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PROBLEMS AND ADJUSTMENTS

DEAN A. THOROMAN

Regular readers of this publication are aware that our last two issues did not arrive on schedule. Because of numerous inquiries, we think some explanation is in order. In this instance the difficulty was our inability to acquire the mailing labels at the time everything else was ready. We believe this problem has been resolved for the immediate future and your copies should not now be delayed on this account.

However, you need to know that a different kind of problem may cause us to decrease the number of issues, at least temporarily. Notice this issue, for example. It is for November and December. Your January copy may be delayed as much as two weeks and will carry an announcement about 1974 publication plans. These adjustments are necessary because of the impaired health of our Editor-in-Chief, Hoy Ledbetter.

In the middle of October Hoy was the victim of symptoms and pain sometimes associated with heart attacks. While we were all relieved to learn that he actually did not have an attack (his heart lost its rhythm), we were nevertheless sobered by the many ramifications of his being even partially limited in his activities. The doctor's advice was to temporarily refrain from doing anything that did not have to be done, but this really was no great help because Hoy's life is such that he involves himself in matters he believes are quite essential to begin with. *Integrity's* board made some decisions at this point.

We know how closely the destiny of this publication is tied to Hoy. At the same time we recognize that life and health are obviously more important than this monthly magazine. Therefore, we are immediately reducing Hoy's editorial load as outlined above and planning for future issues only to the degree of improvement in his health. We know you will join us in praying for his complete and speedy recovery.

SENSE AND SANCTIFICATION

HOY LEDBETTER

Reading mythology is for me a depressing exercise. While spending the late hours of one night last summer with some books on Greek mysteries, I suddenly realized I was feeling strangely insecure. I had begun to identify with the lostness and despair of those who suffered in darkness. It was a painful experience, but also profitable, for my appreciation for the *Savior* was enhanced by a clearer vision of the world into which he came. Which is why I begin this discussion with some references to paganism.

In Egypt, said Herodotus, the worship of Dionysus was "almost exactly as Dionysiac festivals are in Greece, except the Egyptians have no choral dances. They also use instead of phalli, another invention, consisting of images eighteen inches high, pulled by strings, which the women carry round to the villages. These images have male members of about the same size also operated by strings" (*The Persian Wars*, II, 48). The use of simulated sex organs accorded with the purpose of these festivals, which celebrated the return of life in the spring and employed imitative magic to restore fertility. Worship of this god of the vine involved drunkenness, sexual excess, and physical brutality.

Dionysiac Frenzy . . .

Euripides' play about the Bacchae (the female followers of Dionysus=Bacchus) gives us a vivid picture of the frenzy and brutality of Dionysiac worship. A good example is

what happened to Pentheus when he audaciously spied upon the Bacchae: "His own mother, like a priestess with her victim, fell upon him first. But snatching off his wig and snood so she would recognize his face, he touched her cheeks, screaming, 'No, no, Mother! I am Pentheus, your own son, the child you bore to Echion! Pity me, spare me, Mother! I have done a wrong, but do not kill your own son for my offense.' But she was foaming at the mouth, and her crazed eyes rolling with frenzy. She was mad, stark mad, possessed by Bacchus. Ignoring his cries of pity, she seized his left arm at the wrist, then, planting her foot upon his chest, she pulled, wrenching away the arm at the shoulder—not by her own strength, for the god had put inhuman power in her hands" (*The Bacchae*, 1113ff.).

Even if allowance is made for dramatic treatment, Euripides gives a generally accurate impression of Dionysiac frenzy. Various means were employed to induce ecstasy, including generous amounts of wine, flutes and percussion instruments, dancing (wherein "whirling feet kept time to the strict beat of the taut hide and the squeal of the wailing flute"), handclapping, singing, and rhythmic cries. Such devices are not remote from our time. Not only does the brutality of the earlier Dionysia have its modern counterpart in Satan-worship, but the mechanizations utilized for ecstatic ends are commonplace in rock concerts, and—except for narcotics

and perhaps dancing—in numerous religious gatherings.

The Verdict of Unbelief . . .

The value judgments we impose on such phenomena will depend on our frame of reference. Euripides' Pentheus thought the Bacchae were crazy, but they had the same opinion of him. We find a similar opposition in the New Testament. Concerning Jesus many of the Jews said: "He has a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him?" His words were so fantastic to their religious orientation that they thought he had lost contact with reality.

When Peter was in prison, awaiting execution, the church engaged in earnest prayer for him. Not knowing that an angel had rescued him from Herod's prison, a group was praying at Mary's house when the maid interrupted them to announce that their prayer had been answered: Peter was standing at the gate! But they said to her, "You are mad!" Which shows that even Christians may find God's work so amazing that they will judge its herald to be crazy.

When Festus resisted conviction by Paul's testimony, he resolved his dilemma by questioning Paul's mental health: "You are mad, Paul! Your great learning is driving you mad!" Paul answered: "I am not mad, your Excellency! The words I speak are true and sober." Which means that his apology was both rational ("sober") and in full accord with reality ("true"). And this illustrates the unique position of the Christian witness. Despite the possibility that disorganized personalities may profess Christianity, the fact remains that only the authentic servant of God is completely in touch with reality. Jesus is the truth; therefore he who is apart from him is apart from reality; but he who

has him has reality, even if unregenerate people like Festus do not recognize it.

With the examples of Jesus, Rhoda, and Paul to encourage him, the Christian witness should not be unduly disturbed when unbelievers question his sanity. However, he should realize that such a verdict has no intrinsic value, and he must exercise caution that it is not rendered unnecessarily. That we can invite derision through our own carelessness is indicated by Paul's treatment of the tongues-speaking problem at Corinth: "If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say you are mad?"

"Mad" here is not to be interpreted psychologically but religiously; it is the term for religious frenzy (denoting the same sort of ecstasy seen in the Dionysia) and does not mean "crazy" but "possessed." It is the same word used of the Bacchae: "His worshippers, like madmen, are endowed with mantic powers. For when the god enters the body of a man he fills him with the breath of prophecy." Madness, then, was possession by the god which led to some sort of ecstatic speech. A modern observer, being more in tune with psychopathology than with pagan oracular response, might have judged the Corinthians insane, but their contemporaries were more likely to think of a supernatural—but not Christian—phenomenon. Therefore, while tongues at Corinth might indicate some supernatural influence, they would no more direct the minds of the uninitiated to God than to some pagan deity, since they did not communicate the fundamental Christian thesis: "Jesus is Lord." For this reason tongues were wholly inadequate as an evangelistic agency.

If the church at Corinth was to maintain its distinction from paganism, a superior

form of expression was required. Therefore Paul directed the Corinthians not to use tongues in their meetings in the absence of an interpreter. This they could do, for the Christian—unlike the pagan "who was caught up in a frenzy, till he spoke like a lyre struck by the plectron"—was perfectly able to restrain himself. Certainly Paul did not equate tongues-speaking with Dionysiac ecstasy. He simply pointed out that its limitations were proved by the effect it had on outsiders. And this raised a significant ethical question, for the unbeliever needed intelligent communication, not a phenomenon which had no more meaning to him than a noisy, hysterical exhibition; therefore the persistent use of a gift so inadequate and so liable to misapprehension would not be service to God but selfishness.

The Goal of Our Ministry . . .

C.K. Barrett has truly noted: "Moral conviction distinguished New Testament Christianity from other forms of religious feeling." This view is ratified by Paul's stress on the superlativeness of prophecy: "If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you." The superior value of prophecy lies in its ability to provoke in the unbeliever or ungifted man the overwhelming sense of the presence of God which issues in genuine worship, rather than impressing him with the extraordinary nature of the speech or speaker. The end of our ministry is that every man "will fall on his face and worship God." We should remember this when we contemplate what will take place in our meetings, for what we want to do

may not be what the other person needs. To deliberately ignore his needs, or to unnecessarily provoke his contempt is arrogance.

But we should note that Paul's criticism was not directed toward a display of emotion. There is a kind of emotionalism, induced by the same mechanizations employed in the Dionysia, which leads to hysteria and even sexual excitement. Paul would have none of that, although, I fear, many of his successors have found it quite attractive. But the early church was a highly emotional communion. The New Testament constantly stresses the joy, the sorrow, the reverence, the love, and the (right kind of) hatred manifested among the early Christians. A sense of awe was everywhere; they shared their meals with unaffected joy; the church went forward in reverence for the Lord and in the strengthening presence of the Holy Spirit; the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name; Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns in prison; and on and on. Intense, sincere love for everything good (and even for men who were not good) intertwined with a divine hatred for evil works. "Great fear" (resulting from a sense of God's judgment) alternated with "great joy" (resulting from a sense of his active power). People like that did not meet for a short-because-it-is-boring ritual. I suspect that many of us would have been very uncomfortable in their services—with the exception of those at Laodicea. True, they made some mistakes, but I believe Moffatt makes a valid point: "Better deep feeling, better even unintelligible raptures or involuntary seizures of ecstasy, now and then, than calm indifference or clever arguments or superficial sentiment."

We should let ourselves go, yet we must never lose touch with reality in so doing.

James said: "Is any one happy? He should sing praises." Paul said: "Do not give way to drunkenness and the dissipation that goes with it, but let the Holy Spirit fill you: speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and songs; sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). There may be an allusion here to Dionysiac orgy, but for us the question is purely academic. We have that old garbage in a new wrapper. A crazy world lives by the conviction that salvation (*soteria*) is dissipation (*asotia*), that self-realization issues from letting ourselves go, that intoxication frees us from shackling inhibitions, that we can frolic away the melancholy side of our existence. Paul offers the antidote to such paganism. There is something better than drunkenness and the wild and disorderly behavior it induces: the fullness of the Spirit which is expressed in songs of praise, prayers of thanksgiving, and acts of love. And it not only is the alternative to intoxication; it is also the remedy for *stagnation*.

But there is an antecedent drunkenness which is more likely to separate churches today from reality. It is pointed out in Paul's admonition that the Thessalonians, in view of the coming of Christ, should not "sleep, as do others, but . . . keep awake and be sober" (1 Th. 5:6). This call to reality, with eschatological overtones, recurs in 1 Th. 5:8; 2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; and 5:8. As Bauernfeind has stated in a pregnant sentence (*TDNT*, IV, 939), the alertness demanded in these verses "consists in acknowledgment of the reality given with God's revelation and in discharge of the resultant ministry by worship, hope, love and warfare."

When we no longer believe "the end is near," we forget that "he cares," and we stop caring. Our minds are not ready for action. Our commission is not patiently

executed, but unstable souls are left untended to vacillate between "listening to the truth" and "turning aside to myths." We lose the flint-like resolution based on Christian faith which is vital to resisting Satan's assaults. We allow our lives to be shaped by the desires we had while still ignorant.

"Be alert," said Peter, "to be able to pray," for prayers cease when the mind becomes fuzzy and human ego takes God's place. True worship is the Siamese twin of reality; but it is broader than acts performed in a sanctuary. Look at Peter's whole statement: "The end of all things is near. You must be self-controlled and alert, to be able to pray. Above everything, love one another earnestly, for love covers over many sins. Open your homes to each other, without complaining. Each one, as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he has received from God" (1 Pet. 4:7ff.). In view of the end, love must be the corrective to selfishness, covering the sins which tear the community apart, inspiring gracious generosity, and devoting whatever of God's gifts we have to the benefit of others. It is no accident that such exhortations stand before an eschatological backdrop, for an anemic ministry and a selfish, sensual life reflect a lost hope.

When the Master Tarries . . .

The effects of a waning Christian hope are illustrated by Jesus' picture of that servant whom he has appointed over his household, who "says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk." When hope fades, not only does the Christian lose the motive to endure the pressures militant

saints must face, but he also loses his moral standards. This collapse of morality follows two routes in Jesus' story.

On the one hand, the unfaithful servant's dimmed vision of his master causes him to misinterpret his own position. In practice he ceases being a slave and acts like a master. In a base abuse of power he begins to beat his fellow servants. Since the picture is one of (at least nominal) servants of the Lord, we must look for modern counterparts in the church. We may expect that when those with special responsibilities in the church lose their vision of the Lord's coming, they will become bullies. Conversely, much abuse of power in the church today may be attributed to a lack of intense conviction that He is coming.

The second outgrowth of waning hope is gluttony—living as though earthly enjoyment is the real end of life. The unfaithful servant became content with satisfying the most primitive vital needs. In this respect he reminds us of the rich fool earlier in the chapter, who said to his soul, "Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." That such an attitude is directly related to lost hope is shown by Paul: "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Cor. 15:32). Some expositors have tried to cure this sensual disposition by stressing the inevitability of death, but this in fact is the *cause* rather than the *cure*. When we lose hope, we propose to "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Awareness of impending death merely confirms the sensual disposition. Paul continues: "Come to your right mind [lit. become truly sober], and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God." The cure for the insanity of seeing life's meaning only in the satisfaction of present physical needs is not to know that death is coming, but to know *the Lord* is

coming. Consequently the ministry which brings men into touch with reality also rescues them from sensuality.

The Oldest Christian Prayer . . .

In this connection we must take note of what has been called "the oldest liturgical prayer of the early Christian community." *Marana tha*, an Aramaic expression, is correctly translated "Our Lord, come!" (RSV, 1 Cor. 16:22). (The equivalent Greek, with "Jesus" added, occurs in Rv. 22:20: "Come, Lord Jesus!") K.G. Kuhn has truly said that *marana tha* states "in a short and pregnant form the decisive content of the early Christian expectation of faith." And Ralph Martin's comment on the comprehensiveness of the expression is worth repeating in full: "It looks backward to all that the coming of Christ into the world has meant, and is an acknowledgement of praise. It looks forward to His appearing, and is a cry of expectation. It has also a present significance, as it bids the assembled Church recognize that the Lord is in the midst and has come to greet his people."

Marana tha—Our Lord, come! This old Christian prayer has not been forgotten simply because of its antiquity. The real reason it is so seldom heard in the contemporary church is that we have lost touch with reality. In our state of confusion we have begun to act like lords, simultaneously losing our respect for other people. We also have begun to act like animals, thinking only of satisfaction of bodily desires. We are crazy! We must come to our right mind, and sin no more. And this we can do, for the "true and rational words"—words which can be understood and tested—of New Testament witness assure us that He is coming, and that we will be raised from the dead. □

A CALL TO DEPTH

DAVID ELKINS

El Cajon, California

For the past year I have been actively involved in trying to facilitate small "personal growth" groups. At various times I have seen displays of what I would call real depth. Often the people demonstrating this depth were people who knew little or none of the psychological theories or jargon. Yet they were able to feel their own depths and to respond to the deep feelings of other group members in a beautiful, sensitive, human way. These small group experiences, along with the writings of men like Paul Tillich, have impressed upon me what I believe to be the Biblical "call to depth."

"A call to depth" is initially and ultimately a call to "go into ourselves." Some of us who have tried this have encountered a strange and unfamiliar land—the land of "inner space." We sense within us mountains with no names, forests rising into the sunlight, murky swamps shrouded in darkness. We sometimes experience nameless emotions, complicated cross-currents of sensations, and intricate webs of undecipherable feelings. One who "goes into himself" becomes impressed with the inadequacy of our language to designate and distinguish the myriad array of "things" and "non-things" encountered there. For some the journey into the depths is full of excitement and adventure. For others it is a journey of fear and reluctance. For most of us perhaps it is a combination of the two.

But whether dreaded or anticipated, I am coming to believe that a Christian is one called to make this journey into his depths. The Biblical references to meditation, prayer, fasting, communing, etc., are not foreign to us. But the depth experience they were designed to facilitate may be. The human depths out of which God spoke through Solomon in *Ecclesiastes*, Job in his book, David in the *Psalms*, and Paul in *Romans* are known to most of us. In fact our Scriptures are replete with the stories and words of men who journeyed into the human depths of meaning and existence.

But roads of meditation, prayer, retreat, etc., which have led others to the depths, can become ineffectual for us. We can bend them into circular drives which bring us back where we started. Or we can so glaze these roads with the ice of ritualism and familiarity that they become unusable and impassable. Too, and more sympathetically, the solitary nature of these "unbeaten paths" into our depths can engender such loneliness within us that we give up, returning to the more familiar and crowded freeways that criss-cross the surface of our lives.

Prophets, poets, artists, philosophers, priests—all creative men and women who have touched and deepened our humanity—have found themselves and their gifts in the depths. Perhaps this encourages those who admire and want to imbibe the prophetic

spirit. Yet it may equally discourage those who see themselves as entirely inadequate to be creative influencers of men. Reluctant prophets, men with deep feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness, are well known in the Scriptures. Yet, without exception, these were the truly deep men of their times—the men who, through suffering and scorn, spoke their tragic truths and pointed to the only hope for their people.

But reluctance, in order to be seen positively, has to be faced and dealt with. The fear of looking deep within ourselves is real. Our reluctance can be an escape route from, instead of an entrance-way into, our depths. Specifically, quite often the idea is expressed that: "My education is limited. Do not ask me to go into deep things; for I cannot." The following words from Paul Tillich seem to me an apt response to this common feeling:

... the mark of real depth is simplicity. If you should say, "This is too profound for me; I cannot grasp it," you are self-deceptive. For you ought to know that nothing of real importance is too profound for anyone. It is not because it is too profound, but rather because it is too uncomfortable, that you shy away from the truth. Let us not confuse the sophisticated things with the deep things of life. The sophisticated things do not concern us ultimately and it does not matter whether we understand them or not. But the deep things must concern us always, because it matters infinitely whether we are grasped by them or not.*

Running somewhat parallel to the above escape route is another—the tendency to make conveniently shallow that which is uncomfortably deep. How often have we dealt superficially with such deep Biblical words as "sin," "grace," "love." To oversimplify is

to escape the depths and to live on the surface. Oversimplification allows us to avoid having to live with uncomfortable ambiguities and fragmentary knowledge. It lets us escape the suffering and turmoil of uncertainty and doubt. But while it insulates us from these discomforts, it equally deprives us of the rich and exhilarating experience of new insights, of new depths of feeling and understanding, and of inward life-changing transformations.

I am aware that some readers may be experiencing the disturbing feeling that in this article I have departed from theology and have taken an excursion into humanistic psychology. If so, then our communication is not complete. I have written of the depths of "inner space" because I believe that it is precisely there that we can encounter the living God, rather than in "outer space." (Remember the popularized comment of the Russian cosmonaut that he did not see God "out there"?) In Acts 17 Paul assured the Athenians that God is "not far" from any of us. In fact Paul went so far as to put his own stamp on a bit of contemporary philosophy which said, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." For me, the journey into my *being* is a journey toward the Author of *all* being and existence.

Christians are under a "call to depth." It is a frightening call, but it is also an imperative call. Those of us who answer this call will find in our depths both the riddle and the meaning of our lives. We will discover the paradox of our estrangement from, yet commonality with, other men. And there, in the deepest parts, we will encounter God—experiencing through that encounter the fear that breaks us and the grace that puts us back together. □

*Tillich, Paul, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 60.

A Question About Biblical Interpretation

BOB WILLIAMS

Nacogdoches, Texas

Cecil May and Norman Parks have reached an impasse that is known in the Southwestern colloquial speech as a Mexican Standoff. For those sheltered souls who have been unaware of the debate, some *Integrity* articles opined that women were a neglected resource within the church. Cecil May responded with "proof texts" that showed feminine silence was a "direct command." Norman Parks disallowed May's evaluation of the passage on the ground it was a "custom of the time" and countered with an "approved apostolic example" and a dash of "necessary inference." The only recourses from that confrontation were post hoc appeals to Greek and polite insinuations on the opposition's respect for "The Authority of the Scriptures." If the matter were allowed to degenerate further (which hopefully all involved are too mature to allow) it could become a textbook case of Church of Christ divisiveness, with each "position" quickly "disfellowshipping" the other.

Quotation marks have not been used in the above paragraph simply to follow brotherhood tradition (although there is ample precedent). The quotations set off terms that are crucial to the debate. As an aside, one might note that *none* of these terms is quoted from Scripture—but then neither are other precious phrases we use such as "speak where the Bible speaks" or "Bible names for Bible things."

Certainly a little reflection on the matter is overdue. Although we may sympathize with the saintly but naive sister who protests that she "doesn't interpret, but only reads what it says," such a claim, for her or us, is spurious.

Nor does this writer have a solution all neatly packaged and priced. The matter of interpretation bothered the apostle Peter (2 Peter 3:16). Brilliant minds like Origen, Aquinas, Luther and Campbell have all struggled with it less successfully than their effort, intelligence and sincerity might seem to warrant.

In the case of Norman Parks and Cecil May we have two erudite and sincere men. The old frontier libel that assumes that any disagreement must be the result of ignorance or dishonesty just will not fit the case.

It is true that both men are somewhat subjective. To some extent at least, each comes to the Bible with his preconceived belief fairly well formed, looking primarily for support for his position. Such a statement is not an indictment of either or both, for both *attempt* objectivity. Rather it is a recognition that our brothers are human. They are redeemed, reconciled, justified, sincere children of God—but still fallible and human.

Both men approach the Scripture with some elements in common. Obviously from

their writings both still come with a tripartite approach common to their heritage—the "command," "example," "inference" approach mentioned earlier.

Both men approach the Scripture with some elements vastly different. Different backgrounds, temperaments, theories of inspiration and ideas of canon color their thinking. On what basis is one inherently or objectively better than the other? Our present situation provides none. Both men (at least in theory) reject any sort of pope or council to mediate or adjudicate their disagreement, and an appeal to Scripture begs the issue, for the question arises over interpretation. Both common sense and a commonly accepted interpretation of Romans 14, Colossians 3:12-15 and parallel passages determine that a cease fire and a little loving forbearance are in order. That (hopefully—unless the matter involves music, classes, cups, the millennium or the indwelling Spirit or such like) gives a pragmatic conclusion to the argument, but leaves the issue unsettled. Can we go any farther? Who knows. At least we can ask some germane questions.

Perhaps in every controversy the first question should be: "How important is it?" Does it strike a strange note that in 1906 and following many churches of Christ violated what they themselves regarded as a "direct command" (1 Cor. 6:1-8) in order to sue others over an *interpretation* of the *silence* of the Scriptures? Perhaps at times brothers may prefer, for pragmatic reasons, to meet separately, but should controversy be encouraged, publicized and even broadcast?

And a second question follows: "If such-and-such a question were so important, why was the Holy Spirit so negligent in canonical instruction that he left the matter undefined enough that there is no clear 'thus saith the

Lord'?" Within the history of the Restoration Movement at least, there has never been a division over a "thus saith the Lord." Is not the existence of a dispute itself evidence that the matter is not too clearly defined in Scripture?

If we accept the traditional Restoration tripartite approach, then who is to determine what is a "direct command" and what is a "custom of the time"? This is an old question, and the traditional examples such as footwashing (Jn. 13:12-18) and the holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14) are equally familiar but the question is as valid as ever. Who is to determine what is approved and what is not? (And will someone please explain what a *necessary* inference is? In all candor, that has always seemed like a contradiction in terms!)

Is there not a better, more objective, more irenic approach to interpretation? □

THE WORTH OF WORSHIP

It's quiet now.
I've listened to the noise of my life,
And once again I've remembered Jesus.
I've remembered His cup and His loaf,
And my weakness and His love,
And His death and His burial,
And His resurrection,
And most of all His promise.
I know the peace,
I know the love,
I know the joy.
And you ask me,
Was it worth it?

—Richard Thornton

WOMEN and the ASSEMBLY

MICHAEL HALL

Jeffersonville, Indiana

“The assembly” is a very important and basic part of Christianity. The un-assembled assembly (church) *assembles* on the Victory Day (Sunday) in celebration of our Lord’s resurrected life! The purpose of the assembly is praise, mutual edification, spiritual strengthening and enlightenment. It’s a time for intimate sharing, study and praise. So important and vital to our spiritual lives is this day that the Bible strongly urges us not to “forsake the assembling of ourselves together . . .” but to “exhort one another . . . and consider one another to provoke unto love and good works” (Heb. 10:23-25).

The assembly is that time “when ye come together in the church” (1 Cor. 11:18). The phrase “in the church” literally means “in the assembly”—a formal gathering of the “called out assembly.” It is a time for sharing our spiritual lives together, a ministry much neglected in most of our assemblies (1 Cor. 14:26).

Presently there is a controversial issue among us as to **the role of Christian women in the assembly and church life**. Perhaps the issue is made worse because of the lack of distinction between “in the assembly” and “in church life.” That the women have a very vital, active and essential part in the ministry is clear from the pages of the N.T.

Witness Priscilla (Acts 18), the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), the ladies of 1 Cor. 11:5, Euodias and Syntyche (Phil. 4:3), and Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2). These women were actively involved in the ministries of prophecy, prayer, proclamation and service. But these ministries were not fulfilled in the worship assemblies!

There are two primary passages that restrict our women from leadership roles in the worship assembly. “If any man *speaks* in a foreign language, let it be by two or at the most by three and that by course, and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him *keep silence* in the church [assembly] . . . Let the prophets *speaks* two or three. . . . For ye may all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be comforted. . . . Let your women *keep silence* in the churches [assemblies]; for it is not permitted unto them to *speaks* . . . for it is a shame for women to *speaks* in the church [assembly]” (1 Cor. 14:27-35). In the assembly, then, the women are limited from “speaking”; that is, preaching.

In 1 Timothy 2 Paul speaks concerning the need for *holiness* in assembly worship. The men are first addressed. The males (Greek: *aner*) are to lead the prayers with “holy hands, without wrath and doubting.” Those leading assembly worship must be spiritually pure.

The women are then addressed. As the men must prepare for assembly worship, so must the ladies. “In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel . . .” (v. 9). It’s illogical to suggest that this verse is not speaking about the assembly *because* it would allow the ladies to dress immodestly when not in the assembly! It does not *imply* such, any more than verse 8 would imply that the men can be full of wrath and doubt outside of the assembly.

The verse is simply speaking of the need for purity and spiritual preparation of the ladies for assembly worship.

The ladies are then to dress spiritually pure for worship. Their emphasis should be not on their physical garments but the spiritual adorning of godliness and good works (vv. 9-10). “Let the women learn in silence with all subjection.” The assembly is a place for learning. “But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (vv. 11-12). The woman is not to teach in the assembly. She has teaching ministries elsewhere.

And why this restriction? “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith, charity and holiness with sobriety” (vv. 13-15). Leadership positions in the assembly belong to the men because of the physiological and temperamental differences between men and women. The man is better qualified for that task. Eve’s emotional nature made it easy for the devil to deceive her. Adam was not deceived; he sinned wilfully! He sinned with his eyes open. The woman is more effective in her ministry with children. She has more patience, can show more love, and is more sensitive to their needs than a man. The next verse challenges the men, not the women, to desire the leadership roles (3:1ff.).

The issue as to the role of our women breaks down into two major areas: her role in the assembly, and her role out of the assembly. *In* the assembly she is limited from “speaking” and taking leadership positions (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:9-12). Of course, ushering, helping distribute the communion, etc., are not “speaking” leadership roles. Are they? And *out of* the assembly our

women can follow the example of the N.T. ladies, by being involved in ministries of prophecy, prayer or proclamation (1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 21:9; 8:3-5).

If this was not the case, then no Christian woman could teach in a Bible class! But inasmuch as Bible classes are private study groups and not an assembly, they can teach (Tit. 2:3-5). Furthermore, we should come to grips with the fact that small devotional groups in prayer or sharing are not “assemblies.” The rules of 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 don’t apply to non-assembly groups. Let’s honestly confront 1 Cor. 11:5 and Acts 21:9. For then we will realize that N.T. Christian women did prophesy to somebody somewhere and did lead somebody in prayer *somewhere*! Otherwise, if women are forbidden to join in or lead in prayer *everywhere*, home devotionals of husbands and wives must cease. Evidently women did not and cannot lead in prayer in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:34-35), but they did lead somewhere. So it must have been to a small group (of either Christians or non-Christians) that was not considered the assembly. Women are not second class citizens; they only have different ministries and realms of ministry. Let’s let them minister where they can. It is wrong to apply the rules of public worship to areas of non-assembly groups.

I’m not a liberal, nor the son of a liberal. But a lot of freshness and originality is being labeled “liberalism.” Liberalism is indeed a threat among us, for it seeks to reject Bible authority and forget the restoration principle. But traditionalism is likewise a threat to the restoration heritage that would plunge us into a stagnate lake of dogmatism. Just because a truth is unfamiliar, or a method new, doesn’t make it wrong. The challenge of this age is for us to be *neither anti nor liberal*—just the people of Jesus! □

Letters

The Value of Journals

When my wife and I were students at Harding College in Searcy, Ark., we got an opportunity to read (and profit from) your fine little journal. Now we are some 3000 miles from home, creating our own, and feelin' lonely. As I'm sure you're aware, there exists in our brotherhood a complete spectrum of religious thinking. We seem to have landed in the "gray" frequency. Around here it seems the few small congregations that exist do so solely on the theology imported from Nashville and Texas, in the form of brotherhood journals and preacher-schoolers.

The point is—we're despondent, whether our fault or not—and need encouragement. Journals like yours, *Mission*, etc., where at least there is some attempt made to penetrate below shallow "unity in conformity" to perhaps a greater Unity, offer a pat on the back, or a thoughtful word that says, "These people think, yet still believe." That's what we need. A faith built on something *more* than bland sermons. But this is something experiential, and as yet I've encountered that kind of faith only occasionally, and in no great depth. The closest we come to the recognition of a truly more universal church, a body of believers built on Him, is through the efforts of editors of magazines such as yours. Fresh air in a stagnate house.

NAME WITHHELD

Integrity in Complaining

Re: Allen Holden, Jr., "On Negativism." *Right on!* He said most beautifully what I would have said had the letter been from me except that he probably said it much better than I since I have a "bad" habit of letting it all hang out.

Perhaps the problem comes from the lack of real interest in the *total* issue and the failure of persons to express themselves on the counterside of the matter so as to expand or magnify the idea so that we might come to a better or even the real concept of the "issue."

Do not let *Integrity* become the sounding board of the discontents. As much as I dislike saying it, your pages are being filled much too often with the complaints of the dissatisfied.

Complaints are fine and acceptable when the possible solution is provided with said complaint. They are just as acceptable and sought when those presenting them seek answers to their complaints.

Complaining, *just to complain or sound off*, is the same as sowing discord among brothers. Well done, Allen Holden, Jr.
Irwin, Pennsylvania CHESTER S. PERHACS

Commending Dr. Jones

I praise the Lord for your ministry in print—and feel a fellowship within the confines of the pages with the thoughts shared by your authors. The September article by Dr. Jones fed my Spirit as I read through and thrilled to see his statements put into words, thoughts and ideas I am unable to express. He is so *precious* in the Lord.
Southfield, Michigan CAROLYN MONTGOMERY

More Thoughts on Homosexuality

Why did I read that †+!%&* article? I knew better. I'd had a pretty good day at work and was in a reasonably good frame of mind. In the mail was my copy of *Integrity* which I put on the bottom until I read the important stuff (like a flyer from Western Auto).

Having worked my way through the stack and having no viable alternative, I scanned the index. The word "homosexuality" sorta jumped up at me (probably from scanning pocket novels for the "good parts"). There was no way I could put the little book down now, so I read the full title: "God's Stand on Homosexuality."

It wasn't too late to salvage my peaceful (relatively) state of mind—I could just put the little book down, make me a scotch and water, and watch TV for a while—but I didn't.

It was as though a masochistic spirit had taken "aholt" of my senses. Knowing within reason what I was going to find, I turned to page 42 anyway, all the time feeling the anger and old memories rising inside. There it was again—that red flag. "God's stand" on something. Not "my understanding" or

even "my understanding of God's view" or even "God's stand on such and such for *me*."

I try (usually unsuccessfully) not to pre-judge. My experience told me that that kind of a title could only denote a particular type of Church-of-Christ that I'd just as soon forget—the one who has the definitive answer to every question asked or unasked by religious people everywhere (and it's only coincidence that every one of these answers has been espoused by the *Gospel Advocate* over the years).

"You're being unkind," I admonished myself. "You could easily be wrong." "If that's true, why would it be in *Integrity*?" "Maybe this lady is trying to make a point about dogmatism." (I really talk to myself when I talk to myself.) All of this rationalization served to draw me into the article like a moth into a flame.

After playing Nave's Topical, she dismisses homosexuality-is-a-sickness with a wave of her hand—this very hand!

She told me—surprise, surprise—that God would forgive sicknesses and/or mental retardation, but forgot to include all the many proof-texts for that position.

She also makes the strong statement that "homosexuality can be controlled." How does she know? Has God done that for her? What *has* God done for her? Has she ceased overeating? Losing her temper? Judging her brother?

Are there any *possible* mitigating circumstances in homosexuality? Does God judge the same those who choose it (as many of the Greeks did) and those who anguish over it? I wonder.

No, I'm not gay—it's one of the very few sins in this world of which I have not been guilty. But I wrestle unsuccessfully with other problems in my life that are just as bad—maybe worse. I am utterly dependent on the grace of God and, since that's true, can ill-afford to withhold it from *anyone* else.

NAME WITHHELD

I appreciated Penny Holden's Biblical statements on homosexuality. I agree in a sense that if it is a sin, it is well condemned among the other misdemeanors and felonies.

However, as a practicing internist I find it extremely difficult to exclude its being an illness since I've had a pathetic number of homosexual Christians pour out their story(s) of perverse desire

having its onset in the innocent fours and fives and proceeding inexorably to permanent fixation by adolescent or adult years. God's grace rarely (if ever) changes their basic orientation, but thank God, He does change their *actions* and my only solace to my patients is God's answer to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Homosexuality is a hush-hush subject in Biblical, Restoration circles. I've not heard a single well-thrusted thought on the subject issuing from one of "our" sources. I'm sorry I cannot accept pontifical answers when they don't jibe with the data.

I hope to hear and read very thoughtful responses on this subject.

NAME WITHHELD

NOTICE

Unexpected changes in our publication schedule permit only a brief announcement of the following coming events:

The Hartford Forum—Dec. 27-28—will be held this year in the huge restaurant at Lewis and Clark Motor Lodge, East Alton, Illinois. Make reservations in advance (the prices are reasonable). For more information, contact Berdell McCann, 127 Donna Drive, Hartford, Illinois 62048; telephone 618/254-6454. The role and function of women in the church will be a topic of discussion. My assignment is: "Is the Organization of Local Congregations Cultural or Revelational in Origin?" I hope to see many of you there.

The ACC Preachers Workshop will be Jan. 7-9. Among several interesting features will be a paper on "Woman's Place in Church Activity" by Norman Parks, with reactions by Robert Marshall and Cecil May, Jr. For information and registration forms, write: Preachers Workshop, ACC Station Box 7868, Abilene, Texas 79601. —HGL