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Intercepted Correspondence

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Imitating a Friend

The articles written for this issue of *Integrity* focus upon both Christ's example of limitless love and upon our responsibility to imitate Him in our relationships with others. Paul said it this way: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2). Imitating Christ and "living a life of love" is sometimes risky and painful, but Don Crawford explains in his article, "When Love Hurts," that Christ-like love leads to real joy.

Donald Lloyd teaches that Jesus' purpose for reciting Psalm 22 while on the cross was to reveal to us the unlimited greatness of God's love. Elmer Prout's meditation on Psalm 51 continues to explore the impact that God's forgiving love has upon our responsibility to others. Craig Watts helps us to refine our imitations of Jesus by pointing out what Christly communication is and what it is not.

Alton Thompson creatively illustrates the difference between real and cheap imitations of God's love. Joseph F. Jones, in his review of C. Leonard Allen's book, *The Cruciform Church*, explains that the author is encouraging us to be a people who understand the love that led to the cross, so that we may reflect that love to others in meaningful ways appropriate to our time and culture. And "Intercepted Correspondence" reveals more details of Satan's strategy to oppose our efforts to imitate God.

These writings were encouraging to us, and we hope you, too, find them helpful as you imitate God's love, "so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God" (II Cor. 4:15b).

Diane and Bruce Kilmer
Co-Editors

When Love Hurts

DON CRAWFORD

Have you noticed yet that love hurts? The more one loves, the more one hurts. This, of course, is the opposite of what the world expects. This is the reason the world loves so little. The world glorifies love, but believes love makes all things right and one's days bright. We have trained ourselves to believe that real love means that all the problems disappear, all the hurting is stopped, loneliness is ended, and the rest of life is only a blissful happiness. So when things begin to become painful, the world thinks something has gone awry and stops loving.

Real Love Hurts

The problem here is that the world confuses sentimentality for love. Sentimentality is a feeling, a feeling that feels something like the feelings produced by love. But sentiment goes no deeper than the feeling. And, of course, it is hard to sustain the feeling of "love" when there is also a strong feeling of pain. So when the pain starts, the world retreats, deciding the love just didn't work out or last.

Real love always hurts. Why? Because we live in a fallen world in which all of us fail. We fail God, we fail ourselves, we fail each other. We hurt those we love the most, even when we would do anything for them. Why would we hurt those we love the most? Because. Because we have weaknesses we don't even recognize; because we make mistakes which we don't even notice; and because, even when we don't fail each other, there are obstacles to communication over which we have no control. So love hurts, partly because we hurt and disappoint those we love the most. For no matter how much we love, we still are fallen. So we hurt because we hurt those we least want to hurt.

Real Love is Involved

But there is more to it than that, for love also means that we get involved in the hurt and pain of others. We make ourselves vulnerable to their scars and their weaknesses *in order* to love them. Jesus tells us, "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." And John a few years later, remembering the life of Jesus, tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. . . ." If God himself could not find a way to love without being hurt, why on earth do we believe we can? God himself, the creator and sustainer of all things, the One whose purposes are being worked out through all of history, found He could look the other way for a while, He could roll the problem back to another day for a while, but that ultimately, if He was going to ultimately love us, He would have to suffer the ultimate loss and pain. Love is not fun. Love hurts. There is no way 'round it except not to love. Paul in effect warns us of this when he tells us that love "bears all things, . . . endures all things."

So why take the risk of loving? Not because it is fun, but because it leads to joy. Somehow, in the midst of the pain that comes from loving, we discover who we are and what life is really about. The joy comes from the affirmation inherent in love. In loving, we affirm what we are, who we are, and why we are here. In loving, by facing and accepting the pain, we affirm that through it all there is something more important to existence than comfort: we affirm that the other matters, that people matter, that the quality of life matters, that our life makes a difference. This is the reason the richest moments in life are the ones in which we have become involved and vulnerable

enough to hurt. In the midst of the pain is an unconquerable joy that we have shared our life with someone else and that a bond of caring has been established. In the midst of the tears comes embrace, bonding, and communion that give strength and chase away the mundaneness of our lives.

Real Love is a Cross

It is no accident that our symbol is not a placid Buddha unmoved by the difficulty of life, but a Lord on a cross, because of the difficulty of life. Shall we cringe back from that terrible

spectre, seeking the safe comfort of the shadow of an uninvolved Buddha? Or shall we pick up the cross as a sword, and step into life ready to risk hurt in order to love? The answer is already made for one who would be a disciple of that One on the cross. You can't follow Him far before you come to His cross pointing the way.

Don Crawford is host of *Christian Encounter Talk Show*, heard in over 70 countries on the Armed Forces Radio Network. He and his wife Gloria, and their children make their home in Austin, Texas.

Was Jesus Forsaken By God?

DONALD R. LLOYD

Both Matthew, in his Gospel, and Mark, in his Gospel, record the puzzling statement made by Jesus while on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Mark best preserves the Aramaic, while Matthew shares the quote in Hebrew. Luke adds three additional sayings, and John adds an additional three, thus accounting for the so-called "Seven Last Words" of Jesus. Neither Luke nor John record the problematic statement recorded in the first two Gospels.

What of this perplexing saying? Is there some explanation that will ease our minds? Did God, in fact, have to "turn His back" on His beloved Son when the Son needed Him most? The traditional sermon on this saying has always seemed to say just that, holding that because Jesus had all the sins of the entire world heaped upon Himself on the cross, and because He cannot stand the sight of such sin, God had to look the other way for a time. God had to go off into some far corner of the universe where He wouldn't have to watch.

This is not to question that our blessed Savior did, in fact, carry our sins to the cross, or to downplay the seriousness of God having to make "him who had no sin to be sin for us" (II Corinthians 5:21). But where was God while this took place? Does it mean that the cry meant something like, "God, where did you go?!"

Many liberal theologians have "made hay" with the saying. Most claim that Jesus never made any claims to be the Messiah or to be divine. It was all part of a "plot" contrived by the disciples and the early church. Hugh Schonfield in his book, *The Passover Plot*, contended that *Jesus* was the maker of the plot. Jesus, it seems, wanted to force God's hand, to prompt God to intervene in history, and rescue the Jews, and destroy the hated Romans. He became impatient with God's timetable and decided that if He would go the path of Calvary, God would surely have to intervene and rescue Him and all of Israel. The cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is then, for Schonfield, the crowning proof supporting his

theory, proving that the plan of Jesus didn't work, and the cry really means, "God, why didn't you help me?!"

Was this a "cry of dereliction" or a "cry of desperation" or a "cry of agony?" Was the cry a sign that God had deserted His Son? Elizabeth Barrett Browning refers to "Immanuel's orphan'd cry" in her poem "Cowper's Grave." But God had called Jesus to this very mission, the mission of giving Himself to save lost mankind. I'm not sure it was a mission that Jesus was personally very fond of. We recall the anguish of Gethsemane, and the earnest prayer that Jesus prayed to have the mission removed from Him, but we also recall His, "Nevertheless, Father, not my will but thine be done!" God had called Jesus for this very mission. It only seems fair that God be with Him in that mission! God had sent Jesus down that path! Would God desert Him?

God a Fair-Weather Friend?

I guess I personally would have trouble thinking that God is always with me — unless or until I get into serious trouble! Then He doesn't have the courage to stick around! It kind of makes God a "fair-weather" friend. You see, if God turned His back on His own *Son* at a point like this, why would I think He wouldn't do the same when I get in trouble?

Let me contend that it is more than just coincidence that Jesus, in the moment of His greatest suffering, quoted the first line of Psalm 22! We must recall that the chapter and verse divisions were made later, and the original hearers of the cry from the cross probably wouldn't know the Psalm Jesus quoted as "Psalm 22." They knew it as one of the *meetzmore l'david* Psalms (roughly "Psalm of David"), and without our numbering system, they knew it as the *meetzmore l'david* which began with the line "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani."

In graduate school I had opportunity to do some translating of materials that was part of the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran. We were looking particularly at what we know as I Chronicles 16. It was peculiar Hebrew. There was no vowel pointing, that is, the vowels were simply not there. The top half of the page was

the text in Hebrew of I Chronicles 16. The bottom half of the page was a commentary by one of the Qumran scholars, also written in Hebrew. We were working primarily with commentary. The commentator would simply write the first two words of a line from the text, and then proceed to give his commentary. When he finished his commentary on that line, suddenly two more Hebrew words would appear. They would appear to be completely out of order or context. Then as you looked above to the text printed there, it became obvious that these were the first two words of the *next* line. The scholar would proceed to give his commentary on that entire line. It became obvious that the first two words of a line referred to the entire line. It also became obvious that if the commentator quoted the entire line, he was referring to and would make comment on the entire section or paragraph.

It was not a coincidence that Jesus used the words He did from the cross. He was calling out to those standing by the cross, including the learned scholars of the day, urging them to recount (no doubt from memory!) the Psalm we know as Psalm 22. Close examination of the Psalm reveals that its major thrust emphasizes the victory that comes from a God who never deserts His people.

Never a Deserter

Verses 1 and 2 show the honesty of the psalmist, including the opening line quoted from the cross. Today we only pray nice little prayers, praying like we think we "ought" to pray. The psalmists held nothing back.

In verses 3-5 the psalmist sees God as completely holy, One who saves those who cry to Him. Whereas the first line of the Psalm might imply that God *deserts* His People, here God is seen as the *Helper*!

Verses 6-21 give a pretty good description of the plight of Jesus on the cross. Note that there are many prophecies that were fulfilled on the cross, including the phrases "scorned by men," "despised by the people," "All who see me mock at me," "they wag their heads," "He committed his cause to the Lord," "a company of evildoers encircle me," "they have pierced my hands and feet," "they divide my

garments among them," and "for my raiment they cast lots."

In verses 22-25 the psalmist offers praise to God, who *hears* His people and doesn't abandon them! Verse 24 is a key verse here, proclaiming, "For he has *not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted: and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard when he cried to him.*"

Verses 26-31 describe what God now offers to everyone: His salvation! This marvelous salvation will be proclaimed to all generations!

The cry from the cross was not a cry of "dereliction" but a cry of *victory!* Jesus is not saying, "God, where did you go?!" He is referring the hearers to the prophecies concerning God's salvation, and God's Savior, as found in what we know as Psalm 22. Therefore, it is very closely related to the saying recorded in John's Gospel, "It is finished!" Jesus is saying in both cases, "I have completed what was prophesied!"

Ours is a God who does *not* turn His back on His people when they are in trouble! That is the exact point of Psalm 22. Verse 24 again says, "For he has *not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted: and he has not hid his face from him, but He has heard, when he cried to him!*" The Psalm so vividly sets before us, not merely the sufferings of the *Crucified One*, but also the Salvation that comes to the world through the *Resurrected One!*

Our God does not turn His back on us! He is always there to help in times of trouble! And because I have a God like that I will praise Him forever!

Donald R. Lloyd farmed for 15 years before he decided to become a minister, acquiring a Master of Divinity degree and studying classical Greek at Harvard along the way. He and his wife, Lois, presently reside in Rochester, Minnesota, where Don now serves as president of Minnesota Bible College.

The Forgiven and the Dead

ELMER PROUT

The Bible study had gone well. The text had been Psalm 51. Every line of David's penitential song had spoken directly to each of us.

We identified with his cry for mercy (vs. 1). We stood with him in his plea for cleansing (vs. 2). His sense of sin was written in our hearts as deeply as it had been in David's (vs. 3-5). We prayed with him that God would hide his face from our sins (vs. 6, 7). We longed earnestly for the joy and gladness of salvation (vs. 8, 12).

As we read and prayed with the text we found ourselves carried along into David's experience. It was not merely an academic exercise we were doing — it was life with God. Life with God for us just as surely as it had been for David.

No wonder, then, that we could hear Nathan's words echo down the centuries:

"The Lord also has put away your sin"
(II Samuel 12:13)

We were the redeemed of the Lord! We were eager to say so! (Psalms 107:1, 2)

It was somewhere in the middle of that moment of glory that two words collided: forgiven and dead. David was forgiven. Uriah was dead. I tried to turn back to the unhindered joy of forgiveness, David's and my own. But the vision was gone. Right up beside forgiven David was Uriah — betrayed, tricked, carrying his own assassination message back to the battlefield. Sold out by the very king who depended on his loyalty.

How did it fit? How could the Forgiven and the Dead turn up side-by-side in the study of a Psalm designed to sing the praise of the Forgiving God? Didn't the fact of God's gracious forgiveness override the tragedy of Uriah's death? Once the confession had been made, wasn't forgetting the next gospel step? Wasn't it enough that God can be counted on to set everything right for Uriah "after a while?"

Perhaps it is better to leave matters there. Perhaps we should be content to sing, "We'll understand it better by and by."

Perhaps. But I wonder if we will deeply appreciate the cost to God of the grace which saves us, unless we look at both the Forgiven and the Dead? I believe that God is grieved at the injustice and inhumanity which people heap on each other. Can we not say that God's smile of forgiveness is accompanied with his tears of

sympathy? God neither snaps his fingers nor winks his eye at our sins. The divine heart was not only broken at Calvary, it is wounded by the terror of our sins against one another.

I do not suggest that we attempt to balance the Forgiven and the Dead on a religious teeter-totter. That is not the point. Rather, we are asked to feel at least a little of the divine tension generated when justice, holiness, grace and mercy interact in the Divine Heart. Understand that? No. But we can experience a tiny bit of it. And, under the pressure of that tension, find a broader godliness growing within us.

For over 30 years Elmer Prout and his wife, Geneva, have served churches in California and Japan. Elmer presently serves as minister to the North Stockton Church of Christ in Stockton, California.

Christly Communication

CRAIG M. WATTS

It has often been suggested that the ability to use language is the trait that most significantly sets us apart from other creatures. Perhaps that claim will fall in disrepute sometime in the future. But I would like to make another claim: our capacity to communicate as we do is a characteristic we share with God. God is the original "great communicator." From beginning to end, the Bible is filled with stories of God's attempts to communicate with rebellious creation. The God which Holy Scripture speaks of does not dwell in splendid isolation, unconcerned with the conflict and pain that fills the world. Rather, from the patriarchs and the prophets, to Christ and the apostles, the Bible depicts God as One who persistently reaches out to us in word and deed, that we might have the joy of knowing and obeying God. God seeks

to communicate with us that we might have communion with him.

Our ability to communicate is one of the very greatest gifts we have from God. With language we can speak words of love; we can describe our hopes and dreams; we can teach important skills and convey crucial ideas. With language we can sing, pray and praise God. A biblical proverb extols the virtue of language, saying, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (25:11). Words can help bring us closer to God and closer to one another.

Words Can Damage

But words can also do the opposite. They can serve to drive us apart. With gossip, deceit, careless criticism, boasting and belittling of

others, our words can function as a wedge that separates us. Words are not only the tools by which to build friendships, they are also instruments used to create enemies. Words are capable, not only of encouraging and enhancing the lives of people, they are also a means of devastating the happiness and undermining the confidence of others. Our ability to communicate gives us a capacity to both express a blessed godliness and to do demonic deeds. Thus, in one of Elie Wiesel's tales, a wise rabbi warns, "Be careful with words; they're dangerous. Be wary of them. They beget either demons or angels. It is up to you to give life to one or the other. Be careful, I tell you nothing is as dangerous as giving free rein to words" (*Legends of Our Time*, p. 31).

Our capacity to communicate is far from harmless. Though our ability to use language is a gift from God, given so that we might enter into personal relationships with one another and with God, this ability is often corrupted and abused so that harm, rather than healing, comes from our words. Communication that is not disciplined by truth and love is bound to be destructive. James (3:6-14) describes the tongue as a fire "setting on fire the cycle of nature and set on fire by hell." He also portrays the tongue as a wild, untamed creature, restless and evil, and he states that the tongue is "full of deadly poison." A century before Jesus walked on earth Roman thinker Publilius Syrus taught, "Speech is a mirror of the soul." If this is true, then according to James our souls are filled with tragic contradictions. The author of our text laments that with our tongue "we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing." He is so appalled by this ungodly inconsistency that he seems to be ready to disavow language altogether and take his stand with those who proclaim, "Silence is golden."

Distorted Messages

But the fact remains that our capacity to communicate is a gift from the hand of God, a gift with great potential for good or for ill. Unfortunately, all communication is not communi-

cation of truth, and all speech is not aimed at producing understanding. Too often the opposite is the case. The French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire, among others, maintained that we use speech only to conceal our thoughts. Sometimes it is true that words become a camouflage behind which we hide our viewpoints and our intentions, our hopes for the future as well as the truth about our past. Some speech is used in order to befuddle hearers rather than to enlighten them. As one person has said, "Words, like eyeglasses, blur everything they do not make clear." Sometimes, when clearly communicated truth is not to our advantage, it is very tempting to mix up the message.

The unrighteous benefits of deliberately distorted communication are very well illustrated by a story that comes out of Texas. There was in the nineteenth century a Mexican bank robber by the name of Jorge Rodriguez, who did his thievery work along the Texas border. His great success brought him to the attention of the Texas Rangers who assigned an extra posse to work along the Rio Grande River in hope of capturing him. In time, one of the rangers spotted Jorge sneaking across the river. He trailed the robber back to his home village and the ranger kept his eye on him until Jorge was relaxed in his favorite saloon.

The ranger carefully slipped into the place and got the drop on the infamous thief. With his revolver to the startled man's head, the ranger said, "I know who you are, Jorge Rodriguez, and I have come to get back all the money that you have stolen from banks in Texas. Unless you return the cash to me, you will soon breathe your last." There was one significant problem in this encounter: Jorge could not speak English and the ranger could not converse in Spanish.

Seeing the problem and sensing an opportunity, a clever little Mexican fellow came up and said, "Would you like me to act as a translator? I am bilingual." The ranger was agreeable to the suggestion. After the fellow told Jorge what the ranger has said, the thief quickly and anxiously replied in Spanish, "Tell the ranger I have not spent a single dollar of the money. If he will go to the town well, face north, count

five stones, he will find a loose stone under which all of the money is hidden." The translator then turned to the ranger with a solemn look on his face. "What did he say?" demanded the ranger. In perfect English the translator replied, "Jorge Rodriguez is a brave man. He says he is ready to die." Like the industrious translator, we, too, sometimes find it to our advantage to use our capacity to communicate, to hide the truth instead, even though someone else may be hurt in the process.

Honest Listeners

But communication is not only the message that is sent out, but also what is received. Communication is not just in the speaking but in the hearing as well. No matter how truthful and complete a message might be when it is broadcast, the communication will be faulty if the broadcast is not received. Accurate information can be sent out but misinformation may be received. A message of truth can be spoken only to be distorted or ignored by the hearer. Even God's attempts to communicate with his people often failed, not because of any shortcomings in God but because of the stopped-up ears of the people. Within the gospel we find Jesus repeatedly telling the apostles that we would be taken captive by his enemies, be killed and be raised from the dead by the power of God. But despite his efforts to communicate these important truths to his followers, the message never got through to them.

We are like the apostles when we block messages out of our minds. We have not tuned our mental receivers so that all the important truth directed toward us is taken in. We may want to blame the communication problem on the one sending out the messages, but often the real problem is our own slowness to hear messages which do not match up with our preconceptions. The apostles couldn't, or wouldn't, hear Jesus' teaching about his coming suffering and death, because their notion of the Messiah had no place for such experiences. His message just bounced off of them.

Most of us tend to be the most receptive to communication that reconfirms our prejudices. Thus, when we like a person, we are prone to

filter out the things they say or do that we find disagreeable. Our attention is drawn primarily to their words and deeds that we find commendable. On the other hand, when we have a negative view of a person, we very likely overlook the virtuous and praise-worthy things he or she says and does. Instead, we center our attention on those things that we find irritating or distasteful, things that reinforce our possibly unfair assessment of that person. Miscommunication, then, is not just a matter of what is transmitted, but also involves what we will openly receive. In order to improve communication, we need to work on our own sensitivity in receiving the messages that are "out there," and quit protecting our prejudices. Christly communication involves both speaking truthfully and lovingly and also hearing truthfully and openly.

Miscommunication involves more than intentionally distorting the truth when we speak, blocking out truth when we hear. Miscommunication is often unintentional and unfortunate. We sometimes assume too much from each other. We expect our actions to be understood without explanation. We imagine that our intentions are self-evident and so we neglect to spell them out. And then we blame the other person when there is misunderstanding. "You should have known!" we protest.

Words With Action

Some time ago I heard about a mother and a daughter who had been alienated from one another for years. Finally they saw a counselor together. The daughter contended to her mother, "You never showed me that you loved me. I needed you to hug me and hold me. I needed you to praise me and tell me that you care, but you never bothered to do that! Instead you spent all your time washing and ironing and caring for my clothes when it was me, *me* who needed your care!" With shock and pain in her face, her mother replied, "I do love you and I tried to show you my care for you. But when I was growing up my mother constantly hugged me and told me how she loved me, but day after day she would send me to school in dirty, tattered, unkept clothes and I was humiliated. I was determined that when I had a daughter I

would prove my love by making sure her clothes were well cared for so that she would never need to be embarrassed.” And with that revelation a tearful reconciliation took place.

Our deeds are not enough. They need a label. Our deeds can be symbols that communicate truthfully only when they are clarified by words. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we do something that has powerful meaning. But without words that explain that the bread and the cup point to the body and blood of Jesus Christ, given for our salvation, the meaning is lost. The sacrament is reduced to a not-very-satisfying snack. Words and deeds need to go together in order for our communication to be Christly.

Nevertheless, even in the best of cir-

cumstances and with the best of intentions, we are destined to have misunderstanding. None of us is perfect in our speaking or in our hearing. It helps to keep in mind the persistence and patience of God, who does not give up on his people even when there is failure to communicate. We would also do well to remember apostle Paul’s advice: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone” (Col. 4:6). Certainly that is the essence of Christly communication.

Craig M. Watts is minister to the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Louisville, Kentucky.

The Limits of Fellowship: A Parable Retold

ALTON THOMPSON

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“Love is the greatest commandment,” the teacher said. “Whoever claims to be in the light while hating his brother is still in darkness; whoever loves his brother lives in the light.”

The class was silent for a moment. Then one of the deacons blurted out, “But we must be very careful who we call a brother! There are still limits on fellowship!”

The teacher’s eyes sparkled.

“Of course,” he said. “Which reminds me, by the way, of a story. . .

“There was once a young man who enrolled at a large state university. Although he had been brought up by Christians, his faith was weak; when challenged by the skepticism and diversity of the campus environment, his faith collapsed. The young man became an agnostic and despaired of ever finding any truth at all.

“Now it happened that the first person to notice his despair was his girlfriend; she was

a Totally Committed member of a fast-growing Discipling Church. When she saw that the young man had become an agnostic, she broke off their relationship. She quickly retreated into her discipling group. . .and the young man never saw her again.

“The next person to notice his despair was his roommate; he was a recent transfer student from a prominent brotherhood Bible college. When the roommate saw that the young man was in a state of existential crisis, he thought, ‘This is what they told me would happen in a secular, worldly environment!’ He immediately transferred back to the Bible school. . .and the young man never saw him again.

“Just as the young man began thinking how he might kill himself, his despair was noticed by a young Catholic; she was on her way to the cathedral because it was All Saints Day. When the Catholic recognized his misery, she

had compassion on him and invited him to Mass with her. This started a series of discussions about the reality of God and the meaning of human existence. Her sympathy, patience, and wisdom soon nourished the young man back to spiritual health, and his faith became a hundred times stronger than ever before.”

The teacher paused for a moment.

“So tell us,” he said to the deacon. “Which person has the right to call this young man ‘brother?’”

Book Review

The Cruciform Church, by C. Leonard Allen
Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1990, 191 pages.

Review by Joseph F. Jones

Two books co-authored by C. Leonard Allen have been reviewed previously in Integrity: The Worldly Church in the September/October 1988 issue and Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ in the July/August 1988 issue.

The Cruciform Church is a book which many outside of Church of Christ circles have found significant. It is reviewed at length here because we felt that you readers, many of whom are heirs of the “Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement,” would find this book relevant to our present churches and to the future effect our movement can have within the church at large.

This book by Dr. Leonard C. Allen, Associate Professor in the College of Biblical Studies at Abilene Christian University, is the third volume which he and colleagues have produced on the heritage, present status, and possible future direction of Churches of Christ. (For the benefit of those not acquainted with the previous two works, they are *The Worldly Church: A Call for Biblical Renewal*,

The deacon shifted a little and cleared his throat.

“Well, I suppose it would have to be the, uh . . .the . . .uh. . .”

He swallowed.

“Well. . .the one who had compassion, I guess.”

The teacher smiled.

Alton Thompson is a doctoral student in conducting at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, Maryland.

coauthored with Richard T. Hughes and Michael R. Weed; and *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ*, sharing the authorship with Hughes.) All three books have been released by ACU Press in the last two years, although the research for such works obviously required intense scholarly commitment for years. The brotherhood of Churches of Christ is deeply indebted to Leonard Allen, Richard Hughes, and Michael Weed for these significant contributions to our understanding and appreciation of our rich theological heritage.

In his Preface to the present work, Allen gives a brief rationale for his title, *The Cruciform Church*. Overriding the objections of competent and scholarly friends who were wary of the title for various reasons, the author avers that he chose the word *cruciform* because “it wonderfully and concisely conveys the vision of what Christ’s church can and must be.” He chose “the word in hope that this image might become the dominant image by which Churches of Christ speak of identifying the New Testament church.”

Professor Allen structures his work around five theological “identity points,” each of which is subsequently explored in the light of our heritage as Churches of Christ, or what we

in this brotherhood of churches know as the Stone-Campbell Movement. These theological foci are: 1) the way we read and interpret the Bible; 2) the way we understand the God revealed in Scripture; 3) the place we give to Christ and his cross; 4) the stance of the church toward "the world;" and 5) the extent to which we portray Christ-like character. (Preface, p. x) The author then affirms that the cord tying all these theological identity points together is the "biblical imperative to lift up Christ crucified and to let the church be known primarily by its faithfulness in following the way of the cross."

Allen sees present-day Churches of Christ as facing a "kind of identity crisis," attributable to several significant factors, three in particular: the fact that all religious traditions undergo change as they pass from one generation to another; the acceleration of this change in our tradition because of the breakup of the rural world (ethos, he calls it) which was such a vital factor in fashioning the identity of Churches of Christ in the late nineteenth century; and the present ethos of our generation with its intense individualism and pluralism, drawing us into society's addiction to newness, consequently further cutting us off from our historic roots. The author then offers his threefold solution toward coping with our identity crisis, having lost much of our knowledge of and appreciation for our heritage.

Within a few pages Allen presents a view of dealing with our theological past which is imperative if we are to be true to our calling and witness as the People of God. Toward our past we must 1) accept it; 2) engage it; and 3) responsibly appropriate it. At this point, the author states that the "thesis of this book is that: facing our past and learning to appropriate it, we can chart with renewed clarity our course for the future." (p. 4) Without a healthy and realistic perspective on our past, Allen argues that we have developed a kind of historylessness, meaning, that "while other churches or movements are snared in the web of profane history, one's own church or movement stands above mere history. One's own movement partakes only of the perfections of

the first age, the sacred time of pure beginnings." (p. 5) Such an inadequacy in our historical perspective has either led us to either denial of our own history as having any relevance, or to the erroneous conclusion that we have no load of tradition to shoulder, or that other religious movements and churches are really the ones guilty of religious blindness and error in fostering their history of religious errors and tradition. Allen's conclusion about the seriousness of our historylessness is that it works in powerful and subtle ways, creating "exhilarating (and damaging) illusions. Among Churches of Christ it often has meant that we simply discounted eighteen centuries of Christianity as, at worst, a diseased tumor or, at best, an instructive failure." (p. 5)

From realistic and healthy acceptance of the past, we can then move forward to critical engagement of the past, as "a fundamental part of our faithfulness to it." Critical engagement with the past serves at least three vital purposes: 1) to make us self-conscious about our dependence upon traditions from the past; 2) to force us to deal with other traditions in a new way; and 3) to remind us that biblical interpretation is always a human enterprise. Through such critical engagement with the past we are reminded of our humanness, our finiteness, our inescapable involvement in history; and from these realized historical perspectives we are humbly led to "accept the finite and therefore revisable status of our theological pronouncements." (p. 12) And, as the author further points out, while revelation is divine and absolute, "our interpretation of that revelation takes place within time, under the conditions of creaturely finitude." (p. 12)

Professor Allen then moves to his third assumption in dealing with the past, for it is his conviction that "maintaining a strong sense of identity among Churches of Christ today will mean seeking a sense of continuity with our past — not rejecting or denying that past, not uncritically embracing it, but responsibly appropriating it." (p. 14) Responsible appropriation of the past then leads to his treatment of the five "identity points" which have most powerfully shaped our present theological

stance, namely, the way we read Scripture, the way we view God, the place we give to the cross of Christ, our stance toward the "world," and our portrayal of Christ-like character.

Much of the material in the two chapters dealing with our approach to the reading and understanding of Scripture will be familiar to those who are at home in the field of biblical hermeneutics. Perhaps one of the author's most insightful suggestions in our need for a fresh reading of the Bible is the realization "that Scripture is able to override the interpretive rules and systems we construct for it; that God works through and beyond our limited, time-bound ways of reading his Word to draw people with searching hearts into relationship with him. . . The divine Word breaks out of the constraints we place upon it. Through it God graciously uplifts and transforms those who humbly seek." (p. 38)

Allen's four suggestions for a fresh engagement with Scripture include (1) the recognition of the "remoteness of the biblical text" and a new commitment to historical interpretation; (2) that we broaden our "functional canon" by a new inclusion of the Old Testament and the Gospels in our Scripture perspective; (3) that we see, read, and interpret Scripture "as a collection of diverse literature rather than simply as a collection of "facts"; and (4) that we attempt to follow the central narrative of Scripture, "thereby distinguishing what is primary from what is secondary." (p. 74) Those readers acquainted with the work of Professor C.H. Dodd will appreciate Allen's summary of the New Testament *kerygma* as found primarily in the sermons in Acts and in I Corinthians 1:23 and 15:3-8.

While every chapter in this book is incisive and compelling, this reviewer found chapter 5, "The Church Under the Cross," the most imperative message for Churches of Christ today. With understandable passion the writer sees the "word of the cross" as having been "significantly displaced in the history of Churches of Christ. Throughout the four generations since Stone and Campbell we have tended to push the cross into the background and thus to proclaim an anemic and distorted gospel." (p. 113) What does it really mean to

live in this world as a cruciform church? How do Christians see and appropriate the message of the cross, of denial and suffering, while living in a secular culture "that values nothing so much as comfort and self-fulfillment?"

With scholarly care and loving concern the author traces "the subtle but serious displacement of the cross in the heritage of Churches of Christ;" and for those who preach or proclaim the Word of God as our primary ministry in the church, the knowledge of this displacement should deeply disturb and challenge us toward a reassessment of our message. The New Testament is vibrant with metaphors descriptive of what God has done in the Person of Christ and His Cross, the divine initiative in seeking and saving the lost; yet our Restoration history has been more of a focus on what man must do to be saved. Allen's conclusion is the occasion for humble penitence even today as he reflects on our heritage: "There was affirmation of the fact of atonement but reluctance to delve much into its meaning. Thus preachers could preach sermons entitled, 'What Must I Do To Be Saved?' and scarcely even mention the crucifixion or atonement of Christ. (p. 120)

Restoring the centrality of the cross to the theology and preaching of Churches of Christ today should include a fresh appropriation of the rich New Testament metaphors descriptive of the meaning of the cross. These basically are: 1) the Suffering Servant; 2) conflict and victory; 3) sacrifice; 4) ransom and redemption; 5) reconciliation; 6) justification; and 7) adoption. When made central in the Church's theology, the doctrine of the cross reveals the heart of God most clearly, "thereby putting all our human conceptions of God to the test;" when made central, the "cross reveals to us the true nature of human sin and the depth of divine grace;" and when presented with clarity and conviction "the way of the cross provides the model for God's new social order, the messianic community." (pp. 133-139)

Our past indicates that Churches of Christ have, as have other churches and movements, struggled with the question of the church's relationship to our surrounding culture. It has been the age old question, "How can the church be

in the world but not of the world?" The answer to this question must be that the church has to be true to its calling, to be the church; to be the community of God's People, filled with and empowered by His Spirit to carry out its mission of witness, proclamation, and healing to a sinful and sick world. And "the Spirit-formed, Spirit-led community stands in sharp contrast to worldly communities," Allen affirms.

In his efforts to address this problem faced by Churches of Christ, namely, the relationship of Christ and culture, Professor Allen offers four suggestions which are worth serious consideration by congregational leaders and those Christian colleges and universities which are preparing Christian leaders. 1) We must create channels for closer fellowship and greater involvement with one another; we must move "beyond the impersonality of large assemblies and involve people in small groups;" 2) we must restore meaningful standards of church membership, providing Christians with appropriate environment for developing moral skills and lifestyles more compatible with the ethos for the kingdom; 3) we must make confession of sin a more integral part of the church's life together, whether in worship, small group experience, or person to person; and 4) we must sound a call to a greater modesty and simplicity of life, seeking leaders who model such a life.

Life in the Christian community must reflect the cruciform virtues and values which are evident when one has "the mind of Christ." Doctrine must not take precedence over ethics, and the profession of truth must not supercede the practice of truth. Compassion is prominent among these cruciform virtues, the ability to empathically enter into the hurts, sufferings, and oppressions of others.

Such compassion begins with understanding, then listening, feeling, and hurting when

another experiences such burdens, as written by the apostle of compassion (Gal. 6:1-2). And, understanding must be committed to bear whatever burdens that such understanding brings; and this cruciform virtue of compassion involves identification with the sufferings of another. This, as Allen rightly concludes, was the first meaning of incarnation, and it is our call as both individual Christians and Christian community.

One further observation regarding this work and previous writings of Dr. Allen seems appropriate. From this reviewer's perspective as both theologian and behavioral scientist, it appears at times that Allen holds a rather low view of those Christians who are involved in the therapeutic professions, especially the use which many such church and societal leaders make of the Bible, or their view of the gospel. That there is much psychologizing of the Word is obviously true. But for those Christians who see the essence of man's problem and predicament as sin, and, consequently, alienation and estrangement from God, others, and self, the Gospel is, indeed, the Source of healing, correction from distorted thought processes, and the enabling Power to give one a new, truly healthy self-concept. The Gospel of Grace is able to save the whole man, to provide him true therapy, to heal body, soul, and spirit.

Several printer's errors will obviously be corrected in the next printing of this work; but these are only minor flaws in an otherwise major contribution to the thought and life of Churches of Christ. I have deliberately extended this review to, hopefully, stimulate interest on the part of many.

Dr. Joseph F. Jones has ministered to the Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan for 22 years. He holds doctorates in higher education and pastoral counseling. Joseph has worked and written for *Integrity* magazine since its earliest years and has served as the president of the Board for more than ten years.

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Intercepted Correspondence

The following "Intercepted Correspondence" is a continuation of a feature we began in the January/February 1988 issue of *Integrity*. These letters are *Integrity's* version of C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* and more recently Os Guinness' *Gravedigger Files*.

To refresh your memory, we have an im-

aginary setting where Bruce accidentally comes across these letters in his computer class. Bruce thought he would warn the rest of us of what may be going on under our very noses. The nefarious teacher Apollyon continues his instructions to the young devil Ichabod.

My Dear Subversive Servant,

Let me treat the final item in your most recent epistle before I address the issues and methods of your labors.

At the regular biannual meeting of our Supreme Demonic Council early this week, you were granted a promotion, by unanimous vote, to the office of Imp, First Class. You are now entitled to wear the enclosed lapel pin with pride. This little fellow was designed by Beelzebub himself, and you must note how the ruby eyes radiate the very flames of our Council fire, while the engaging, diabolical grin typifies your attractive subversiveness. Just a few words of information and caution: you must never reveal the true significance of the pin to any mere mortal. It will suffice for you to say it is a gift from an Oriental friend; that its duplication makes the imitator liable to an immediate, catastrophic lawsuit; and that it has mystical magical powers. Its possession will identify you to your companion-workers, and vice versa. Guard it with your life, literally. It must never be out of your possession, for any reason.

You have now entered a select circle of trusted underlings. To have reached such a level at your age is remarkable. Please don't let me down: continue your successful subterfuge and

your inventive interferences with our human guinea pigs at Broad Way.

A bit of information about Tristan. His problems stem from a 'one-night stand' with our "Time Bomb Lady." He was really suckered into a situation, yielded to her wiles, and you know the rest. You know, in some ways I could almost feel sorry for him! Her method has been quite successful to this day; we have already planted some prospective companions' names in her lecherous head, and have contrived future trysts. You may expect to hear more of this; but, should you learn the identity of the anonymous 'carrier,' you are sworn to secrecy, of course.

Our "New Age"* ploy is working beyond all our expectations, although perhaps this should not come as a surprise to us. We of the Council think of it as a hodgepodge of pseudo-intellectual gems and garbage, in equal mix; but it works. There is enough 'truth' to give the appearance of credibility; enough of our condiments to kill any true spirituality. Not even the most committed adherents of our Enemy can fault the abhorrence of violence, pollution, and crass materialism, for instance. But convincing the gullible ones that truth is determined by the individual is, in the current generation, an

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especially effectual, if ancient, mode of our operation. The Enemy took note of this in the book they call "Judges," describing the age as a period when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Precisely what we are working for. No absolutes, no ultimates, no authority superior to the individual; and a full measure of secular humanism, to boot.

Much less obvious, but equally effective, is our often subtle, sometimes blatant, program to deprecate the Enemy's sacred Book. We don't necessarily have to argue vociferously about its inerrancy or infallibility, nor instances of 'legends' and 'myths' within its pages. It is quite enough, in most cases, simply to lead the Enemy's legions to neglect it, as you have noted. The program is working.

I would like to suggest a project for your attention. A recent Gallup Poll posed this question to a large, representative group of young Americans: "With what historical person would you most like to spend two hours?" They were permitted to make two choices from numerous individuals listed. The choices included movie stars, political leaders, and a number of much-

My dear Model of Malevolence,

My apologies for not answering your last letter right away; I will explain in a moment the reason for the delay. First, I want to let you know how devilishly happy I am to have received the promotion you informed me of. The pin has already occasioned several comments and questions. I have decided, however, to be cautious about wearing it to church gatherings. There are several people in the congregation who are spiritually sensitive enough to be made uncomfortable when they see it. They haven't really identified what makes them respond that way, but I don't want them getting suspicious. In fact, I try to avoid them when I'm not specifically on the attack. *They* make *me* uncomfortable, too! I have noticed that for some

admired people who have been prominent in world history. The disturbing factor is that 92% listed *Jesus as one of their selections*. This is a most distressing situation. Work on it. If you can come up with a sound plan to combat it, I think the Supreme Council will be much impressed.

When the opportunity comes for you to step into the field of politics, jump to it. Your talents are ideally suited to the exploitation of such opportunities as this area affords. We will see that you are specially endowed with persuasive powers, generous contributors, and media exposure, since we have more than a little influence and power in all these areas.

Your unctuous Uncle,

Apollyon

*How's that for an ironic, psychologically effective misnomer? The concepts are positively ancient; the applications fresh as tomorrow's news!

people, on the other hand, there is a kind of fascination with the pin that reflects a submerged bitterness and rebellion in their souls. Thus, your gift has served as a touchstone to identify some vulnerable prospects for future manipulation.

That brings me to the reason for my delay in answering your letter. There is a movement afoot to establish weekly prayer groups throughout the congregation. The minister, Brother Whitesoul, preached a powerful sermon about the need for constant awareness of "our" spiritual foes. You can bet I was squirming inside. Unfortunately, several people were really moved by the sermon and took his suggestion about forming regular prayer groups.

I have joined the one with the most inexperienced and undeveloped Christians in it so that I can try to derail at least one of these dangerous cells of opposition. Consequently, I've not only had to attend the meetings regularly, but I've taken extra time to raise questions with people about whether we shouldn't be devoting this time to our families or to some benevolent project. (I try my best, of course, to make these "active" things and regular prayer meetings mutually incompatible.) At the meetings themselves, I've found it relatively easy to get people to talk about their problems, their gripes, or even trivial matters like sports, after which there's not much time left for serious prayer. And lest anyone get into self-examination and confession (which usually means that effective prayer is just around the corner), I try to insert some tidbits about somebody who isn't there, so that people will be afraid of what word might get around about themselves if they drop their heavily protected self-images.

It's certainly not helping my work any that a number in the congregation are reading Frank Peretti's novels on battles between spiritual powers. I've been hoping that some will be turned off by the graphic literalness of his depiction of demons and angels, but he presents so grippingly the interaction between the prayers of the saints and the victories of the forces of God that most who read these stories are being made more sensitive to what it is they're up against. That's definitely bad news for us! Much better that "devils" be referred to only in jokes and cartoons.

I have begun to look into the workings of political power in our community. Evidently the trick to success is to espouse principles without the attendant drawbacks of actually practicing them. That strategy will not work consistently, of course, unless the electorate themselves have become hardened to dishonesty and cynical about corruption. One wonderful side-effect of the current emphasis on the relativity of values is that people find it harder to articulate effectively what public standards of behavior ought to be. I have received some good training in this kind of applied hypocrisy in some of the struggles for power at Broad Way Church. The difference in their way of going about it, and that of businessmen or politicians, is that church people seem more often able to convince themselves that they really *are* acting out of pure motives, rather than out of a desire to gain prestige and exercise control over others.

I must go now and do some heel-dragging by phoning the other members of my prayer group and suggesting that we cancel the next meeting. Besides its depriving them of power to discern what we're doing, cancellation would relieve me of having to sit there and be spiritually assaulted by my "brothers and sisters" if they really do get down to effective prayer. I'm almost ready to renounce my damnation at the end of one of those sessions!

Yours in resistance to prayer in the church,

Ichabod

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