

Integrity

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A CHRISTIAN'S VIEWPOINT

ELTON ABERNATHY*

San Marcos, Texas

*After Maurice Weed conceived the idea of putting on paper a brief statement reflecting the views of the Holland Street Church of Christ, he and I wrote a draft of the following and laid it out for several weeks discussion by the membership. To a large extent this revised version represents the viewpoint of members of this congregation.

—ELTON ABERNATHY

Religion is so uniquely personal that it is not easy to discuss in any collective sense. Doubtful it is that any two persons, provided they feel privileged to think freely, will agree in every respect regarding things divine. Individuals' sensory perceptions and their sub-conscious and conscious response to stimuli almost guarantee that the attitudes they develop and the beliefs they hold will be distinctively their own. Therefore the phraseology used as a title for this paper.

Yet this is not intended as a personal confessional or creed. Rather it pretends to describe, in general terms, a posture taken by an increasing number of individuals in the so-called "Christian World"—in some cases by most of the members of entire congregations. The author's experience with one such congregation perhaps lends a collective or communal aura to what otherwise could only be a purely personal statement.

What, then, does the writer at this time believe regarding certain important elements of the Christian religion? Insofar as words can be manipulated to express a complex melange of thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, that view is here set down. Because numerous other persons are in accord with much that will be said, the pronoun "we" rather than "I" will normally be employed.

THE BIBLE

The Bible is the all time best seller of any book ever published. It is an incredibly complex collection of literature produced out of the religious experience of Jews and non-Jews over a span of more than twelve centuries. The collection includes theology, history, prophecy, doctrinal treatises, protest, private letters, bits of hymnody, and love songs. That all these diverse materials were preserved and collected was not, in our view, purely by chance. Instead we believe that Divinity had a hand in guiding the individuals and groups that saved, copied, translated and assembled the Bible. We believe that God inspired the writing, preservation, and collection of the Holy Scriptures. We are not disturbed when scholars conclude that the formulation of this remarkable book was far more complicated than our small minds had previously supposed. Nor does it unsettle our faith when scientists find evidence that the creation of the physical universe was more complex than previously thought. The God we worship is so great that he could inspire the production of a book or create a universe in any way whatever.

The remarkable diversity of the Bible provides clues to the nature of a remarkable God, which may well offer a clue to the nature of God's work in history. The Bible is alive and concerned in the world today. From it come inspiration and ideas to help those who try to do God's will on earth.

We strongly affirm that the Bible should be open to each individual. We reject the

assumption that any pope, church council, preacher, college professor, editor, or church elder may tell any person how he must interpret any portion of Scripture. We argue that the slogan "No Creed but Christ" should be taken seriously, and that each individual has the freedom and the responsibility of interpreting the Bible to the best of his ability. The Church existed and prospered for 200 years before the New Testament as presently known was accumulated; therefore, Christians may very well be pleasing to God without understanding of or complete agreement on the exact meaning of every verse.

The Bible is not, in our judgment, a book of rules. Attempts to substitute a "law of Jesus" for a "law of Moses" have resulted in division rather than unity. They have, furthermore, served to narrowly restrict the flow of God's grace through the Church. God's love for human beings is no more expressed through a manual of rules than could hunger be assuaged by stones. We doubt that such passages as Acts 20:7 ("On the first day of the week when we were assembled to break bread . . .") and 1 Cor. 16:2 ("On the first day of the week, let everyone lay by in store as he has been prospered . . .") should be any more used for legalistic formulations than 1 Thess. 5:26 ("Salute all your brethren with a holy kiss") or John 13:5 ("Ye ought also to wash one another's feet"). In fact, we question the whole method, often used, of looking upon the Bible as a compilation of "commands, approved examples, and necessary inferences." We regard the Bible as a source of principles rather than a rule book, and the Gospel as good news about Jesus, not a series of commands to be obeyed.

Since the Bible was written over a period of many centuries, in languages other than English, and among cultures other than American, we applaud the work of historical,

linguistic, and cultural scholars. Their efforts to discover exactly what was said, by whom it was said, to whom it was addressed, and under what conditions or in relation to what problems it was spoken can do much to help us apply God's eternal principles as we live in twentieth century America. Even when their conclusions run counter to established beliefs and traditions, we expect our preachers and teachers to exercise intellectual integrity in relating such findings to us and explaining how they were reached.

THE GOSPEL

The Greek word normally rendered "Gospel" could be more properly translated as "Good News." That Good News is really what assures beleaguered men that the ultimate price of their salvation has been paid. They need only accept their deliverance. Having done so, they can be expected to exhibit new, Spirit-filled lives. Unfortunately this happy condition has often not resulted. Many who have been at pains to "obey the Gospel" have become neither more loving nor happier. Congregations of such persons may exhibit few if any of the "fruits of the Spirit." Neuroses, apathy, and concern with self characterize many who were supposed to have received the Holy Spirit.

Although it would be presumptuous to attempt to assess blame for this depressing condition, we cannot but wonder if at least in part it may be related to the general tone of much of our teaching and preaching. Paul, Peter, Stephen, and John radiated joy and excitement; many present-day speakers and writers about religion are more apt to exhibit bitterness, negativism, and meanness of spirit. So-called "Gospel" sermons too often detail rigid commands to be precisely obeyed, to the almost complete exclusion

of wonderful news about Jesus of Nazareth. So much attention is paid to another's alleged errors of Biblical interpretation that there is little time to shed the light of Jesus in the community. Constant quoting of "proof texts" may tend to discourage such pertinent questions as "How can I show people that I really love them?" or "Do I have a wholly new relationship to God?"

In our judgment, "being right" includes "putting things in right perspective." We try to stress the real nature of a spiritual life, with less attention to any allegedly "correct" formula for entering into it. If we interpret the New Testament correctly, Jesus and Paul followed a like course when they roundly condemned pious Pharisees and sick legalists for trying to quench the fires of grace as fast as they could light them.

THE CHURCH

We accept the church as the "Body of Christ," a community of Christians to which God adds all who become Christians. We assume that he alone keeps the roll, which we assuredly do not. We do not care to imitate those disciples who told Jesus that they had rebuked certain persons they found preaching his name because "they were not of us." We do not hesitate to call "Christian" anyone anywhere who confesses faith in Christ and tries to do his will, even though we might disagree with him regarding certain articles of his faith and practice. Speaking of him as "Christian" and addressing him as our brother does not imply that we approve of everything he believes and does; for it is doubtful if any one of us is in complete agreement on everything with any other person on earth. Referring to him as our brother simply means that we applaud the fact that here is another human being who is attempting to follow our Lord.

WORSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Virtually every social group on earth has evolved patterns of worship of the unknown, to which supernatural powers are almost always ascribed. In certain cultures such practices included human sacrifice, in others ritualistic fornication, and in still others self-torture. Many have used the beating of drums, rhythmic chanting, and ritual dances. The Judeo-Christian tradition adjoined human sacrifice, fornication, self-torture, and most forms of witchcraft; but apparently approved a wide diversity of outlets for expressing devotion to God.

The New Testament, beyond the injunction that the spirit be properly attuned and that services be "decent and in order," has little to say about the form of public worship. Had it been otherwise—had God specified that worship consist of a certain number of "gospel songs," an anthem, two prayers, a responsive reading, and a doxology—if such precise instructions regarding the form and content of worship had been given, it would be obligatory on Christians to attempt to follow it. But, in fact, God did not do so.

It seems to us, therefore, that those who lead the followers of Christ in 20th century public worship should concern themselves with forms and practices most in tune with the feelings of 20th century people. Surely this would not mean automatic discarding of hymns, prayers, and other forms that have been used for fifteen centuries or more; for their very longevity is indicative that they must have been meaningful to many people. Yet we dare to experiment with new modes which might allow our reverential feelings toward God and one another to be better expressed. The Bible seems to indicate that God has a remarkable capacity to approve diverse ways in which humble men might express devotion to him.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION

We believe that God has commissioned his Church to be so involved in the world that people it touches will become eager listeners to and partakers of the Good News about Christ. We further believe that proclaiming Jesus through our lives as well as our words, giving of ourselves, can bring meaning to others' lives.

How this mission should be carried out is, in our judgment, left to the discretion of each generation of Christians. In the first century preachers shouted from hillsides; today we are blessed with electronic instruments which allow the voice to be carried ten thousand miles. In the first century, Scriptures were laboriously copied on the skins of animals; today a thousand copies may be made in a matter of minutes. In the first century, illness was treated by rubbing the patient with olive oil; today we have hundreds of other treatments as well. In the first century, indigent persons begged alms on the street; today nursing homes and social security change the nature of our charitable efforts but in no way absolve us of our responsibilities to love others as we do ourselves. We assume that God expects Christians in America in the Seventies to witness his Good News in whatever ways our judgment tells us are best. We believe that neither fear of making mistakes, nor laziness, nor selfishness should keep us from fulfilling our mission of carrying the Good News of Jesus, edifying our fellows in the faith, and doing good to all men.

THE CHURCH'S DOCTRINE

Too often the term "doctrine," which normally means "teaching," has been used solely in reference to a certain body of commands or laws. Confidently it is asserted that any person is required to entertain cer-

tain beliefs and do certain things if he is to cherish any hope of forgiveness. This we would not deny, because we would not risk ignoring a command of God. Yet we find difficulty in equating constant emphasis on commands to be obeyed with Paul's insistence that law is replaced in the New Covenant by grace. The Cross, in our judgment, did not merely signify the substitution of a new code of laws for an old. We think that the New Testament is much more than a mere rule book through which one should search diligently for precedents and examples of laws to be obeyed.

As we understand the teaching of Jesus and his disciples, it points to a whole new way of relating to God. Peter spoke of those who were baptized receiving "the gift of the Holy Spirit." Paul referred to rising from baptism to "walk in newness of life." He drew a vivid contrast between the "carnal man" who follows the normal course of existence and the "man filled with the Spirit" who lives on a different plane. "Newness of life" for those "born of the Spirit" is no small thing. The wealth of "riches in Christ" is so all-embracing that there is little place for attention to any system of rules and laws. Through Jesus Christ, God the Father establishes a spiritual relationship with his creature Man. Our approach to "doctrine" or "teaching" is to stress this link with Divinity to the extent that reference to commands and precepts can be minimized.

MORALITY, CUSTOMS, AND MORES

We recognize that the principles of personal morality are immutable and inflexible, ordained by God for the well being of man upon earth. We assume that honesty and integrity are as much a part of God's way in the twentieth century A.D. as they were in the first century or the twentieth century

B.C. Murder, covetousness, and licentiousness are, by their very nature, contrary to the will of a righteous God.

On the other hand, customs and mores are in a continuous process of change. Perhaps this evolutionary process, which to a greater or lesser extent affects all cultures, is nowhere more evident than in America. Even one normal lifetime is sufficient to see hundreds of old ideas and habits discarded and new ones introduced. The attempt of older persons to freeze the mores of their youth onto their children is responsible for much of the notorious "generation gap."

Since customs and principles are confused in the thinking of many people, the application of God-ordained moral principles to contemporary society is no easy task. Who is to say that the mini-skirt or bikini is less moral than was the mid-calf skirt fifty years ago, when a woman who even exposed her ankle was considered indecent? Who is to say that in a capitalist society based on credit, it is usury to charge the prevailing interest for money loaned to another?

We believe that each person must exercise his God-given personal judgment in making thousands of ethical decisions. We would not dare to dictate what Christian brothers should eat or drink, nor how they should spend their money for amusement. We set up no authoritarian regime in God's Church, taking away the responsibility for making decisions from those trying to become full grown in Christ. To do so, we fear, would insure that they remain spiritual pygmies.

This does not in any sense mean that we condone or approve immoral conduct or attitudes. It rather indicates that we expect to teach moral principles, while insisting that each individual, in the light of his understanding and internal motivations, make his own decisions. Had this course been fol-

lowed by the Pharisees they would not have condemned Jesus for associating with tax collectors and prostitutes. Had it been followed in more recent times, the pulpit in American churches would not have been used for diatribes against card playing, short dresses, movies, and social dancing.

In our judgment the question, "Does your church let you drink (or smoke, or gamble, or attend horse races)?" ought never to be asked. If perchance it is asked of a well-informed Christian, he might well answer, "I make my own decisions. The church with which I worship teaches the Good News about Jesus Christ."

Naturally there will be times when we, as Christian parents, teachers, and people with some experience in trying to live godly lives in a secular society, will voice our judgments. Just as we would be alert to warn either a child or an adult of the physical danger of rattlesnakes or poison ivy, so we do not hesitate to point out the spiritual hazards of associating with certain persons or engaging in certain practices. If experience, observation, or our understanding of God's Word has taught us that following a particular course often leads to spiritual disaster we would be impelled by love to warn others of the danger. Yet final judgments must be made by every individual, for each separate person is accountable by himself to God for the way he meets life's challenges.

To reiterate, we believe that specific injunctions sent by Biblical letter writers to pastoral peoples of semi-civilized Palestine, or to semi-pagan inhabitants of Corinth or Rome, are hardly applicable today either in city ghetto or country club. But the principles on which those guidelines were based are eternal, as applicable now as then. It is no longer necessary to wash the visitor's sandle-clod feet, hot and dirty from a desert

journey by foot. Nor is it necessary that a woman have her head covered as proof that she is honorable. But temperance, godliness, and brotherly love are principles which each individual should apply in his own effort toward spiritual maturity.

Obvious risks are involved in allowing people to make their own moral and ethical decisions. Even the apostle Paul found that because he had so persistently taught the grace of God, some individuals took it as a license to sin. Likewise, today, men may choose badly. But unless they have the God-given right to choose freely, they are slaves in an autocracy. We have confidence that the Good News about Jesus has so much power to change people that their choices will become better as they become more mature in the practice of Christianity.

DIFFERING OPINIONS

We are therefore dedicated to the principle that every man is free to determine how he will serve his God. There will be differences in the interpretation of certain passages of Scripture, and different judgments regarding practices and policies to be pursued. We want no "closed system" of doctrine bound upon ourselves or others. We assume that "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" refers to faith in the life-giving Christ rather than in a new formulation of ordinances and regulations. We have no intention of telling others exactly how the faith is to be applied in their lives.

We hope to preserve in the Lord's Church an atmosphere of openness, honesty, and love. We make every effort to avoid causing fear or a feeling of intimidation as we study and worship together. We expect each individual to feel free to explore any avenue, raise any question, or express any opinion, even when his conclusions may be at wide

variance from our own ideas or traditions. Living Christianity, we believe, implies a condition in which young and old, strong and weak, and informed and ignorant walk together, mirroring in their diversity the diversity of God's creation. The reflection of his love may thus be magnified among us and to those around us.

In this paper, we thus try to explain the essence of our understanding of Christianity. The casual visitor at one of our services who participates with us in singing, praying, reading the Holy Scriptures, and partaking of the Lord's Supper may observe few differences from what he would see in other fellowships. Only after he has spent some time with us, taking part in discussions and observing what is said and done, will he begin to be aware of approaches, attitudes, and underlying concepts of freedom, dedication, and love, which, by report, are not as common in the religious world as one could hope.

Let us conclude with an analogy. To a man standing on the shore, a river seems to be passing by. To a man in a boat floating with the current, the shore seems to be passing. Each sees reality from his own point of view. Likewise, a religious man who is a theological scholar in Greek, Hebrew, and ancient culture views the Bible from a different vantage point than that occupied by the barely literate manual laborer who haltingly reads a chapter of the King James text before he bows his head in prayer. Both men are honest, kind, and devout. Despite their utterly different understanding of God's Word, they may both lie down to sleep justified in the eyes of the Lord. God creates men neither alike nor equal. Whatever their degree of understanding, we assume that all men who accept the Good News of Christ and try to serve God are our brothers. □

A NOTE TO MARCUS

JOHN SMITH

Cupertino, California

Brother, I read your attempt to spill yourself to us and I feel a kinship to you as strong as if we had been soul brothers of close companionship. Your questions are my questions. I offer you *no* answers because there is a very real sense in which there are no answers! Dostoevski said, "There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings." May I suggest to you that your suffering is an integral part of your service! That to live with doubt is your greatest expression of faith! I believe! But God bears with my unbelief.

Brother, there is no quick answer. I too am over the hill. I have lived with doubt and fear and self-recrimination and the inner shame and dread of known hypocrisy. I have shouted victory on the outside and cried in my soul.

Brother, I have no answer for you but this: I love you. And what you lack just might be loving yourself—hypocrisy, doubts, questions and all, as God loves you. I pray that you will be worthy of your sufferings and pain and, in the middle of all that, be able to say, "I have every confidence in you, Father. Just please be patient with me, because I don't understand what you're doing."

Job asks the same questions as you and I have asked (when they're boiled down), and God *never* answers those questions. He

simply says to Job, "Where were you when I made all these things?" You know, a guy could get to thinking about that and forget a lot of his troubles!

May God smile where you are;
May his love and peace fill your heart.
A brother.

The tortured brain could not reply.
He prayed in vain, in vain he cried.

"Was it for this," the question burst,
To live confused, pointless, accursed?

"Was it for this"—his mother's pain,
His father's sweat and blood for gain?

To seek, to plead, to pray, to wrest,
In one determined life of quest?

"For what?" A time to think and wonder
why

Despair must come, when comes to die
The man.

The man who plundered, robbed, deceived
His friend, who loved him, and believed
Him better.

The man who made no time for friends,
For sons or daughters, till he ends
In grief.

In grief for time forever gone,
For love, for soul, now left alone,
In tears. □

FROM THE EDITOR

SOME PERSONAL NOTES

First I must make an installment on a great debt by **thanking the many** individuals and churches who prayed for my recovery from illness and encouraged me with their letters. I really would like to respond to all of them personally, but that does not seem possible for now. One could hardly expect more love than I have received from the brothers and sisters with whom I intimately associate. Obviously they have been with the Lord, who has held me up in some real crises during the past year. He is a friend whom I know much better as a consequence. Your prayers have had great power in their effects (just as James promised). I am convinced that God wants our work to continue and that he will see that all obstacles are overcome.

A minor problem we have recently faced is **the paper shortage**. Like other publications, we may have to settle for substitutes and delayed orders—and certainly increased prices—but these are minor irritations.

Although the last part of December is usually our best time for **contributions from readers**, they were down this year (possibly because of uncertainty about our future). But now that it appears we will be able to continue without interruption, we expect this situation to improve. We praise the Lord that at the last minute enough came in to pay our outstanding bills.

The energy crisis has left a lot of people with the corners of their mouths set at 20 minutes past 8. Since the area in which I live depends heavily on the sale of "gas-guzzling dinosaurs," we are having massive unemployment. One blessing of this is the challenge it

brings to our Christian ministry. Since *enthusiasm* comes from an old Greek word meaning "inspiration by the god" (from *en + theos*), it could denote what we need—if we add the capital G. But perhaps we need an entirely new one which will have more Christian connotations. Since the Greek word for fish (*ichthus*, the letters of which stand for Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior) is so widely known today, the coining of *ichthusiasm* seems to fit our needs. This word implies the answer to loss of morale among our citizens. Ichthusiasm does not depend on happy physical conditions. People who know Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior, can face any crisis!

A new publication which will be of great interest to our readers is *Fellowship*, which is published quarterly by a group of concerned individuals from the Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches, and Churches of Christ. There are three editors: Leroy Garrett, Wilford F. Lown, and Robert Hayes Mulkey. It is very well done, and you should obtain a copy by writing to 1699 Court St., NE, Salem, Oregon 97301. The price is \$2 a year.

We sadly note that the beautiful brethren at Hartford and Carl Ketcherside have found it necessary to discontinue **the annual Hartford Forum**. My personal participation in this forum has been very rewarding, not only through hearing what others have said, but also by having my own understanding of the Bible tested by the learned brethren who attended. My last paper dealt with whether or not the Bible teaches a pattern of organization for the church today, and I especially welcomed the opportunity to have my views on this important topic examined by some real scholars. The Hartford Forum began 20 years ago, and it was a pioneer in efforts toward unity among our brethren. Hopefully another sponsor will be found.

This issue includes responses to some very hot topics. It is often said that articles on

women in the church should be written by women. I don't think that is necessarily so, but it is good to have the viewpoints of some thoughtful women in this issue. Incidentally our second printing of last year's special on this subject is now gone. Responses to the

articles on homosexuality have run the gamut. Surely it is not necessary to point out that our printing of the various responses *does not imply our endorsement* of views expressed. We have confidence in our readers' ability to think for themselves. □

REACTION RESPONSES ON WOMEN AND THE ASSEMBLY

CORRECTING THE RECORD

SARAH NELSON

Columbus, Ohio

It is good to see the continuing debate on the question of woman—her duties, rights, and privileges in the church—in the pages of *Integrity*.

Michael Hall (November/December) was moved to present what he felt was a clear and consistent case for the traditional viewpoint concerning this question. And he was willing to go one step further and point out that "ushering, helping distribute the communion, etc., are not 'speaking' leadership roles," which is consistent with what he had said in previous paragraphs. But even though he is consistent on the above point, he makes unwarranted assumptions in his interpretation of 1 Timothy, bringing into question the validity of his argument.

Brother Hall speaks of 1 Timothy as referring to "assembly worship." His basis for concluding that Paul is here speaking of "assembly worship" is that "men are first addressed"; and then, because of his basic "assembly" assumption, he moves on to say that "the males are to lead the prayers with 'holy hands, without wrath and doubting.'" Yet the verse speaks nowhere of "leading" but rather that they should "pray everywhere"—the main point being that they should pray, and *when* they prayed they were to do so without wrath and doubting. Turning to women, Paul continues the same train of thought: "in like manner." In like manner what? Could it be that he was saying that women also should pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting, with an

added injunction aimed toward their femininity: "that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, etc.?"

When are we—both men and women—going to stop our insidious generalizing concerning the supposed physiological and temperamental differences between men and women? There may be a certain basic frame of reference for each man or woman from which they survey their world and respond to it. However, such broad stereotyping as Brother Hall's assertions—

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. [Etc., etc.]—

are unjustified from either scripture or personal experience. One has only to bring to mind the cop-out of Adam when he said to God, "Don't blame me; it's this woman you gave me that caused the whole thing" (Gen. 3:12, personal paraphrase). Not exactly a shining example of "leadership qualities," would you say? Or Moses who excused himself from leadership because of a speech defect, or Barak who wouldn't wage a battle without a woman—Deborah the Judge and Prophetess of Israel (Judges 4).

When one uses the fall to "justify" a general male domination over womankind (as Brother Hall does), one does so at great risk to scriptural consistency and the personhood of women.

The context of Genesis 3 and of the fall is that as a result of a true *choice* of mankind (Adam and Eve; see Rom. 5:14 which places the transgression on Adam's head) there was a total and complete breakdown of perfect order. Before the fall there was no need for law. But then, because of the wrong exercise of their wills, Adam and Eve placed all of creation (including the material world—Rom. 8:23) in a state of degeneration or a descent into chaos. This is the record of history and the future expectations of science (Second Law of Thermodynamics). In this situation Adam and Eve found themselves: estranged from God, estranged from each other, and afraid (Gen. 3:8, 12). God acted in that historical moment as only such a God of justice, mercy and omniscience could. He created law and order for fallen humanity (Rom. 3:20: "For by the law is the knowledge of sin"). God instituted law so that man could *survive* to be redeemed, and he began with the basic unit of humanity that needed order—a *husband's relationship*

to his wife and a wife's relationship to her husband (Gen. 3:16).

By the way, the fact that Romans 5:14 places the transgression of the fall on Adam's head is not inconsistent with 1 Timothy 2, which places it on Eve's. The reasoning is consistent with the discussion of the husband and wife relationship and the consequences of the fall on it. With this verse 15 fits in quite nicely: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." The context of Romans 5:14 relates to the consequences of the fall to *all* mankind.

To infer from Genesis that all women are under all men simply because they are born female is to do a great disservice to the rights and liberties of being a person in Christ. Sadly this is just what has happened. We need much more study and a true willingness to reexamine objectively the implications of the attitudes that have prevailed on this issue up to now.

FULL PERSONHOOD FOR WOMEN

JEAN SALNERS

Mundelein, Illinois

I became aware of two magazines *Mission* and *Integrity* several months ago when a feminist friend sent me a copy of an article by Norman Parks, "Set Our Women Free" [*Integrity*, January, 1973]. He said exactly what I had been advocating for years.

Well, at last, I said, the brotherhood is beginning to discuss current topics and not just ignore them. But I have yet to see anything written by the sisterhood on the subject. Are our women so brainwashed and programmed that they like the status quo or are they afraid to say what they think?

I am a feminist; I have lobbied for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. My husband is also for equal rights, and we have an egalitarian marriage. And if wanting equality makes us radicals, then you can call us radicals.

Men cannot fully understand what the women's movement has done for women since they haven't had to live with blatant and subtle discrimination all their lives. It's a whole religious awakening and awareness. It's knowing that you are a person in

God's sight and you don't have to apologize for being born female. It's knowing you can make choices in life as to how you will use your mind and your body. It's knowing that customs of years and centuries which put you down will just have to go.

So I get very angry when I read an article like "Women and the Assembly" by Hall, who says, "Leadership positions in the assembly belong to the man because of the physiological and temperamental differences between men and women." There are no physiological and temperamental differences between men and women. Only biological ones. He also says, "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." How dare he presume what women are like. These traits depend on the person, not the sex. I for one am not more patient or sensitive to children's needs than men. Men have been telling women for years what they should and should

not do. Now women are thinking for themselves.

One scripture that has always been used to put down women is the flagrant mistranslation of Gen. 3:16. The Hebrew text should read, "Thou art turning (that is, from God) to thy husband, and he will rule over you (a prediction, not a command)." This means the opposite of what a lot of people teach. Eve was really being warned against giving her husband too much authority. She had disobeyed God, and as long as she preferred to obey her husband, her life would be filled with unhappiness. This state of affairs was not at all pleasing to God. In Gen. 3:16 we are confronted with a woman who turns away from God toward her husband—which has been encouraged by male Bible translators who have falsified the Word of God.

Jesus made a unique contribution to the equality of women through his every word and deed. He purposely countered his culture and gave full personhood to women that they too might hear the good news about God.

RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY

CONDITION AND PRACTICE

LOWELL M. HEAD

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

"The world of the soul is most imposing. Man is what he is in the depths of his heart. In our secret chambers of imagery, we feel, understand, reason, will, choose and plan. (Heb. 4:12; Matt. 13:15; Acts 11:23). The inner man is the seat of our moral being—the center and source of our outward life. The scriptural heart is at the heart of the scriptures: 'for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, fake witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man . . .' (Matt. 15:19-20)."

—Harold Taylor

"Condition" is defined by Webster: "Anything essential to the existence or occurrence of something else"; or, "Something required before the performance, completion, or effectiveness of some-

At a time when woman's only value was bearing children, a woman said to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb of your mother." But Jesus rejected the childbearing reason for being and replied, "Bless her instead because she hears the word of God and keeps it" (Lk. 11:27-28).

So what are the churches doing about the problem when it's pointed out to them? Nothing. In fact, they won't even discuss it. So what are people doing about it who have sat long enough and watched men's clubs operate? Leaving the church. Perhaps in 50 years something will be done about it, but I don't have that much time.

So I have been attending the Christian church in our area which is closer to what I believe than any other. There women are not treated as non-persons. The first time I was called upon to pray I was so overwhelmed there were tears in my eyes. I try going back to the church of Christ every now and then, but I come away depressed and angry, and that's no way to feel at church.

thing else." Thus man's heart must be in the proper condition before he can be pleasing either to God or to Satan. Man has been asked to offer his body a living sacrifice by not being conformed to this world but by being transformed through the renewing of his mind (Rom. 12:1-2). So long as his thinking is conformed to the thinking of the world, his actions are going to be conformed to the world. Transformation (the removing or changing of one's self from one state into the other) is attained only through the renewing of one's mind—by taking one's mind off of the things of this world and centering it upon the things of God. The proper condition must exist before there can be the occurrence of something better in one's life. His heart must be in the proper condition: it must be centered upon the principles of God before there can be a life pleasing to God.

Must not the condition be right before there can be a theft? But what is the condition? Is it the theft? Or is it not the practice? It is the act of committing the theft that causes one to be known as a thief; but is not the condition—the will to commit the theft—condemned as well as the act? "A man is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (Jas. 1:14). Thus the condition—"that which is required before the performance"—is shaping up in the man's life. The man who withstands temptation is blessed, for he has stood the test. But when the desire hath conceived it gives birth to sin, the committing of the act, allowing sin to become full grown, thus bringing death.

In our society one no longer becomes a drunkard, he just becomes sick. He enters into a condition that requires the consumption of a certain amount of alcohol to survive. For him to quit getting drunk, as with the thief, the condition must be changed. When his sickness is cured he can quit drinking; thus he is no longer a drunkard.

When we say, "We must distinguish between the practice and the condition of homosexuality," all that does that differ from saying we must distinguish between the condition and practice of any other

sin? Craig M. Watts (*Integrity*, October, 1973) concludes that "the homosexual condition is not condemned," only the practice. The mind leading one to the practice of homosexual acts cannot be conformed to the principles of Christ but is conformed (at least to some degree) to the principles of the world. Again the condition is essential to the act. So, the proper condition is essential in order for the practice to stop. As long as the mind or heart is the source of sin, that heart or mind must be transformed to the source of righteousness, whether the practice is homosexuality, theft, adultery, or drunkenness. "For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification" (Rom. 6:19).

It is true that "the confessed homosexual generally has a difficult time being accepted in normal social circles." And "it was the misfits and rejects that flocked to Jesus two thousand years ago," but was not his admonition, "Go and sin no more," no longer to be a homosexual, an adulterer or a thief? On this ground the church is willing to accept all who come to her. The condition is changed, manifested by the practice.

A LOOK AT THE FIRST AND SECOND LOOK AT HOMOSEXUALITY

ROY F. OSBORNE

San Antonio, Texas

In a recent reaction, Craig M. Watts writes an excellent article differentiating between homosexuality the "disease" and homosexuality the "sin." He correctly points out that it is the activity of the homosexual that is condemned in the Bible and not the condition. His reaction to the harsh and uncompromising stand taken by Penny Holden is well taken. However, he failed to deal with the probable cause of Miss Holden's strong feelings reflected in her article.

It has been my experience in 30 years of counseling that the average homosexual does NOT consider his condition to be a disease, and often not even a problem. Most express no desire to change and are insulted because society and the church dare to suggest that there is anything abnormal, or not right, about their "third sex." Many go so far as to exhibit proudly their "different" status and

seem to enjoy the reaction of people who are too "Victorian" to coolly accept them as perfectly normal and charming people.

It is not the doctor's evaluation which we have to deal with, but the evaluation of the homosexual himself. Few seek help because few consider that they need any help and do not want it. Even the dozen or so who have come to me for help have soon backed off, and have indicated that what they wanted was acceptance, not change of their condition.

It is not wrong to have a sickness. I believe it is wrong to make no attempt to have the sickness treated when it stands between me and a complete and proper relationship with other people in society. In order to become what God intended for me to become, I must strive in every way to work

in the framework in which He created me. Statements to the contrary notwithstanding, God did not make people homosexual. This is an aberration, and one which one should strive to have

treated in order to overcome it. Not to do so is to be satisfied with abnormality, which cripples total relationships with other creatures of God. This I believe to be wrong.

A HOMOSEXUAL'S VIEWPOINT ANONYMOUS

I'm a Christian. I have experienced an encounter with God in the very depths of my being. I continue to have a relationship with him that is total at every level of myself of which I am aware. I am committed to him with all the integrity I have as a person—committed beyond recall and to the point of death as nearly as I can judge myself.

I'm 38 years old. I'm married and have two children. The only fulfilling sexual relationship I have ever had has been with a person of my own sex. I am still deeply in love with that person. I desire no other person sexually, man or woman. If I were again to have the opportunity of a physical relationship with that person, I would not feel guilty or condemned by God. By your definition that makes me a homosexual. I do not define myself in those terms but rather in the terms of wholeness and personality and identity. I do not *objectively* know how God defines me. But for practical purposes and in the world in which I must live and function, I accept your definition. I am a homosexual.

I could blame my parents as psychologists urge me to do, but that seems very superficial and unrealistic. I have several brothers and sisters, none of whom have this "problem." It seems then to be a cop-out to blame parents (who treated us all essentially the same) for a problem that is uniquely mine.

It falls then that I should blame myself. And as I read heterosexual "healthy" people's views of homosexuality, it appears that that is *just* what you would have me do. Blame connotes guilt and remorse and punishment in most people's thinking. Well, I refuse—kindly, but firmly.

I do not advocate gay liberation, but I am firmly committed to the liberation of persons. If I understand anything at all about what Jesus was trying to do for me in dying, it is that he meant to liberate me—from blame, from guilt, from remorse,

from punishment—to name only a few things. I cannot take these things unto myself again or I will negate what he did in dying and also negate the personal love for me that the person Jesus has shown by living in me.

Neither do I wish to blame God for what I am. I am what I am though I did not will it. Something has made me as I am. I am not in willful rebellion against God's laws; neither do I feel psychologically "sick." I am not a freak. On the contrary, most people consider me to be a talented, creative person. In any group of which I am a part, people seem to be impressed with my intelligence or my sensitivity or my ability or my spirituality, depending on what kind of group it is and its purposes in coming together. I do not have to apologize for the above mentioned things, yet it is from the same personality that this other thing emanates, for which you would have me apologize.

It seems that there is an eternal mystery as to how God relates to nature. The creator God has created me. By nature I am sensitive, introspective, intelligent, spiritual, loyal, responsible . . . and homosexual.

You don't blame a thing for being what it is. You don't blame a snake for biting you. It's his nature; he's a product of his environment; it's part of what he is. Yet, if it is to the snake's advantage to live in *your* environment, he will have to control his natural functions. Social responsibility demands it. I must live in your environment for it is the only one existing in society as we now know it. The gay liberationist seeks to create his own environment that will have the sanction of society. I don't know if that's right or wrong—I only understand what impels him to do it.

Every homosexual who read the articles by Penny Holden and Craig Watts responded to them . . . perhaps not verbally as I am doing, but responded nevertheless . . . perhaps with anger, or

defiance, or shame, or frustration, or hopelessness, or fear. I understand all those responses. I remember the anger I felt when I was really faced in my own heart for the first time with my own homosexuality. I remember the hopelessness and fear of a person who wants to change but is not sure he can. I remember the alternate shame and defiance when my secrets were violently opened to the knowledge and condemnation of another person. I still sometimes feel the frustration of wanting only to be known and understood as a person—not lumped into a category and labeled indiscriminately.

Letters

Where It All Began

Before I become more misunderstood and judged, I would like to say what I should have when I sent the article in, "God's Stand on Homosexuality." The article was a paper I wrote for a class, which had to deal with some view of homosexuality. I chose to use scriptures from the Bible which refer to homosexuality. I was speaking in terms of the practice of homosexuality, and was to give a theory relating to the practice.

I did not intend to come across as a know-it-all, "conservative Church of Christ" who has a file of answers on any given topic ready for immediate use. Since I knew the topic was a hot one, I knew I could count on feedback from readers of *Integrity*, who would delve deeper into the very difficult to understand world of homosexuality, and present their educated views.

I sincerely appreciated the article, "A Second Look at Homosexuality," which indeed attempted to answer some phases of the subject, and was very spiritual. Of great importance was the distinction made between the practice and the condition of homosexuality.

As suggested by a brother-in-Christ, to avoid such future attack, I should have signed, "P. Holden," so readers who react would do so under

The correct response to these articles and to life itself seems to me to be courage and humility. I'm trying very hard to respond that way because I really seek to be led by the Spirit of God.

The healing power of his Spirit is evidenced to me by the fact that I would *really* like to sign this article openly and honestly. It's not because of me that I can't, but because of you. You would hurt my family, my church, the person I love. Perhaps if you could create an atmosphere and an environment in which I could sign this without fear of your hurts, I could live there freely, you could live there freely, and we could be healed together.

respect thinking I might be a preacher instead of a woman! (Under the supposition, of course, that preachers still receive a certain amount of respect.)

May Christ give us His Spirit of discernment. The subject is not closed!
Malibu, California

P. HOLDEN

Power in Positive Thinking

Just a note to let you know that many people here at Procter Street Church read *Integrity* and are thankful for it.

Personally, I appreciated this September's issue very much. We that are classified as "open" or "liberal" must be careful that our Christianity doesn't become just a continuous negative attack upon the "legalist." A negative "liberal" doesn't contribute any more to the world than a negative "legalist." This issue of *Integrity* contributes positive thoughts and aid to all of us who read it here. The article mentioned most—it was also my favorite—was "Church Music: Spiritual Power." John Kernan did a good job. He opened my eyes to many new thoughts.

Thank you for *Integrity*. Keep up the good work.
Port Arthur, Texas

RICHARD HALL