talk about restoring the ministries of the church? And in what respects do we think the church needs to be renewed? In other words, just what is the distance between what the church actually is and what she should be?

Some of us have spent years looking for the perfect church. We have done so in vain, because — let's face it! — there is no such church anywhere in the world. And even if we did find a perfect one, it would cease to be perfect once we became members of it!

But this sobering fact should merely cause us to be realistic in our expectations; it should not discourage us from pressing toward that goal of maturity which the Lord has set before his community. Some solid help in refining our goals may be found in Romans 12:9-21 (my quotes are from the New American Standard Version) in which Paul, in a series of imperatives to the Romans, outlines several characteristics of the perfect church. An outstanding feature of such a church is its

## sincere love.

*Let love be without hypocrisy.*

This requirement binds us to absolute realism in congregational life. It challenges us to maintain a fellowship which is wholehearted and disinterested. It outlaws what Shakespeare calls "that glib and oily art, to speak and purpose

not," and demands that our love be completely sincere and spontaneous.

If you think Christians today sometimes talk about love when their hearts really are not in it, you will need to remember that the Bible long ago anticipated this problem and prescribed the remedy for it. "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart" (1 Tim. 1:5), even if some of us did not do too well on the exams. And in obeying the truth we purified our souls for a specific purpose, "for a sincere love of the brethren," and consequently we must "fervently love one another from the heart" (1 Pet. 1:22).

Just how sincere (unhypocritical) this love should be is indicated by what it disallows: "all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander" (2:1). Love from the heart cannot coexist with a desire to see others hurt, a craving to outwit them, a feigning of feelings toward them, resentment at their success, or an inclination to make injurious statements to or about them. If any or all of these vices are a part of our attitude, we are evading God's goal in our regeneration.

Sincere love also has to do with the truth. Paul's declaration that love "rejoices in the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6) deserves more attention than we usually give it. It means that any action which is not consistent with truth also is not consistent with love.

Look at what happened to Peter at Antioch (Gal. 2:11ff.). At first he ate with the Gentiles, but when certain brethren came from James in Jerusalem, he began to hold himself aloof from the Gentiles, because he was afraid of the circumcision party. And even Barnabas

was carried away by this hypocrisy! So Paul, seeing "that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (or, as the margin says, were not "progressing toward" the truth), opposed Peter to his face. What Peter did was not consistent with truth, and his love (surely he still claimed to love the Gentile brethren!) was therefore hypocritical.

This sincere love must be coupled with a very tender sense of right and wrong, which Paul stresses in these words:

*Abhor what is evil, cleave to what is good.*

Unhypocritical love entails a strong negative attitude toward what is bad, as well as a strong positive attraction to what is good. There is to be no compromising neutrality, no halfhearted moral posture. Real Christians are able to tell right from wrong and act accordingly. They are enthusiastically involved in the good they see as necessary, and they regard evil with appropriate repugnance.

My emphasis on this point reflects my conviction that a great tragedy of our time is that many people who belong to the church have no finely-honed ethical system. We cannot deal adequately with the moral questions we must face because we do not have the resources to do so. Therefore we cannot live by love, as we claim to do, because love without direction is mere sham.

Another characteristic of the perfect church is its

## brotherly spirit.

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.*

I am still very fond of the King James version: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." This enjoins a love which is appropriate to those who are our own kind; and the addition of "brotherly love" provides a double emphasis that Christians are not isolated units, but are part of a family to

which they are tightly bound. We ought to know this, since we "are taught by God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9), and should only need an occasional reminder to "let love of the brethren continue" (Heb. 13:1). We do have some responsibility in the matter.

The brotherly spirit is further emphasized by the demand to

*Give preference to one another in honor.*

This is not an easy obligation to meet. I understand it to mean that if I have the option of determining whether I or my brother will be honored, then I must give the preference to him. We need to develop that capability, for with each of us "esteeming others more highly than himself" (Phil. 2:3), instead of looking and waiting for praise for himself, we will eliminate one of the most pernicious plagues in the church today. But we will never have peace until we somehow get it through our heads that none of us has any right to claim special privileges.

Another attribute of the perfect church is its

## wholehearted commitment.

*Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*

This passage insists on intensity in the Christian life. The church is no place for "nodding" acquaintances. God's people are not yawning spectators in an ecclesiastical arena, but are wholly dedicated participants. God demands our total being. The scriptural verdict is that unless we stay on a schedule of hard work, we either do not know or care about the meaning of the word "diligence."

"Lagging behind" translates the Greek word which describes the "lazy" slave in the parable of the talents. Not being able to overcome his distaste for responsible effort, that "wicked, lazy slave" hid his master's talent in the ground and neglected a responsibility he should have met in view of God's judg-



ment. He is a warning to us to be neither indolent nor conservative when it comes to using the talents and opportunities God gives us. If we refuse to venture, to take risks, as well as to work hard, our caution will not be to our credit when the Lord comes to settle accounts.

"Fervent" (the suggestive Greek root means "to boil") further stresses intensity, and "in spirit" apparently attributes that intensity to divine action. It seems that Paul first considers human energy ("diligence"), then moves from that to the impelling power of God (i.e., fervor generated by the Holy Spirit), and finally regards all as being subjected to obedience to the Lord.

Apollos illustrates this progress. Being "fervent in spirit . . . he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue" (Acts 18:25). His natural gifts are indicated in verse 24: an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures. But beyond his natural abilities the Spirit inspired him to a fervor which resulted in a bold confrontation in the Jewish assembly. If this interpretation is correct, then the point for us is that we may make a start, but God, through the Spirit, enables us to go beyond what we would do without his help and assures that we will truly "serve the Lord."

Incidentally, although we may be weary of hearing of the Laodiceans, we do need to recall that it was their lukewarmness which induced the Lord to vomit them out of his mouth.

Ernst Kaesemann has said, "If nothing burns, there can be no light." And that, I think, is true of the church. If we are not on fire, we give no light. And if William Barclay's claim that "the Christian man is desperately in earnest" is true, how many of us are really Christian?

Another trait of the perfect church is its distinctly

### otherworldly orientation

which is indicated by three closely-

related requirements.

#### *Rejoicing in hope.*

This hope is directed toward the glory of God to which Christians aspire (5:2). It is important for us to note that, as Bultmann has shown, when the word hope is used in the New Testament, it may involve any or all of three elements: (1) expectation of the future; (2) trust in God; and (3) patient waiting. And I believe it will help us to overcome one of our weaknesses if we will ponder the fact that the first two elements by themselves do not constitute true Christian hope.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians so "that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope." "The rest," who have no well-founded trust in a future after death, are the very opposite of the perfect church, whose outlook is described in Hebrews 6:19: our hope is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil" where Jesus is. Our hope is what anchors us to heaven and our waiting Savior, and that anchor is a bit sturdier than our widespread pessimism suggests.

#### *Persevering in tribulation.*

The true attitude of the Christian in the face of evil and injustice in the world is patient endurance. This patience is a hallmark of love (1 Cor. 13:7) and will die out with waning devotion. When the Hebrews first became Christians, they "endured a great conflict of sufferings." But when they began to lose their enthusiasm for the gospel, when their love started to cool, they found themselves in "need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (Heb. 10:32, 36). And I suspect that is precisely what some of us need today.

#### *Devoted to prayer.*

If we are to rejoice in hope and persevere in tribulation, we must carry on a constant and fervent communication with the Lord. Jesus once told a parable "to show that at all times they ought to

pray and not to lose heart" (Lk. 18:1), and those who learned this lesson of persisting in prayer were merely following the example of Jesus himself, who was constantly praying and thereby maintaining his unity with the Father. In view of his attitude, it was inevitable that the early saints would be "continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 2:42). In fact, right after the ascension we find that they "with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women" (1:14). The strong word translated "devoted" suggests that some effort was needed to maintain a habit which was so far above their basic nature. We have the same problem; and this is a good reason why the church ever needs to be exhorted to "pray without ceasing."

But while the perfect church is securely tied to heaven, it does not neglect the world around it. Hence, one of its features is its

### helpful disposition.

#### *Contributing to the needs of the saints.*

More is involved here than just giving gifts to needy saints. We are literally to "share in" their needs, i.e., to identify with them and make them our very own. We are thus called to a fellowship which is expressed in practical assistance to widows, orphans, prisoners, and a wide variety of needy individuals.

This spirit of helpfulness also takes concrete form in

#### *Practicing hospitality.*

"Practicing" (from a Greek word which means to "pursue" or "strive after" and is the usual word for "persecute") lacks the vigor of the original, which conveys the idea of seeking. Early Christians needed to strive after hospitality because it served a valuable missionary purpose, but it was more than that, and we should not overlook its relevance to the contemporary church and especially its value in the development of Christian character.

Hospitality should be approached with zeal (so this verse), readiness (Heb. 13:2), and cheerfulness (1 Pet. 4:9). Moreover, Jesus once noted that when certain people gave a dinner party, they would only invite those who could be expected to invite them in return (see Lk. 14:12-14). Such people do not give anything away, but expect to be repaid in full. In this respect there may be far more swapping in the church than actual giving. Jesus criticizes this bartering benevolence and asks that our invitations be addressed to those who will not be able to return the favor. The "harbourous disposition" (as Tyndale called it) cannot thrive in one who expects a reward for his good deeds.

But how far are we to go in helping others? The gospel calls us to unlimited concern and goodwill, as the next requirement indicates:

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.*

This sweeping command should relieve us of the responsibility of worrying about whether or not those who present themselves to us for help really deserve it. People who are saved by grace must manifest grace in their dealings with others.

Another mark of the perfect church is

### profound sympathy

with the broadest possible application, Paul says,

*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*

This is possible because, now that we have faith, we are no longer self-centered, and therefore can show true sympathy with others. But, as Edward Gibbon said, "Our sympathy is cold to the relation of distant misery." It is hard for us to become emotionally involved with those from whom we are physically remote. Fortunately the Bible supplies a corrective to this carnal disposition: "Remember the prisoners, as though in



prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body" (Heb. 13:3). I have never been in a prison cell as a prisoner, and therefore I do not have that experience to draw on when I try to identify with a prisoner. Neither have I been afflicted with an incurable disease, so I cannot use that experience in relating to the seriously ill. Consequently I must make use of what F.F. Bruce calls *imaginative sympathy*. I must draw upon my mental resources to put me in that prison cell or in that afflicted body. I overcome distance by utilizing my God-given gift of imagination.

Of course, Paul's direction does not just apply to the exceptional situation, but to everyday life with its alternation of laughter and tears, and what he requires is the very opposite of the Stoic ideal which was popular in the ancient world. The Stoics trained themselves to have no feeling with human misery, either their own or another's. To them it was a divine virtue to remain unruffled no matter what happened. But the gospel directly reversed that pagan aspiration and required — and enabled — us to put ourselves (at least psychologically) in the bonds and bodies of those who suffer.

Another quality which the perfect church possesses is

### unanimity.

*Be of the same mind toward one another.*

The text is translated in various ways: "live in harmony with one another" (RSV, NIV, Phillips); "have equal regard for one another" (NEB); "have the same concern for all alike" (TEV). All have merit.

A similar statement is made in Romans 15:5, where Paul uses "with one another" rather than "toward." In either case interpretation must be enlightened by the apostle's strong defense of diversity within the church (see esp. Rom. 14

and 1 Cor. 8). If the charge is used to rigorously enforce doctrinal accord, it will have the very opposite effect to what its author intended, for exact dogmatic agreement is seldom realized in the church (and is probably not even desirable), and insistence thereon is a sure cause of division. (If this notion bothers us, we might ponder whether or not we are the ones really disturbed by diversity, rather than God.) If the passage does lean in that direction, Paul is calling for the disciples all to focus on the same goal for the church. He asks for unanimity, not uniformity. We might think of Euodia and Syntyche, who were to be of the same mind — or live in harmony — in the Lord. But the next line may call for another point of view.

*Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.*

Since "the lowly" are people with whom God is pleased to have fellowship, should not we open our hearts and arms to them? The rule forbids a social aristocracy in the church. When spiritual siblings are so afflicted with false dignity that they cannot assume humble tasks or "go about with humble folk" (NEB), they are uncomfortably out of place in the presence of Him who is "meek and lowly in heart."

Another aspect of this problem is treated next:

*Do not be wise in your own estimation.*

This directive prohibits an intellectual aristocracy in the church. When people get such a high opinion of themselves, they are not hospitable to others' views, for they do not believe they can learn from, or trust the judgment of, even their own brothers and sisters who disagree with them.

This is, of course, an ever-present danger to those who have strong convictions, who unfortunately find it hard to imagine that other people could *honestly* disagree with them. I recently read an article which gave seventeen reasons why some brethren do not

rather than men. But when it is possible (as it often is), and when it depends on us (as it often does), let us be sure we are at peace with all.

The next imperative is so demanding that it is hard for some of us to take it seriously:

*Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."*

"I don't get angry, I get even," we sometimes jokingly say. But there may be more seriousness in that remark than we would care to admit. This vengeful attitude, which is really giving place to the devil (Eph. 4:26), is opposed to the demand that we give place to wrath (i.e., God). The wrath of God must be allowed to work; and we would have it no other way, for we cannot believe in a God who will let us get by with anything. His wrath is often a delayed wrath, and we must not anticipate it. Nor are we just to defer to some future date the satisfaction of seeing our enemy suffer, but we are to lose all thought of revenge. How far this principle must lead us is indicated by the command to feed our hungry enemy (nothing to make him sick is allowed!).

The point about the fire is that "if you want revenge, avenge yourself by helping." Of course, if our enemy evades the coals of fire on his head (the acts of kindness), he will not escape the fire of the wrath to come. No doubt we need to know that.

This burden of nonretaliation is truly Christian; it is said of its Author that "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23).

Finally, the perfect church is noted

Members of the perfect church will live in harmony, be at home with all of their brothers and sisters, and be open to reason. They will also be known for their

### deference to God

in the face of evil. First there is the negative:

*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.*

Men are not to take an active part in the divine judgment. The principle of eye for eye and tooth for tooth belongs to a bygone era. The positive side of this is:

*Respect what is right in the sight of all men.*

We are thus urged to an active regard for what is good, i.e., what is noble and praiseworthy. Instead of paying back evil for evil, we should visit orphans and widows in their distress (Jas. 1:27), give what is necessary for the body to a brother or sister who is without clothing and in need of daily food (Jas. 2:15-16), be hospitable to one another without complaint (1 Pet. 4:9), and engage in such other good deeds as will excite the admiration even of pagans.

*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*

Since peace is the essence of the kingdom, surely the perfect church cannot fail to maintain it. However, this demand is qualified in two ways. First, the will of others may prevent us from being at peace with them, since some people do not want peace. Second, the conditions for peace laid down by others may be at odds with our Christian principles, in which case we must obey God



for its conquering goodness.

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The last word of this chapter is also the ultimate word for the church. It sums up the whole list of features of perfec-

tion. There can be no higher term for us as a community of believers than the word "good." We can desire no more favorable judgment than to have it said that we are good people, serving a good God and overcoming evil with good.

## God's Own People Part Two: A Royal Priesthood

TOM LANE  
Cincinnati, Ohio

In our first article on the nature and meaning of the church we talked about God's people as the chosen race. A second suggestive image which we find in that stately description of our corporate Christian ministry, 1 Peter 2:9, is that of the church as "a royal priesthood." We are the society of holy ministers serving in the court of the King.

Peter's description of the church as a royal priesthood, as also his descriptions of the Christian community as a holy nation and as God's own people, updates and applies Exodus 19:5,6, a classic statement of God's call to ancient Israel: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Ancient Israel was outfitted with a special priestly caste, whose duty it was to offer sacrifices for all the people and to oversee the proper observance of the Mosaic ceremonial laws. Each Israelite, however, had the duty of obeying God's commandments, and so was in a sense a priest or witness by his way of life. Hence Israel was collectively "a kingdom of priests." In the church of Christ, there is no special priestly class needed to administer sacrifices, for Christ has offered Himself as the consummate sacrifice once for all of us (Heb. 7:27). He is our

sacrifice, and also our High Priest interceding for us before God (Heb. 2:17). Each Christian in his own right is a priest having access to God through the single mediator, Christ (1 Tim. 2:5). We are all equally and in the same sense priests before God, each for himself, and each as a brother to his fellows.

Our identity as a holy priesthood, like our identity as a chosen race, hints at both privilege and responsibility in our Christian life. Our privilege is precisely this freedom of intimate access to the presence and favor of God. The privilege of our priesthood is perhaps conveyed even more forcefully by the New Testament's common image of our identity as that of sons and daughters of a loving heavenly Father. Indeed, we can confidently hail Him as "Abba" (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6). "Abba" was the intimate Aramaic word for father, equivalent in tone to the familiarity expressed in our word "daddy." First century Jews, with their strong sense of God's other-ness, and a mistaken impression of His unapproachableness, would never have referred to Him in this manner. They would not even pronounce the Old Testament name for God, the Tetragrammaton, but would say "Lord" in its place if reading aloud a Scripture which contained it. The Christian, however, can relate to God in a familiar and free fashion.

As God's priests and children, we may feel comfortable and confident in our fellowship with Him. This is our privilege. But our call to be His priests also gives to us certain duties of service to God and to man. Our role as priests encompasses our mission as God's servant people.

Old Testament priests offered sacrifices as tokens of God's promised forgiveness of their own and the nation's sins. We, too, offer sacrifices, but not to cancel our sins (Christ has removed them). We offer sacrifices of praise and good deeds out of grateful hearts, in order to uplift God among ourselves and before all the earth. We are, wrote Peter, "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . a royal priesthood . . . that [we] may declare the wonderful deeds of him" (1 Pet. 2:5-9).

### Priests to One Another

As priests, we offer our personal and corporate worship to our God. This is "a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb. 13:15; cf. Ps. 50:14). Our songs and prayers of repentance, thanksgiving, and adoration, which we offer individually and as a body assembled, are our natural reaction when we consider His "wonderful deeds."

Our specific verbal formulations of worship to God are validated by the tacit worship which we conduct as we pursue our daily lives. Along with our verbal worship, we present our entire lives to God as a sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). This we do by living according to His standards of purity, and by bearing His Word, His call to salvation, to others. As priests, we not only present ourselves before God, we minister to one another within the community of faith, and we portray God's message of grace by our words and our deeds to those not yet part of His people, that they, too, might enter into fellowship with Him.

Our priestly duties include caring for one another as members of God's people. As each of us is a priest, so each may minister to his sisters and brothers, offering instruction, correction, empathy, encouragement. To this end God designs that each of us consider his own unique personality, talents, and even material abundance, and contribute from himself and his means to the upbuilding of others. Our particular personal abilities and wisdom and endowments, thus devoted to spiritual service, become what the New Testament calls our spiritual "gifts." We all have differing gifts, and that is important, for we all have differing needs, and God has arranged us with our diverse gifts together so that our various needs, spiritual and material, might be supplied, so that we might all be helped to mature in the knowledge of Christ and the practice of His teachers. In Paul's eloquent imagery, we are one body with many diverse organs all functioning for the common good so that the whole organism grows to maturity of stature under the direction of the head, who is Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:4-16).

The New Testament presents us with the magnificent vision of the church as a vital body taking strength from the vigor of its many different members. Is this vision realistic? How can there be such a cooperation of different people, especially when what is going on is that all are openly and honestly sharing in such intimate, delicate, personal and important matters as their very deepest convictions and motivations?

The secret of the church's remarkable fellowship is divine-like love. The trusting, fair, patient, forgiving, accepting nature of this love enables us to share ourselves deeply with one another, to admit our needs, to give help where others have need, to accept help humbly in our turn, to rejoice together in times



of victory and abundance. Undergirding this interaction is our constant affirmation of our common identity, our common faith. Ours is the practical, intimate affection of fellow members of a family, the family of faith. Our priesthood, our ministry, to one another, out of our diverse gifts but toward the common goal of our conformity to the holy example of Christ, works because it is done in an atmosphere of holy love. Love binds the body together. Philosophers of an earlier era spoke of an intangible but essential quality or soul that gives life to animate things. Love, we may say, is this "vital force" which gives life and health to the body of Christ, which is His people, the church.

It is, however, true that the church sometimes degenerates into an impersonal institution. We sometimes permit an empty formalism to replace the vitality of shared divine life. We sometimes forfeit our glorious role as priests ministering to one another by placing the responsibility of exhortation and teaching upon hired preachers. Our fellowship with one another, meant to be a deeply personal experience of loving participation in one another's lives, we sometimes allow to decay into a mere superficial, unchallenging social affability. Sometimes disillusioned idealists will compare the church against its high calling, conclude that the situation is beyond repair, and in frustration question the very purpose or meaning of the church as an organized body. Is there any valid reason for the church's existence as an organized and functioning assembly, instead of just as a theoretical sum of individually pious persons?

Now, man on the most basic level is a social being. People seek companions who have interests and personalities that complement their own. Any human grouping exists because it is our nature to find common cause with others and to seek confirmation of our individual convictions in the support of the group.

This gregarious impulse holds true for Christians. We rejoice in discovering others who adhere to the same faith in Christ, the same interest in serving Him, and the same motivation of love, as we do. Our formation into a community of faith is the spontaneous outcome of our human nature. And God ordains that our growth in knowledge and skill in practicing His teachings should take place through our interaction with each other. Within the church community each of us shares his experiences and his insights into Christian living, exercising his particular teaching or helping abilities, and in turn feeling at ease to let others give him instruction and encouragement. Within the community of His people, we find an identity, a home, and a source of strength and support as we strive to live up to God's calling. The church exists as an assembled body, because we need one another.

That churches in practice sometimes do not measure up to the church's task of building itself up in love, does not mean that we should doubt our ideal. Rather, our ideal calls us to renewed effort to love and serve one another. Let us study the Scriptures to learn who we should be. Let us pray for wisdom and courage to reach out to one another in sincere concern. Let us give ourselves to each other in the name of Christ. Thus may we undertake a revolution which will restore to the church today its pristine vitality as a loving fellowship of functioning priests.

### **Priests to the World at Large**

As priests of the great King we offer God the sacrifice of praise, and the sacrifice of lives spent in holiness and in service to one another. We uplift God's name among one another by uplifting one another in the faith.

It is also our task as priests of the Most High God to bear His message to the whole world. As the Old Testament priests taught God's ways to the people

of Israel so that their lives might accord with their ritual offerings, so we, as a community of priests, teach others to claim the salvation provided by Christ's sacrifice, and to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God in return. Some among us may possess a special spiritual "gift" of proclamation to the world. But all of us labor in the priestly work of evangelism.

We proclaim God's truth to the world by our *words*. In Peter's phrasing, we "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light." What are these deeds of which we tell others? They are the saving acts of Christ: they are the facts "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day" (1 Cor. 15:3,4).

We witness to the efficacy of God's mighty deeds by the *manner of our lives*. We conduct ourselves as people chosen and called by God to a high standard of holiness and love. In a society which rejects the notion that people should follow any rules of behavior other than their own desires, we demonstrate that genuine inner peace and wholeness, wisdom and personal effectiveness, result from obedience to the precepts of purity and integrity upheld in the Scriptures. In a society which believes that persons need have no bonds with one another except common selfish interests (how long do friendships and marriages built on this assumption last?), and which has corrupted the noble concept of the sanctity of the individual into each individual's right to use others as means to his own ends, we witness, by the quality of our fellowship with one another, to the healing power of self-giving, instead of self-serving, love.

We further witness to the reality of our spiritual experience by the *good deeds* which we do toward others as God's representatives, out of the abundance of our genuine love. Faith, purity, and active, loving service to others are all

elements of our response to the call of God. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas. 1:27). As we have opportunity we do good to all people (Gal. 6:10). We visit the sick, comfort the confused, seek justice for the downtrodden, and share our goods with the poor. Our works of benevolence, of counseling, of caring, prove to others the sincerity of our faith and the nobility of God's ways. Others are attracted by our good works to listen to our message of God's call.

God has chosen us to be a community of priests, sharing with one another in His magnificent grace, and announcing His gospel call to all people. God has thus called us to undertake great adventures. Our work of mutual teaching and correction challenges us to overcome our pride and fear, to make ourselves open to give and to receive intimate gifts from each other. But then, His love which is at work within us will, if we yield to it, dissolve the walls that fence us off from one another, that we may touch one another with healing care. Our work of evangelistic proclamation challenges us to join battle with the vain philosophies, the entrenched evil, the apathy or opposition, that we may encounter in a world that does not know Him. But God has given us a powerful message whose truth can refute every erring argument and every proud obstacle to faith, and take minds and hearts captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Our holy lives, our loving fellowship with one another, and our good deeds done toward all who have needs, help gain our message a hearing and prove the reality of our experience with Christ.

Let us set out boldly to fulfill these great tasks. Let us set out joyfully, with a sacrifice of praise upon our lips to the One who has saved us and who aids us in our labors. He who has called us will show us the way. □



commitment. We must pay up dearly as well as speak out clearly.

## 2. Tolerance

Every time I read Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* I am newly impressed with how much of the party spirit which he deplored can be found in our own fellowship. You will nod your head in assent, of course, but can you really qualify for a stone-thrower's license? The tendency to require people "to make a profession more extensive than their knowledge" is stronger than many of us care to acknowledge. And often we like it that way. When we feel threatened by some new development within the church, it is reassuring to have some orthodox authority to interpret the Scriptures along traditional lines and hand down a ruling: It is not always easy for even the most tolerant to grant the right of private judgment.

## 3. Profit from Mistakes

In the *Declaration and Address* Campbell asserted that "nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God. Nor ought anything to be admitted, as of Divine obligation, in their Church constitution and managements, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament Church; either in express terms or by approved precedent."

Unfortunately, over the years an increasingly large number of "approved precedents" for party peculiarities have been found. Such insignificant issues as whether or not the communion cup must have a handle on it have been made tests of fellowship. We could write a long list of "stupid, senseless controversies" which we deplore, but the enormity of this mess has been a boon as well as a bane, for it has stimulated some of us

to go back to where our forefathers started and evaluate for ourselves the basis of Christian unity.

I speak from experience. It was very hard for me to reach the conclusion "that the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one," as Thomas Campbell stated in the fundamental first proposition in the *Declaration and Address*. But I think I did accept it (although I could not state it so well) before I had ever read that document. I did so because my search for a solution to prevailing sectarianism led me to study Ephesians 4 from a new perspective, and there I learned what should have been obvious: that there is one body and one Spirit, that the Spirit gives unity, and that we must be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. It occurred to me that the Spirit was giving much more than I was eager to maintain. (Perhaps he is still doing so.) The implications of this were enormous to me.

Learning by trial and error can be very costly, and yet, in Campbell's words, "are we not the better instructed by sage experience, how to proceed in this business, having before our eyes the inadvertencies and mistakes of others, which have hitherto, in many instances, prevented the desired success?"

## 4. Knowing Who We Are

Look again at Campbell's first proposition: "That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one" — and note this — "consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians."

This is another way of saying that "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3), and so is

very broad. But it also says that no one who fails to manifest faith in and obedience to Christ is a Christian. This limitation of fellowship needs to be made clear, because being too inclusive is no improvement over being too exclusive. It is imperative that we continually stress the divine demand for total surrender to Jesus as Lord. After all, there can be no fellowship between light and darkness, and we must recognize where one begins and the other ends.

## 5. Knowledge

If (as Campbell said) we are not to require people "to make a profession more extensive than their knowledge," neither are we to discourage them from making their knowledge more extensive. In recent years a widespread distrust of scholarship and liberal arts colleges has led to the establishment of training institutions which are poorly prepared and prepare poorly. We did not get this either from the reformers or the apostles. It is possible to place too much stress on scholarship, but those who delight in the truth need not fear to learn.

Many brethren manifest a purely subjective approach to revelation. Existential experience becomes more important than what God has actually said. Such thinking at its worst will inevitably reduce our religion to a myth, and at its best will leave us totally unqualified to compete with the intelligent, well-educated spokesman of the lower world.

Our unity movement, if it is to succeed, must rest on a solid theological foundation; and one of our greatest needs is an intensive search for truth. Had our forefathers not been open to learning and to correcting their mistakes, they would not have been reformers. Their spirit, as stated by Thomas Campbell, needs to be recovered: "Let none imagine that . . . we arrogate to ourselves a degree of intelligence superior to our brethren; much less superior to mistake."

## 6. Love

Uniting the Christians in all the sects will require a genuine love for all. Without that there will be no agonizing over loss of liberty, no real respect for individual worth, no attempt to rescue the lost, and no grief over walls that separate brothers and sisters. But our fellowship with man will be in proportion to our fellowship with God, and it is fitting that *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* urges brethren to "pray more and dispute less." Surely if we pray more we will dispute less (and it is very likely that if we dispute less we will pray more).

Only if we love others with God-inspired love will we have sufficient tolerance to maintain Spirit-inspired unity. When brethren seem unbearable, in creed or deed, let us remember that "there is nothing love cannot face." And when we wonder where we are going to find that love, let us recall that "we love, because He first loved us." This proposition can be extended: we will find our difficult fellow-Christians becoming more lovable when we are more loving toward them. You can depend on it.

—HGL

## Debates and Makebates

The wolf and the lamb engaged in debate. The lamb's arguments were true, logical, and courteously presented. Still the wolf ate the lamb. Debates are not always won by those with the best arguments.

When the word "debate" (*de*, down + *bate*, beat) appears in the King James Version, it denotes sinful behavior because it is used to translate the usual Greek word for strife, which is what debate used to mean. A related word is "makebate," which sometimes shows up in the margin of the King James Version, where it is used of a *maker* of strife. By