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INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

## The Budding Stump

(Isaiah 11:1-3 and 53:1-3)

The Stump of David,  
Cracked and grey with age,  
Neglected, cast aside,  
Now sprouts again, as God had said.  
Not couched in beauty, nor in power,  
Comes this obscure and unexpected Branch;  
Nor with glory sought by swords,  
Drenching Israel's enemies in blood —  
Though bloodshed nascent lies within.

O Lord of stumps,  
Whose sapience informs  
What men have cast aside,  
And makes to grow again  
What you yourself have pruned away:  
Now take the hopes of glory  
Grown and nourished by our pride;  
Reform them by Your promised Shoot,  
That we may find the power  
That lies in roots, and not in mighty trees.

— Elton D. Higgs

# Integrity

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Elton D. Higgs

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## Of Sleeping and New Awakenings

An article about sleep in a recent university publication reported on the many advances in the study of sleep in the last 20 years. Scientists have learned about sleep patterns and can detect when dreaming is occurring, but at the end the scientists admitted that, even with all their new knowledge, they still do not know *why* we must sleep. Scientists are talking about physical reasons, of course, but there are some spiritual reasons why we need to sleep every night. Sleep provides a definite conclusion to every day ("knits up the ravelled sleeve of care," says Shakespeare), and how wonderful it is to be able to awaken each morning to a new beginning.

God is like that. He wants to provide new beginnings for us. That was why he sent his son as a baby into the world — so that mankind could have a new beginning, through the subsequent life, death, and resurrection of that baby.

This issue is about various ministries; and isn't that what ministry is all about — enabling others to have new beginnings in the Lord? We welcome three new writers to *Integrity*, to tell us of how the Lord has opened up either new challenges and opportunities or new ways to meet old challenges. Each of the ministries they tell us about is low-key in its own way, but firmly planted in the trust that God's power will make these endeavors fruitful.

Our beloved former editor, Hoy Ledbetter, reminds us that God's variety of saints is to be respected, assuming that they all accept the bedrock of faith in the saving power of the Incarnate Christ. And thus we are led to some considerations appropriate to the season we call Christmas. Gary Boswell challenges us to be positive about the holiday, and the poem, "The Budding Stump," points to God's propensity to begin anew with what everyone else has given up on. A book review by Henrietta Palmer and another installment of "Intercepted Correspondence" round out this issue.

*(Continued on page 99)*

## A Ministry of Encouragement

DWAIN EVANS

Suppose you are in the hospital and the mail arrives. You receive thirty or forty 3x5 cards on which are words of concern, love, assurance of prayer on your behalf and other words of encouragement. What would that mean to you? It would mean much. I know because I have had this experience. How wonderful to know that you have been remembered in your time of need.

What are the results of this ministry in the life of the recipient? It creates a feeling of closeness and warmth that bolsters one's spirit and enhances the healing process, not to mention the benefit of the prayers that are being offered to our Father. But not only is there the opportunity to offer consolation in times of difficulty, there is also the opportunity to "rejoice with those who rejoice" with congratulations for various blessings that come to our lives, such as birthdays, new arrivals, and anniversaries.

### Simple but Effective

Several years ago, Samira Fitts, a member at the Bering Drive Church of Christ, introduced this ministry. I confess that when it began, I thought it was just another of the fad ministries that would flourish for a little while and then fade away. I could not have been more wrong!

This ministry has continued to gather strength as the years have gone by. Each year we have a ministries fair. This is when we have the opportunity to leave an old ministry and to sign up for a new ministry. The ministry of encouragement always has plenty of volunteers. There are currently eleven members of the congregation involved in this ministry. It is not complex. Every hymn book has a paper pocket that has been glued to the inside cover, and in

the pocket are specially printed cards. Each Sunday morning a few minutes are spent on congregational concerns. This period is normally led by one of the elders or the ministers. During this period we go over the names on the prayer list. The congregation is encouraged to take one or two of the cards and write a brief word of hope or congratulations.

The entire process takes only five minutes or so. The cards are collected in the contribution basket and early in the week the encouragement ministry meets to mail the cards to the addressees. Week by week over the years, this has been one of the better things we have done at Bering.

Most of us are aware of how desperately we need encouragement and how much we need to give it. Our time in the assembly is all too brief, and then we go our separate ways. This ministry provides the opportunity to speak the word which we wish to speak.

### Encouragement in the Book of Hebrews

There is a marvelous picture in the twelfth chapter of Hebrews. It is the picture of a great stadium of believers who have gone before who are there to encourage us in the race which we have to run. "With all these witnesses to faith around us like a cloud," what incentive, what encouragement it is to those of us who are still running the race! These are those who by their faith have won the victory. Their names are called in the eleventh chapter. And in addition are all those others who have gone on before. You know their names. They are on our side. They are urging us to keep the faith. In the ministry of encouragement, these names take on flesh and blood. These are our brothers and sisters who sit beside us on Sunday morning.

They too are urging us to be faithful, to keep our eyes on Jesus. You know the warm feeling you get when someone says, "You have done well" or "Thank you for that ministry." We all need encouragement and we need to be givers of the encouraging word.

How long has it been since you said to a young man or a young woman, "Your example of faith has been a special blessing to me"? We have thought these words many times but so often we do not speak them to the person who needs to hear them.

Perhaps we need to look again at Hebrews 10:23-25. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all

the more as you see the Day drawing near." The strong picture here is that one of the reasons we come together is to encourage one another, to "stir up one another to love and good works." This text should help us see that an encouragement ministry has solid biblical support.

Whether or not we choose to begin an encouragement ministry where we worship, we all need to be more involved in our own personal ministry of encouragement. For all of us, in one sense or another, the "Day" is drawing near. Resolve today to speak that word of encouragement.

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Dwain Evans serves as an elder for the Bering Drive Church of Christ, Houston, Texas.

## Ministering to the (Partially?) Empty Nest

PAUL L. WATSON

Train up a child in the way he should go;  
and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

These well-known words of wisdom have both inspired and challenged parents for countless generations. There is so much in these words that appeals to us. The underlying assumption that there *is* a difference between "right" and "wrong," that all ways are not equally "good," is reassuring. The call to duty, to a high, moral purpose in the role of parent, is invigorating. The promise of results, of future blessing, stimulates both perseverance and hope. Indeed, there is only one thing wrong with this beloved maxim: It is simply not true — not universally, not without exception; and therein lies the rub.

Of course the maxim is true some of the time. The sons and daughters of diligent, concerned Christian parents quite often *do* make their own commitment to Christ and *do* marry mates who share their faith in God and *do* go on to become responsible members of both church and society. But it does not *always* happen this way. More than a few children of godly, caring parents turn out to be indifferent, irresponsible men and women, some even to be rascals and reprobates. When this happens, what are Christian fathers and mothers who have given so much of themselves in conscientious parenting to think, to do?

## Prevalence of Hurting Parents

Having come to the ministry of a local congregation seven years ago after a previous career in education, the one area of pastoral counseling for which I was least prepared was that of working with disoriented, distraught parents of grown children. Pre-marital counseling, helping couples with marital problems, death-and-dying counseling — all of these I had anticipated. But not ministering to parents of grown children, who in fact have turned out to be the largest single "pastoral" group in my congregation. (Perhaps the fact that three of my own four children have grown up and left home over these same seven years has had something to do with my increased awareness of this post-parenting syndrome!)

Not only in my own congregation and family, but among other congregations and in the families of friends and relatives as well, I have come in touch with parents trying to cope with their wayward, grown-up children, and with their own feelings toward these children. I know of parents who feel responsible for covering the bed checks of a 30-year-old son or for paying off the credit-card debts of a 28-year-old daughter. I have seen parents feel both guilty and angry at "having" to take back into their home a grown child after that child's divorce. (Conversely, I have seen a 22-year-old astonished and hurt that her parents, upon her graduation from college, would give her a 90-day-deadline to find employment and housing for herself and to move out of her parents' home.) I have seen some couples grieve themselves sick over wayward children in their 20's and 30's, and other couples reach the point of separation in disagreement over how to handle such grown children.

How has this all come about — to parents who have taken Proverbs 22:6 with the utmost seriousness — to a Dobson-generation of child-rearers who have literally given themselves up as parents and grandparents? How has this protracted dependency of child upon parent, and parent upon child, come about? And what can be done about it? Definitive answers and fool-proof solutions are not available, to be sure; but

neither are we totally without understanding or remedy.

## Some Reasons for the Pain

The obvious reason that a grown child remains dependent upon his/her parents is that the child is not ready to leave home; and "ready" most often means financially ready. Having become accustomed to the comforts afforded them by industrious, "loving" (i.e. indulgent) parents, why should a child leave home too quickly or too completely (when the automated bank-machine remains the umbilical cord connecting otherwise distanced parent and child)?

But perhaps the unreadiness of a child to leave home, particularly the Christian home of two godly parents, is much more than a material unreadiness. The real world that awaits the child is one of hard choices, moral and otherwise; of unfairness and deceit; of uncertainty and failure; of disappointment and rejection. And since the Christian home is, by definition, a haven of security and truth and acceptance, it may be all the harder for a child to leave, especially when that child has some inkling of what to expect "out there," away from home, without having been really prepared for it.

Parental reasons for not letting a child go are, I imagine, more complex. The Christian parent has acted out of a strong sense of duty, of responsibility, for 18-22 years; does it not seem like an abdication of that duty to simply turn a child loose on the world at some single point in time? After all, just as the 27-year-old parent knew more than the 2-year-old child, so the 47-year-old parent still knows more than the 22-year-old child. It is not a matter of lack of confidence in the "grown" child (or so the parent reasons, although the child suspects otherwise); it is simply a matter of wanting that child to continue doing the right thing, for his/her sake and for God's.

Behind and beyond this understandable (if not fully reasonable) sense of duty, there lurks, I suspect, a less noble motive or two. One such motive might be our desire, as parents, to create the "perfect" creature, the ideal person we know that we are not. In other words, given our failure to perfect ourselves, perhaps there

is still hope for us to create and sustain this other person, or persons, in whom both God and we can be well pleased. Such thinking, of course, is both blasphemous (as regards our relationship with God) and idolatrous (as regards our relationship with our children). We are not our children's Creator; God is. Each child has been entrusted to us by God; and we should prepare both the child and ourselves for that time when we will relinquish our custodial care of him/her (how instructive the story of Hannah and Samuel is for us here; see 1 Samuel 1:1-28).

Still another motive for not letting our children go is the desire to maintain one, big, happy family, with emphasis on the "happy." For years a parent's "happiness" (satisfaction, sense of accomplishment, sheer pleasure) has come from the family being together and doing things together as a family. Now, if the child leaves, what will become of the parent's happiness? And if a parent's major success as an adult has come from his or her parenting (as distinct from vocation or civic pursuits or recreational activities) — as is often the case with Christian parents — a parent's loss, if and when he or she ceases to parent, will be all the greater.

### Some Solutions

If these are not at least some of the reasons for post-parenting distress, what are the solutions? How may our hurt be assuaged, our guilt be lifted, our void filled, when our children leave their Christian home, and especially when they start to walk in ways they were never shown as a child?

For starters, the Christian parent must realize there *is* life beyond parenting, life that has meaning and the potential for happiness in its own right. As one couple with five grown children put it, "We simply decided that our happiness cannot depend upon the happiness of our children."

Part of that happiness can and should come from our continued relationship with our mate; after all, "till death do us part" applies to my wife or husband, not to my child. With child-bearing and child-rearing accomplished, my

mate and I now have new time for one another, new ways to enjoy each other.

Another opportunity for post-parenting happiness is through vocational renewal. I know of a Christian father who recently embarked on a second career at 40 but who is already planning his third career, in ministry, to begin on or before his 50th birthday, when his four children are grown and gone. I know of another couple who arranged their post-parenting years for travel (satisfying personal desires) and for working with small congregations where they traveled for short periods of time (satisfying spiritual and vocational desires). Of course I need not change vocations to find happiness after my children leave home. The point is that as my time to "parent" ends, more time is available for other, equally valid endeavors — some old, some new — to which God may call me (perhaps even to grandparenting?).

Most helpful of all, however, or so it seems to me, would be to get our priorities straight about this matter of parenting, and the sooner the better; from the beginning, if possible. Our goal as Christian parents is *not* to create the perfect family unit that will stay together until eternity. Our goal should rather be "to train up a child in the way he should go," just as the proverb says. Our goal is to prepare our children to live holy, responsible lives before God and with their fellow human beings, independent of us as parents, dependent upon God alone.

This means we should prepare our children (and ourselves) from early on to "leave father and mother" and to "cleave" to their own husband or wife (Genesis 2:24). We should enable and encourage our children to love God more than they love us (Matthew 10:37). We should remind our children that they inherit neither our righteousness nor our wickedness, but that before God they are on their own (Ezekiel 18:20). And should the Lord discipline our children for their shortcomings, it is *not* our place to try to shield them from His discipline (Heb. 12:5-11).

Such reordered priorities while we parent, and vocational renewal after we parent, should

be of great help to us. Even so, one other reality, and one other need, must be acknowledged as well. The reality is that of human sin, and the need is for God's grace. With all the insight, all the determination we can muster, we will still be sinners, before, during, or after our parenting, as will our children. Which is why, as much as anything else, we will need to forgive and to be forgiven; parents and children alike. We cannot guarantee our children's hap-

piness, nor they ours; but we can extend to them forgiveness and be prepared to receive it, not only from them, but from God as well.

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Paul L. Watson is minister at the Cole Mill Church of Christ in Durham, NC. As he notes in the article, he pursued a career as a professor of biblical studies after obtaining a Ph.D. from Yale University. He is also a graduate of Abilene Christian University. Paul has offered to prepare a further article on this subject, so we hope to present it to you in a future issue of *Integrity*.

## Turning Point — A Ministry by Telephone

CECIL COX

What would you think of comments like this left on your phone answering machine?

Listening to you has really changed my life and I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. Thanks again.

I got my sister pregnant. My dad found out at work. He'll kill me when he gets home. I'm going to commit suicide. I just had to let someone know.

I've been lonely since I've lived alone. I turn to you for encouragement. The Lord bless you in Jesus' name. Amen.

You have no idea what these messages that you're giving out over the telephone have meant to so many lives. I personally have been able to pass on the telephone number to so many and their response is just terrific! May God bless you! And. . .keep this up! Bye, bye!

Hi! I just want to tell you how very pleased I am that there is something like this that a person can dial. We've got suicide preven-

tion and everything else, but I've really been praying that God would lay this on somebody's heart and I really praise you. Praise the Lord, and thank you for having a service like this.

These heartfelt responses were made by residents of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, when they listened to my daily two-minute message called "Turning Point," during the years I preached there (1979-1984). None of them were a part of the church for which I spoke. This was a ministry God *did* lay on my heart, many years ago, and now he has given me the opportunity to take it up again.

An inner drive to help people know God was first planted in my heart by my parents. It was then reinforced by attendance at a Christian college and by a supportive wife who shared my goal. Growing up in a Christian family, in a city containing many Christians, blessed in countless ways and led by Him over long paths of training and discipline, how could I keep from acclaiming our God of love to those who do not know him?

However, little did I realize in more than 23 years of preaching, that "success" with God

might not mean preaching for one of the largest churches! I was surprised to find that His path recently led back to the occupation my dad taught me, mattress manufacturing, which, after five years, is beginning to provide the financial base for a nationwide "Turning Point." If God could use this type of message to wing His love home to the hearts of so many in Calgary, why could he not do the same in cities throughout the U.S., and in other English-speaking countries? Then, some could do the same in other languages! I left the pulpit so that perhaps God can use me to reach the hearts of many more by a different means.

Even in difficult times, God's people have always been there to bathe the wounds of the world. Yet, even the tremendous efforts of a faithful few to awaken people to God throughout the world have been *so small*, compared to the need. Because of the fall of prominent TV evangelists, religion of any sort has become suspect. The artificial tinsel-tones of many pulpites have left the people starving for some message that gives hope and meaning to their lives. When the hearts of too many "saints" have been tapped by other worldly sojourners, the sound has not been a solid ring.

It is my hope and longing that somehow this quiet, unobtrusive ministry of short telephone messages will not be more verbiage of man's wisdom, but simply a demonstration of the Spirit's power, which will give people a sense of the solid ring of the reality of God's presence. I want to let people know that the highest pinnacle of life is enjoying God and bringing Him delight through our faith and obedience.

These small composites of thought are not "churchy," but contain items of human interest taken from events in history, current events, the latest scientific developments, and everyday happenings. They are composed so that every person will hate to miss a day of dialing "Turning Point" simply because of the interesting information contained in these briefs. One message likens the migrating ability of a monarch butterfly, with its built-in "compass," to the drawing power of God's spirit; another compares the refinement of silver to remove the "scum" to God's willingness to subject us to the "fire" so that we can reflect His face. Yet

another makes use of an experiment to see what drivers would do when confronted with a plastic barrel on the road. The ideas from which the "spiritual twist" at the end is spawned have been taken from all kinds of magazines, newspapers and books, as well as from my own experiences. I have collected articles for 25 years, many of which have become obsolete, but some of which are timeless. The spiritual applications are all original with me. They are then capped with a select segment of Scripture and a sentence or two of prayer. Most of the time a script of something I have written is offered free, if the listener will leave a name and address at the tone. Then, the concluding statement, something like: "Hope these moments become a turning point in your day toward God!"

The purpose of "Turning Point" is to touch the listener at various points of need with the reality of God's love and justice. It provides a daily source of interesting information as well as spiritual inspiration. The thoughts of this moment in time are woven in order to catch the attention and interest of today's adult, even though those who dial range in age from 8 to 80. An almost equal number of men and women call. The scripts are primarily directed toward the person who is not yet really aware of God. Special messages are given on special days.

## No Pressure on the Caller

This "dial-a-devotional," if you please, is available 24 hours a day. Most people are willing to take two minutes to call, especially if they like what they have been hearing. Anonymity or identity is the listener's choice. In Calgary, we waited months before making personal contact with those who phoned, so that people did not view the ministry as "bait." One lady had been calling daily for two years before finally giving me a personal call about a devastating family problem which suddenly arose.

Of all the media available, a message of this nature on the telephone is the most economical means of reaching people with a word about and from God. With radio and television, brief messages may hit or miss people with busy schedules. The moment on the phone is directed to the one person who dials because he/she

desires to do so at a convenient time. Unlike lengthy religious programs, the thought on the phone is brief and leaves the deposit of one important truth on one's heart to be absorbed until, we hope, the caller dials again the next day.

## The New "Turning Point"

I think it was providential that I was asked to write this article for *Integrity* at this particular time [ed. note: September, 1990], just when the "Turning Point" ministry is about to start anew. It is scheduled to make its debut in Abilene on October 21, 1990. To begin with, four regular telephone answering units installed in our home will be used. Eye-catching 3-fold colored flyers will be left on the doors of every home by young people in Abilene from various congregations of Christians. On each of these folders will be slightly attached a small Mac-Tac sticker containing the "Turning Point" logo and phone number, which can be removed from the flyer and placed on one's phone or refrigerator for daily reference. Articles about the inception of this ministry will be placed in local newspapers. The round "Turning Point" logo will then periodically appear in the same publications. A round logo shows up much better than a square one. Volunteers will be used to monitor messages left on the tapes.

## Widening the Ministry

It is my hope to make these messages available to Christians, like you who are reading this, throughout the English-speaking world, so that each can make "Turning Point" available in his/her community, simply by daily plugging in and recording the messages on as many answering units as might be needed. With the offset press in our business, printing costs of the flyers can possibly be held to a minimum. The highest cost will be the printing of the stickers, but their effectiveness more than justifies the expense.

The tapes we will provide for Christians in any city will probably contain around a month's worth of messages. The closing portion of each of them will be general, identifying occasionally Christians or churches in your area. Advertising and follow-up will be up to you. We may

make mailout scripts available. Greater success of this ministry in Calgary was limited because not enough funds were used to put the flyers in every door and to advertise it occasionally in the newspaper. Therefore, any statistics I could give would not be indicative of the potential effect of this kind of ministry.

We will soon aggressively contact by mail and phone Christians in all the cities of the U.S. We plan also to spread the word through religious magazines. You are invited to make a long-distance call to hear at least a sample of "Turning Point" (1-915-692-2311). If you would like to sponsor this ministry in your community, please contact me on our toll-free business number (1-800-456-0542), or write me at this address: 702 S. 18th St., Abilene, Texas 79602. If you come across some articles with interesting information that could be used in one of our telephone messages, I would appreciate your sending me a copy. And yes, please ask our great God to speed His Word and love to millions by this means; who knows how many may begin to turn to Him, simply because they were handed a round sticker with a telephone number on it and called to hear, "Hi! Thanks for dialing "Turning Point!"

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Cecil Cox was born in Abilene, Texas. He has a B.A. degree from Abilene Christian University, and has done graduate work in Bible and Greek. Cecil has preached for several churches of Christ. He and his wife, Charlene, own Old South Mattress Company in Abilene. He and Elton Higgs have been "best friends" since grade school.

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## Editorial (Continued from page 92)

We all need new beginnings, whether from pain, sorrow, or sin. We can rejoice in the opportunities that God has given us to minister to others, and we can rejoice in the new beginnings which God provides for all of us daily. "For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind" (Titus 2:11 NEB). May you all experience God's New Year in your lives as 1991 dawns. Bruce and Diane will be back at the editorial helm for the next issue of *Integrity*.

Elton and Laquita Higgs  
Guest Editors

# Tolerance in Tradition and Testament

HOY LEDBETTER

A while back I had a discussion with some people who claimed to belong to the First Church of the Last Straw. They told me how their disagreement with some views held by other members of their communion had exposed them to so much persecution that they were compelled to set out for a new ecclesiastical land of liberty. They were to me a shiny new monument to the fact that the battle for freedom, in the church as well as in the nation, must be fought in every generation.

I have not seen them since that brief pause on their way to the promised land, but I wonder if the church they organized has been more successful than their estranged brethren at living up to Paul's urgent requirement that we "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). The tolerance demanded in this directive cannot be maintained by those who merely do what comes naturally. Unless it continues to receive the same degree of emphasis in our teaching as it does in the Bible, it will soon be as rare as the holy kiss.

## Safeguards

Fortunately, we heirs of the Stone-Campbell Movement have some strong safeguards against intolerance built into our tradition, although in some cases we appear to have forgotten the revolution. One is the solid conviction "that the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." It is a belief we must always cherish, not just because it is the first proposition in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address, one of our historic documents, but because it is an excellent compendium of New Testament teaching.

In his exposition of this proposition Campbell insisted that "nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith, not required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the

word of God." And being well aware of the fact that every sectarian claims his peculiar tenets are enjoined in the word of God, no matter how they are arrived at, he went on to stress that "inferences and deductions from Scripture premises. . . are not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so." Furthermore, he said, "no such deductions can be made in terms of communion."

In other words, the fact that our brothers and sisters do not accept our inferences and deductions gives us no right to kick them out of our fellowship or to pull ourselves away from them. Our articles of faith — our terms of communion — must be limited to what is *expressly* taught and enjoined in the word of God. And since an express teaching or injunction is by definition one that is "definitely and unmistakably stated," that rules out most causes of doctrinal division.

## Application

Our generation affords numerous opportunities for applying this proposition. An instance worth noting because of its current prominence is abortion. No view of abortion is "definitely and unmistakably stated" in the Bible. On the contrary, it is not even mentioned. Why do you suppose that John Powell's book on the subject, which has been circulated by right-to-life advocates, does not contain a single Scripture reference? This is not to say that one's position on abortion is unimportant. But since it must necessarily depend upon inferences and deductions, it should never be allowed to disrupt brotherly relations.

## Confession

This powerful antisectarian medicine is a hard dose for some of us to swallow, and we should remember that it was not Thomas Campbell's

original recipe; it was also prescribed in the New Testament. Let us move in for a closer look at the way the early Christians dealt with the question of how much diversity unity can stand.

We will find, in the first place, that the irreducible convictions of the saints were strikingly limited. Paul asserted that "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9). Surely in the face of this unequivocal statement only a person who knows no fear of danger would dare to disqualify another who has sincerely acknowledged Jesus as Lord and believes in his resurrection, no matter how much else he has yet to learn.

John said essentially the same thing: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 Jn. 4:15). And if this confessor is "in God," where does that leave me if I will have nothing to do with him?

To the disputatious Corinthians, Paul insisted that "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by [or perhaps, in the sphere of] the Holy Spirit." This fundamental confession that "Jesus is Lord" constituted their Christian credentials, and while a great deal more might have been desired, nothing else was required.

## Jerusalem

However, as strong as this teaching was, it was not readily accepted by all parties in the early church. One segment of the brotherhood felt compelled to send a truth squad behind Paul to save his converts from error. Their message was, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). *You cannot be saved!* To those Pharisees who had become Christians, circumcision was as fundamental as baptism is in our most conservative churches today.

Given their apparent certainty that those converts who neglected circumcision would be lost, our modern minds might expect them to withdraw from a fellowship which harbored such liberals as Paul and Barnabas and start another "denomination." But there is no indication that they did anything of the sort, or that

they were ostracized by the rest of the church for their restrictive views. Such was the tolerance of the early disciples.

It may be that the church in Jerusalem, in dealing with this diversity, somehow escaped the power struggle that often attends debates masqueraded as loyalty to the truth, and therefore they could achieve peaceful coexistence. But the real reason they were able to maintain unity in substantial diversity was that they had a mission of such overriding importance that they would not allow it to be sidetracked by a rupture in the church. In an atmosphere where God was so clearly at work among them, those who acknowledged Jesus as Lord were ultimately accepted, no matter how liberal or conservative their other views may have been.

## Corinth

We should not be surprised that Paul would tell the Corinthians that no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by, or in the sphere of, the Holy Spirit. The statement sums up the abundant evidence of inclusiveness in the Corinthian correspondence. Only once — in the case of the man cohabiting with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5) — did he encourage removal from the communion, and that was for an outstanding instance of immorality, not for doctrinal deviation.

Moreover, if the "punishment inflicted by the majority" on the man mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2 refers to the outcome of this case, as some think it does, then the word "majority" implies that a "majority" did not go along with the prescribed discipline. Since Paul suggested no action to be taken against the minority, that would seem to mean that failing to participate in discipline directed toward a brother in obvious need of repentance was behavior that could be tolerated. That possibility would be a serious challenge to those of us who cannot abide our spiritual siblings when we think they are too soft on various sexual offenders in the church today.

Paul's stated refusal to dictate the terms of the Corinthians' faith (2 Cor. 1:24) was put to a severe test by some of their errors. "How do some among you say that there is no resurrec-

tion of the dead?" is a question which would rarely, if ever, be appropriately asked in one of our churches today, but it had to be asked at Corinth. To say that "not all men [in this church] have this knowledge" that "there is but one God" would surely shock any modern congregation wherein it was uttered, but the liberated Corinthians were required to share the pew with people who could not get over their paganistic past.

These were no small errors, even in a church noted for a host of blunders ranging from sectarian sloganeering to abuse of spiritual gifts. And yet the apostle, in his opening remarks to the Corinthians, thanked God for them, addressed them as saints, anticipated that they would be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, and reaffirmed that God had called them into fellowship with his Son. What a model of tolerance!

## Response

As for us, our diligent attention to maintaining the unity the Spirit inspires is not only called for by current opportunities; it is also demanded by the New Testament. We, of all people,

should, by reason of training and tradition, be at the forefront of ecumenical efforts.

But unity, like charity, begins at home. If we cannot love our brethren whom we have often seen, how can we love those distant ecclesiastical cousins we may never have laid eyes on? Let us continue to debate with all vigor, as the early church did, the issues over which we tend to choose sides and which threaten to divide us. But let us do so with an attitude of mutual acceptance. We are brethren not by our own choice but by divine calling which cannot be reversed.

And since there will always be some in the church who view with alarm what others point to with pride, we must not grow weary in teaching our people how to deal constructively with those tensions, which in other times and places have resulted in division. We suffer no lack of material; there is a text on practically every page of the New Testament.

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# Do We Make Sense, Even to Ourselves? (A Lesson in Customs and Culture)

GARY BOSWELL

As we face the issue of the Christmas Season in the Church, perhaps it is time that we take a new look at our background and tradition. Members of the church of Christ have often practiced the secular activities of the season, while ignoring or teaching against the religious aspects of the season as it is practiced in our culture. This is often based on the impression that since the Bible doesn't tell us to celebrate

the birth of Jesus, we shouldn't. In fact, members often feel that it would be sin to do so.

## When Should We Oppose Culture?

Early Christians were required to keep certain cultural practices and customs. The apostles directed them to do so and the inspired word

of God records those directions. Evidently it was important that they not reject customs and culture just because they were Christians. In fact, they were to keep them BECAUSE they were Christians. They were not to cause the church to be spoken against just because they were "free in Christ Jesus."

As customs and cultures have changed, we Christians feel no obligation to practice those old values. We recognize foot washing, veiled women, and greeting one another with a holy kiss as being cultural practices, no longer applicable to our time. If we want to be consistent with New Testament teaching, we should NOT try to keep customs of past cultures. We SHOULD fit into our present culture if we can do so without violating God's commandments. We should not use our freedom in Christ to act odd or rebellious in present society, for the same reasons that early Christians were not to do so.

It is a present tradition, custom, and cultural practice in the United States to recognize and celebrate the birth of Christ during the Christmas season. Even the secular world recognizes this. Does it not seem odd that some in the Church would be against any teaching of the word of God about the virgin birth of Jesus during this season? We feel justified in dropping customs and cultural practices that are outdated, but we would never think of adding one. This is true even though the general religious community and the secular community does not understand why we prohibit the teaching of certain parts of the Bible during this season.

Where has our reason gone? When God asked us to be a peculiar people, he did not have this in mind! He never intended for certain parts of his word to be off limits at any particular season. As a large part of the people of the world turn their attention to the birth of the Savior, should the Church rebel against that teaching about Jesus because it is the wrong season? What better time will we ever have to teach than when we have the world's attention and interest in the story of the Savior?

## Taking Advantage of Christmas

We do not have to think too long before we get a glimpse of why, perhaps, the world questions our sincerity and motives. We should welcome interest in the story of Jesus and take advantage of this opportunity to join in our culture and customs. The world is interested in the birth of Jesus, but we say, "it's improper for Christians to teach that story during the season when they are interested." As Christmas becomes increasingly materialistic, we Christians practice the materialistic part, while prohibiting the religious part. Perhaps we need to rethink what this teaches society and our children. Some in the world are saying we need to get away from the materialistic part and think about the religious part. It is interesting that Christians sometimes find themselves standing on the materialistic side of the issue. Christians are suppose to be on the side of God, *not the world!*

If the Apostle Paul came into a community today which was celebrating the birth of Jesus, would he condemn that practice? Would he say, "I want to teach you about Jesus, but we must wait until July" or "I want to teach you about Jesus, but the Christmas season is the wrong time." Perhaps he would say, "I see you are celebrating the birth of Jesus. Let me tell you what a difference he can make in your life."

To the church of Christ he might say, "Why is the world leading the way in Bible awareness during this season, while you concentrate on the materialistic?" We might say, "But you never told us to celebrate the birth of Jesus." Paul might say, "I never told you to stop washing feet either."

Do we make sense, even to ourselves? More important, do we make sense to God?

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For more than 30 years Gary Boswell has preached for the churches of Christ. With a master's degree in audiology, Gary also serves students in special education through an intermediate education agency. Gary and his family are active members of the Lamoni, Iowa, Church of Christ.

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*He who walks in integrity walks securely. Prov. 10:9*

# Book Review

*The Messiah* by Marjorie Holmes  
New York: Harper & Row, 1987. 396 pages.

Reviewed by: HENRIETTA PALMER

As we rush around during this busy holiday season, let us take time to reflect on the "reason for the season." In *The Messiah*, Marjorie Holmes recreates the story of Christ, God's beloved Son, from the beginning of His ministry at the age of thirty to his agonizing death on the cross and His triumphant resurrection. She completes the novelistic retelling of the life of Christ that she began with *Two from Galilee* and *Three from Galilee: the Young Man from Nazareth*.

Holmes acknowledges the invaluable help of Dr. Roy Blizzard, former instructor in Hebrew, Biblical History, and Archaeology at the University of Texas. Dr. Blizzard had worked on archaeological excavations throughout Israel, and Marjorie Holmes accompanied him on several historic and archaeological seminars in Israel. A licensed guide in Israel who speaks fluent Hebrew, Dr. Blizzard is currently conducting research in Israel with the Jerusalem School for the Study of the Synoptic Gospels. He was Ms. Holmes' constant consultant for accuracy in writing this book, and she credits Dr. Blizzard with helping her to understand more perfectly the life, words, and teachings of Jesus.

*The Messiah* weaves a beautiful and inspiring story of Jesus, and of his tender and selfless love for the lives he touched: for his mother, Mary; for his brothers and sisters; for his little dog, Benjamin, who followed him all the way to the cross; for his friends and for the apostles; for Mary Magdalene and the other women who followed him and ministered to him; and even to those who reviled him and persecuted him throughout his ministry, trial and crucifixion. Mary wanted nothing more than for her beloved, eldest son to remain in Nazareth where she could cook and care for him. But she also knew that God had a purpose for this "special"

child of hers, and she could not interfere with God's plan for Jesus.

As Holmes describes the followers of Jesus, they become very real and individual. Jesus chose each of his disciples because of special strengths and character traits. Andrew, a fisherman, was the first of the disciples to leave his nets and follow Jesus. Andrew brought his brother, Simon Peter, a big, brawny, hard-working fisherman. Although Peter was just a little older than Jesus, he took on the role of protector for Jesus and the younger disciples. Next came James and John, twin sons of Zebedee, a wealthy fisherman in Capernaum who had planned for his sons to take over the family business. Two more fishermen, Philip and Bartholomew, left their nets to follow Jesus. This inner circle around him finally grew to be twelve in number, like the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus told the disciples that the fields were ripe and they must have enough laborers for the harvest. He also told them they would be called apostles, messengers, and they would be sent out, in pairs, to carry the word and to heal.

Ms. Holmes describes in detail the individuals and the crowds who followed Jesus when they heard of his miracles and healings. She tells of Jesus, the Messiah, who agonized because the people were more concerned with their health and physical conditions than with accepting his teachings about the Kingdom and eternal life. I was particularly touched by the stories of Mary Magdalene and her changed life when Jesus cleansed her and accepted her as his loyal and faithful follower; of Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, and their hospitality and their devotion to Jesus; of Jesus' grandmother who wanted him to have a regal-looking robe when he spoke to the crowds in Jerusalem, so she had a beautiful, seamless, white robe made for him and sent it as a gift by her daughter Mary; and of Mary's long journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem to be with Jesus during the Passover and the possible danger he faced.

The last chapters of the book tell of Jesus' final instructions to his apostles; of his commitment to follow obediently His Father's will; and of his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. Holmes presents an unusual slant on the meaning of Jesus' words on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Mary, says Holmes, staring at the son hanging on the cross with outstretched arms, knew that Jesus in his anguish was quoting the twenty-second psalm of David, which so vividly portrayed him:

"The enemy, this gang of evil men, surrounds me like a pack of dogs. They have pierced my hands and feet, they have exposed my bones with their whips, they gloat and stare, they divide my garments among them and cast lots for them. . ."

Mary cried out softly, in awe and thanksgiving. "He was confirming for us that he IS the Promised One!" Comforted, Mary remembered the rest of the psalm that Jesus quoted from the cross:

"But even in my affliction the Lord has not despised me, nor hidden his face from me . . . I will trust him, I will stand and praise him before all the people, I will fulfill my vows. . .our children, too, shall hear from

us about the wonders of the Lord, generations yet unborn shall hear of his miracles . . ."

Jesus knew — he had always known — this was not defeat but triumph! (p. 383).

After his crucifixion, before sundown, Jesus was hastily buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Early the next morning, Mary Magdalene slipped away to visit the tomb. When she arrived, there were no guards, the stone had been rolled away, and the tomb was empty. Jesus had been raised from the dead by God, the Father!

Using a framework of common sense, God-given imagination, and respect for the Scriptures, Holmes breathes life into 2,000 year-old characters. She made Jesus, his family, and his friends seem like real people with real-life joys and emotional struggles. But she also portrays the divine power that made Jesus triumphant in the end.

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Henrietta C. Palmer has served on the *Integrity* board for 12 years. She has B.S. and M.Ed. degrees from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. She is a retired elementary school principal, and has taught Bible classes for the last 35 years at the Troy Church of Christ, Troy, Michigan.

## Intercepted Correspondence

The following fictional feature is the latest intercepted letters between the young devil, Ichabod, and his nefarious teacher, Apollyon.

My dear nefarious Nephew,

I am left with widely divergent thoughts upon reading your latest communique. Is there truly a dichotomous struggle developing in your innermost self, or have you simply experienced

a momentary "low" from which you will soon recover and become your same deviously devilish soldier of the Infamous? Perhaps you had better return to the Inferno for a reprieve and a refresher course in "The Subtleties and Deceits of the Enemy," or, "How to Avoid

Diabolical Burn-out." Take a good, long look inside yourself before it is too late. . .

Should you wear your newly awarded achievement pin to church occasions? My firm and immediate answer is "Yes!" You cannot imagine the success we have had with this device, whose meaning is classified as a top secret. You yourself do not yet know its exact significance; that will come in time, if you prove your absolute commitment to the Cause. For now it is sufficient to say that its mystique incites in certain people a compelling curiosity we can often capitalize upon, turning them to our favor, and even converting them by degrees to our cause. When the Creator vested his mortals with this marvelous trait, curiosity, he did us an unconscious but most exploitable favor. You have proved your ability in our service to a degree in certain obvious, not-too-difficult areas; I urge you to give diligence in perfecting techniques of advanced deception and subterfuge.

And that brings me to those prayer groups. Such works as these tend to develop in either of two ways: some, with our encouragement and even leadership, devolve into little more than inane redundancies or self-lauding pious platitudes; others, even despite our best efforts, become mighty bonds between the petitioners and the Enemy. With these latter groups, we have sometimes (infrequently, I am glad to say) been powerless. But those whom you describe seem more to fall in the former category.

You were briefed on some of our most successfully destructive and digressionary tactics when dealing with prayer, but let me simply list a few for you. Look them over and apply the principles as they are appropriate to the individuals and/or groups: there is the "eloquent but empty" effort; the "humility humbug" hokum; the "trite rote" route; the "trivial tripe" trip, and the "saying's sufficient" segment. Among all of our techniques, these have unquestionably been most frequently successful. Should you need more than this simple reminder, you might consult your notes in the course *Spiritual Subterfuge 202*. I believe you were wise enough to take notes on our indestructible asbestos paper?

American political history demonstrates an astounding assortment of people. Some have been conscientious, hard-working and patriotic individuals who have immersed themselves in conscientious efforts to see that the ideals of the nation's founders are preserved and shared by all its citizens. Some, who have at least started well, have been overwhelmed by the opportunity to advance in personal fame and fortune, sacrificing principle for profit, and working harder at nothing more than getting re-elected. The majority fall somewhere in between these extremes. By all means, after you have gained a degree of comprehension and mastery of the factors involved, toss your hat in the ring! We will be able to help you in all manners in your campaign, as we have aided countless others. You *will* be required to devise some kind of "platform" on which to run. Do some reading on this subject. It will be helpful to see how little the platform itself obstructs your performance in office.

A final comment, this time on your "I'm almost ready to renounce my damnation. . ." statement. You cannot! It is utterly unthinkable, and totally beneath you! I dislike making what might even remotely sound like a threat, but you cannot imagine the consequences of such a ridiculous course of action. Chin up! You've a great calling, one in which you have shown genuine ability. Give me more reasons to boast about your character and your labors!

Yours in sincere subterfuge,

Uncle Apollyon

Dear Uncle Apollyon,

Your last letter was sobering. I shall certainly try harder to see the bad side of everything and I will review my notes on the Great Falsehoods of our calling. How could I have been moved by any of that sentimental tripe about suffering now in order to be glorified later? I have my career and my reputation to think about! And besides, hasn't it always been a part of our

thought-training that the only guaranteed rewards come from the single-minded exercise of power? You will see this devil devoting himself from now on to carving out a prominent place in the Infernal Kingdom!

Now to my reporting. The political plans are coming along very well. Several prosperous and ambitious people in the congregation have latched on to my campaign as a means of boosting their own fortunes, along with the influence of the congregation in the community. And my standing in the church adds a certain aura of moral concern to my image. Of course, I have to be careful to refer only vaguely to any actual religious beliefs. People get nervous when they hear a politician talking too openly about his religious convictions, especially when they might dictate the way he acts. I want to be seen as having enough religion to be respectable, but not so much as to make me odd or quirky. I'm happy to observe that Brother Whitesoul is getting left out in this enthusiasm over having a budding politician in the congregation. He is regarded as rather naive and simplistic about politics, since he preaches that no particular political system or party is given God's special endorsement, not even the ones that seem to champion certain church "positions." Nor does he think that the church's objectives should necessarily be promoted by political power. I'm using the situation as deftly as I can to undermine his credibility in the congregation, by speaking seductively about the attractions of being able to legislate a "Christian society" (with special places of influence, of course, for those who support my campaign).

I've gotten acquainted with someone who is turning out to be as good a source of "juicy" information as Sister Snugrug. His name is Horace Linguaflap, and although he is more subtle than Sister Snugrug, he is quite as effective in spreading unsavory news as she is.

He especially delights in bringing in a hypocritically regretful sour note on someone who is being lauded and openly admired. "Yes," he will say, "Brother Eddie Fyer is good at teaching classes, but it's too bad about his troubles at home. I understand he and his wife haven't been getting along lately, and that their teen-age son was picked up drunk one night last month. I don't know that a man with those problems ought to be teaching at church." I happen to know that in reality Brother Fyer found he had to pull back on some of his activities because his wife was under too much pressure, and the son had a brief run-in with the police because he was picked up with a bunch of rowdies one night (after which he ceased to hang out with them). But I was delighted that Brother Linguaflap was able to put serious doubts in some people's minds about the quality of Brother Fyer's Christian life. Another insidiously malevolent story I got from the lips of Horace was about two couples who were at odds with each other because one couple's cousin (Rosie), who was married to one of the other couple's brothers (Ralph), had left her mate. Ralph's relatives thought Rosie's relatives should cut her off completely, while Rosie's relatives said that Ralph was a nerd and who could stand to live with him anyway. Well, the really delicious part of this whole affair was the way the relatives of Ralph and Rosie never bothered to speak to each other in any setting or atmosphere that had the least possibility of fostering enlightenment, understanding, or forgiveness. Now others in the congregation are taking sides and there is the prospect of an all-out split in the fellowship. I couldn't have arranged it better myself!

Yours in unholy glee,

Ichabod

## THANK YOU

Diane, Bruce and the entire Board want to thank you for the response to our recent letter asking for contributions to the ministry of *Integrity Magazine*. Your generosity is greatly appreciated. We especially appreciate your notes and letters of support and your suggestions.

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