

# Integrity

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## DARING LOVE

*Hoy Ledbetter*

## THE SELF-DISCLOSURE OF GOD

*Joseph F. Jones*

## RESPONSE: THE ART OF LISTENING

*David F. Graf*

## DARING LOVE

This issue is devoted to the twofold theme of God's revelation of himself to man and man's response to that revelation. The two articles which follow are, I believe, excellent statements on this subject and, since they complement each other, should be read together. Because they do not—and *could* not—exhaust the topic, I am not afraid of intruding on another's assignment by adding a few additional thoughts on the God-man encounter.

In his inspiring *Jesus and His Parables* J.A. Findlay says, "We should not, in seeking Him, be called upon to give and hazard all we have, if He, to seek and save us, had not already surrendered all that He possessed—and how much more He had to give than we! . . . Indeed, no lasting friendship is possible even between men if one of the friends holds anything back, and this is true of both parties even when God and man come together; each must give himself away 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer.'"

When God disclosed himself to men, what did they see? John, who wrote with more seniority than other NT scribes, said, "God is love." We should expect, therefore, that those who scrutinized his Exegesis would discern in him, above all else, love. That this love was quite daring, and evoked a daring response, is illustrated abundantly in Jesus' life. And it is in this essential love of God that we can see why he reveals himself to us, for love requires an object, and it is not irreverent to say that God needs us as we need

him. So he has taken the risk of opening his heart to us; he has literally come to us, not just to visit, but to stay.

This loving revelation is the basis of all true conversion. As Norman Perrin has pointed out, "The correct response to God, indeed the only response to him, is to imitate the reality one has known" (*Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 149). When Christians empty themselves for his service, or when they love, not just their friends, but their enemies, they are simply reflecting the self-disclosure of God.

### An Illustration . . .

There is no better illustration of this fact than the prostitute (she is called a "sinner," which in this context bears the same connotation as our "immoral woman") who came to Jesus while he was dining with Simon the Pharisee. "Standing behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment" (Lk. 7:38). All the gestures of devotion—washing, drying, anointing, kissing—are directed to the feet, a sign of exceptional humility. If this report did not come from "reliable sources," we might not believe it; the elements are too extravagant. Instead of water, she uses her own tears, the profusion of which indicates a tremendous depth of emotion; instead of a towel, her hair, let down impulsively, in de-

fiance of convention; instead of oil, the more expensive ointment, perhaps from her supply of perfume used to attract the opposite sex; and instead of a kiss on the head, repeated kissing of his feet.

Now how do we account for this extravagant devotion? Jesus answers: "I tell you, then, the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven. Whoever has been forgiven little, however, shows only a little love" (v. 47). It is important to note that, as G.B. Caird says, "Her love was not the ground of a pardon she had come to seek, but the proof of a pardon she had come to acknowledge" (*Saint Luke*).

Some students have been puzzled by this passage, because there is no mention of a previous encounter in which the woman received assurance of forgiveness; but surely some basis of gratitude is implied in her entrance and action. Jeremias (*The Parables of Jesus*) infers that Jesus had delivered an impressive sermon in the synagogue. However that may be, obviously there was some compelling reason for this woman to defy social convention and enter Simon's house and carry on in such a reckless manner. And this is made certain by the parable of the two debtors, which Jesus spoke to Simon, and the succeeding aphorism: "Whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love."

We may note in this woman's kiss "the decisive embodiment of *agapē*, which for its part is the sign of accepted forgiveness," but it is not without significance that no object of her love is actually mentioned. Ethelbert Stauffer's comment in this connection is worthy of attention: "It is striking that in this passage *agapan* is twice used without any precise indication of object, the more so as this absolute use of the verb is otherwise confined to the First Epistle of John. It brings out the more clearly what is at issue in Lk. 7:47, namely, that a new life is awakened and the person now has love, is filled with it, and is guided by it in all his

actions, rather than that he is to show it to such and such people" (*TDNT*, I, 47). Since the only response to God is to imitate the reality one has known, those who have received his forgiveness respond with a grateful love that is as unrestricted as that of God himself.

### Implications for Us . . .

As the incident with Simon and the sinful woman illustrates, Jesus, "our brother, kind and good," did not exclude from his affection those whom respectable churchmen despised. And this fact bears an important implication for us. The friend of tax-collectors and prostitutes might very well be as open to criticism from us today as he was then. If we shared his attitude, we would be much more reluctant to cut off from our fellowship those who have not yet succeeded in overcoming their sins, or who have not yet reached theological maturity. And, perhaps more importantly, we would not ignore people whose personal dynamism is not sufficient for them to make enough waves to receive consideration for ostracism.

Another implication of this fact of love as a response to God's love applies to the emphasis of our teaching. While judgment is a vital concept in correct teaching about God, it must be understood as an aspect of his love. I do not know exactly what prompted the woman's superabundant display of devotion, but I am quite sure it was not the result of a dramatic sermon on hell. Second-mile service or reckless acts of worship are hardly induced by fear of torment. If our teaching fails to inspire such marvelous manifestations of gratitude, is it not because we have neglected to emphasize God's goodness, especially his forgiveness? When preachers are evaluated in terms of their ability to depict in terrifying detail the horrors of hell more frequently than their portraiture of a loving God, the real motivation for total surrender has been lost. —HGL

# THE SELF-DISCLOSURE OF GOD

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The Hebrew-Christian Scriptures assume an ultimate Being who exists, independent of time and space, yet to whom human endeavors make a significant difference; who is concerned with man's direction and destiny; and who is most of all interested in sharing himself with man in intimate personal relationship.<sup>1</sup> The Scriptures also affirm that this Being, variously designated by revealed names to characterize his nature, has in his own ways and wisdom been disclosing his intents for man through the centuries; and finally, doing nothing less than to enter the sphere of human existence, characterized by mortality and death, chose to become one of us, so that we might become like him.<sup>2</sup> It is the intent of this essay to focus attention on the affirmation of God's self-disclosure, its nature and purposes, while leaving the implications of man's response to God's revelation for a subsequent writer.<sup>3</sup>

## God Who Is and Acts . . .

Opening with the assumption of God's Being, and not pausing to argue or defend

the assumption, the Scriptures move immediately into affirmation of what he has done among men. In this context the late Edward J. Young pointed out that the Genesis account of creation places stress upon God's absolute monergism,<sup>4</sup> and here we see at least four distinctive and noteworthy concepts: 1) that God is, independent of temporalness; 2) that God acts of his own initiative; 3) that God acts with purpose or design in his loving creative endeavors; and 4) that God acts to his own divine complacency or satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> He acts to implement his will for man.

It is the redemptive story of the Old Testament that the same God who disclosed himself in creation also called a people into being; first Abraham and his immediate descendants, and now his many progeny, Israel. God has made known his ways to Abraham and Moses, and fashioned Israel into a chosen nation. And the basis for this calling and formation of a people is his own gracious and sovereign doing.<sup>6</sup> Now that God has

4. Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1949, p. 53.

5. See my chapter, "The Past Unfolds the Answer," in *Pillars of Faith*, ed. by Wilson and Womack, 1973, pp. 88, 89.

6. Gen. 12:1-9; Dt. 7:7-8; Psa. 103; Jer. 31:31-34; cf. G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, London, 1952, pp. 38-86.

called and covenanted a people, he must be involved in their historical direction and destiny. Both the event (Deliverance and Sinai) and the interpretation of the event (God's sovereign election for Israel) constitute revelation.<sup>7</sup>

## Centrality of Christ in Revelation . . .

From the God who has made himself known in creation and nature (general revelation, some theologians would call it), and entered into a special covenant relationship with his people Israel, the Biblical record witnesses to centuries of purposeful revelation both through the spoken Word of God and his magnanimous events, until the ultimate manifestation of himself in his Son; for without question Jesus the Christ is the climactic moment in the divine disclosure.<sup>8</sup>

Within the dimensions of historical process God sent forth his Son, born "in the fullness of time, born of a woman, born under the law."<sup>9</sup> The Christian Scriptures declare this Jesus to have lived an authentic human life within narrow geographical limits, that he proclaimed God's Rule (Kingdom) as "at hand," and readied men for its presence. In the person of this Jesus the eternal God entered history, identified with mortal and sinful man,<sup>10</sup> and openly challenged Satan and the powers of darkness, triumphing over them.<sup>11</sup> Crucified, buried, raised—he was proclaimed "Lord and Christ," "King of kings and Lord of lords," the "One who is and who was and who is to come . . . Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of

7. J.I. Packer, "Revelation," *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas, Eerdmans, 1962, p. 1090.

8. John 1:1-4, 14, 18; Heb. 1:1-4.

9. Gal. 4:4.

11. Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 2:15.

10. 2 Cor. 5:21.

the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth."<sup>12</sup>

In Jesus the risen and living Lord, God continues to reveal his purposes for the church and the nations of the world. He will appear again, a coming that is itself referred to as "the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ,"<sup>13</sup> and he will call men and nations into judgment.<sup>14</sup> That this judgment is set in an eschatological context at the end of history is not to conclude he has not been calling men to judgment in the course of human existence, for indeed he has. But the full and final disclosure of God's purposes includes such an ultimate reckoning between man and God. Thus will God's plan for the ages be fulfilled, divine love and divine judgment perfectly blended; and the absolute sovereignty of God will have triumphed. The vision of God's perfect Self will be shared by the redeemed in eternal fellowship, the ultimate purpose in God's self-disclosure.

## Revelation: Event and Word . . .

The historic Christian view of revelation has recognized that God disclosed himself both in event and word. That God could act mightily in the process of history, and then interpret that act through prophets and apostles, did not present any theological contradiction in the affirmation that Christ is the Word of God, and the Scriptures are the Word of God. But with the rise of modern Biblical criticism, marked by intense study of the Biblical text, emerged an unprecedented interest in the subject of revelation and inspiration, which eventuated in driving a wedge between the living God in

12. Acts 2:36; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 1:4-5.

13. 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 2 Thess. 1:7.

14. Matt. 25; Acts 17:30-31.

his revelation and the written word of the Bible.<sup>15</sup>

Under the auspices of critical Biblical research, many scholars felt an irreconcilable antithesis between the affirmation of God, the eternal Word, revealed in Christ Jesus, and the claim of Scripture itself to be the Word of God.<sup>16</sup> Thus emerged the widely held contemporary view that revelation must be limited to the mighty acts of God in history, God confronting men in given times and places; while the Bible was relegated to the position of record, containing man's response to God's revelation. The Bible as revelation, however, containing propositional truth which God had spoken to man, was truncated. Many scholars and theologians found William Temple's formulation of this position representative of their own conviction, that revelation must be restricted to disclosure through personal encounter with God's work in history, and must never be identified with any human words which man has uttered in response to the revelation (i.e., Scripture). "There is no such thing as revealed truth," wrote Temple. "There are truths of revelation, that is to say, propositions which express the results of correct thinking concerning revelation; but they are not themselves directly revealed."<sup>17</sup> Scripture must be regarded as human response and witness to revelation, but not in the final sense revelation itself.<sup>18</sup>

15. J.I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible*, Westminster Press, 1965, p. 13. (Note: I have not attempted to deal with the doctrine of inspiration within the limitations of this article, although the study of revelation must embrace God's means of communicating and preserving that which is revealed.)

16. John 1:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

17. William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, London, 1934, p. 317.

18. Cf. Alan Richardson, "Reveal, Revelation,"

## Christ the Word of God . . .

Not only do the Scriptures claim to be the spoken Word of God to man, but they themselves assert that God the Word became flesh and blood, took the form of a man, and dwelt among us—full of grace and truth.<sup>19</sup> In Jesus Christ grace and truth (the essence of God) became incarnate, and the Biblical explanation is that "he (Jesus) has made him known (*exēgēsato*)." The term has to do with setting forth a narrative; it suggests that Jesus has "now given a full account to the Father."<sup>20</sup> From the word used by the Evangelist we get our English word "exegesis," and Morris appropriately comments that "it is a suggestive thought that Christ is the 'exegesis' of the Father."<sup>21</sup> Jesus Christ, incarnate Word of God, truly interprets, explains, leads us into the full knowledge of the Father. Understandably, the Apostle Paul bursts forth in an affirmation of revealed truth, propositional in character, "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."<sup>22</sup>

It is acknowledged by modern theology that Jesus Christ is truly the ultimate in the progressive self-disclosure of eternal God; but that Scripture must be viewed as the record (and that only) of his revelation. The antithesis established, therefore, between Christ the Word and the Bible as the Word seems most unfortunate as well as unneces-

*A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, 1950, pp. 195-200.

19. John 1:1-4, 18.

20. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Eerdmans, 1971, p. 114.

21. *Ibid.*

22. 2 Cor. 4:6.

sary. "Word" (*logos*) denotes the expression of mind in reasoning and speech; and "God's Son is called His 'Word' because in Him God's mind, character, and purposes find full expression. God's revelation is called His 'Word' because it is reasoned verbal disclosure which has God as its subject and its source. The verbal 'Word' bears witness to the personal 'Word' and enables us to know the latter for what He is, which otherwise we could not do."<sup>23</sup> Surely there is neither contradiction nor inconsistency here; and it is significant to note in this context that while the author of Hebrews begins by hailing God's Son as the perfect image of the Father (1:3), three times out of four the phrase "Word of God" is used not to denote Christ as Person, but the divine message concerning him.<sup>24</sup> God's saving events in history must be divinely interpreted; and without spoken or written revelation to give meaning to his mighty acts, our religious certainty rests on a highly subjective foundation dependent upon human response and enlightenment.

## Need for Objective and Authoritative Norm . . .

The basic problem which the above approach to revelation posits is that of objectivity in our knowledge of God. If revelation is limited only to events—such as Exodus, Sinai theophany, Exile, Return, or the crucifixion of Jesus—who is to assure us of an accurate and trustworthy interpretation of these events? Cannot God speak his Word to interpret his acts? And cannot spoken truth from God be revelational as well as events? It is the claim of Scripture that God

23. Packer, *God Speaks to Man*, p. 51.

24. Heb. 4:12; 6:5; 13:7.

did in revelation both act and speak. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power."<sup>25</sup> God communicates himself to man through his "Word of power," as well as the power of his Word in action.

## Purpose in Revelation . . .

Revelation has as its end more than intellectual enlightenment or spiritual illumination; its intent is to establish a personal relationship between God and men.<sup>26</sup> It is God coming to man to share nothing less than himself in intimate friendship, having removed the barriers and resistances which sinful man is capable of erecting. God in Christ has "reconciled us to himself," and subsequently committed to us the message of reconciliation.<sup>27</sup> Pleading with all who would listen and respond to the disclosure of God's love and mercy in Christ, the Apostle Paul entreated, "Be ye reconciled to God." This is the end of divine disclosure, to know God and enjoy him forever.

Since God has mightily and graciously made himself known to man, man can subsequently know God; and to know God through Jesus Christ, interpreted to us through Spirit-inspired Scripture, is to begin the experience of eternal life—friendship with God now, perfected in a never-ending relationship.<sup>28</sup> □

25. Heb. 1:1-3.

26. Cf. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 198; Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:15-18.

27. 2 Cor. 5:17-21.

28. John 17:3.

# RESPONSE: THE ART OF LISTENING

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The affirmation of revelation is for the Christian a declaration that the Gospel is rooted and grounded in the once-for-all-ness of the particular events of a particular past. Aristotle arbitrarily only assigned temporal significance to what *has* happened or history; it was rather in the philosophical nature of poetry that he found "universals" (*Poetics* 51b). In contrast, the Christian affirms that what *has* happened is of enduring value and universal significance.

This of necessity gives Christianity a past orientation and imposes on its followers a threefold task: the effort to come to a pre-

The wayfarer  
Perceiving the pathway to truth  
Was struck with astonishment.  
It was thickly grown with weeds.  
"Ha," he said,  
"I see than none have passed here  
In a long time."  
Later he saw that each weed  
was a singular knife.  
"Well," he mumbled at last,  
"Doubtless there are other woods."  
—Stephen Crane

In a world of fugitives  
The person taking the opposite direction  
Will appear to run away  
—T.S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion*

cise understanding of the meaning of that revelation; the attempt to honestly and courageously examine oneself in the light of its truth; and then to make a sensitive essay at translating or communicating it to others. Hans Küng summarizes it in this manner: "The Church must constantly reflect upon its real existence in the present with reference to its origins in the past, in order to assure its existence in the future" (*The Church*, p. 15). Thus the Christian is in tension with the past, himself and the world, and must cultivate the art of listening to each.

## I INTERPRETATION

Nobody favors always acting with an utter disregard for evidence and reason; but some people admonish us to throw both to the winds when it comes to the most important choices.  
—Walter Kaufman, *The Faith of a Heretic*

If the church is to be true to its identity, it must be sure that its response to the world is an appropriate and authentic expression of the revelation of God in Jesus

Christ. The search into the origins of Christianity must therefore be a constant and continuing endeavor. This raises the simple but basic question, "Where do we begin?" It

is obvious that the Scriptures furnish the primary materials or sources for such an enterprise, but the question still remains: "Where is the vitalizing center or focus for our inquiry?" Surely one would not suggest the Song of Solomon calls for the same response as the Book of Isaiah.

Theoretically, the church has always resounded with a loud "Jesus." In practice, it has been otherwise. Prooftexts are gathered haphazardly from Scripture (irrespective of their original purpose) to support our dogmas. More frequently, an evolutionary philosophy has dominated our approach to the Bible. The O.T. is reserved for the children in Sunday School; the Gospels (what to believe) and Acts (what to do) for potential converts; and, finally, the Epistles (how to live) for the maturing Christian. If one is successful in wrestling with the difficulties in Romans and Hebrews, he is then rewarded with the Herculean task of taking on the Book of Revelation. It must be deep; it is the last, isn't it?

Even those who find Jesus as the aim and center do not agree on what is most important in the Gospels. Some suggest the Sermon on the Mount. One may appreciate the optimism of human nature that such a view represents, but hardly the ethical legalism that it advocates. Others have in a similar fashion found in Jesus the model man, the pattern for the rest of humanity. Albert Schweitzer (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1906) brilliantly exposed the nineteenth century efforts to produce a "biography" or "life" of Jesus as mere reflections of modern ideals. The more recent efforts to write a history of Jesus have not removed themselves from the same criticism. The paucity of extant sources stubbornly refuses to permit such an undertaking.

## The Need for Investigation . . .

This is not meant to discredit the historical inquiry into the life of Jesus. On the contrary, the Gospels must be investigated in all seriousness with every critical tool at our disposal. As Warren Lewis has recently suggested, we must struggle honestly and openly with every "clash and jar" (*Mission*, September 1974). If it be objected that faith is not dependent on the results of historical research, it must also be affirmed that neither is genuine faith operative in a cognitive vacuum or asylum of ignorance. Total commitment does not mean the abdication of the intellect.

It is to the credit of nineteenth century biographers that they took the problems surrounding the historical Jesus seriously. They were well aware of the appreciable gap which separated the Gospel records from the Jesus of history (Mt. 28:15). It was also obvious that we do not have the actual words that Jesus spoke (*ipsissima verba*), since the Gospels were written in Greek and not in the Galilean dialect that he spoke and of which only a few scattered words survive. The proposal that we accept the Gospels as they are would ignore such questions. Would such questions be ignored with the *Book of Mormon* or the *Koran* of Islam?

The legitimate basis for such an approach can be found also in the preface to Luke's Gospel where he states: "I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account" (1:3). Neither may it be suggested that Paul is an exception to such interests, for a close analysis of his writings reveals quotations from the earthly Jesus (Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 11:23; cf. 7:25) and the incarnation cited as an illustration of humility (Phil. 2:5-8). The historical Jesus is the

presupposition of the Gospel that he proclaimed (Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4).

However, our original question remains: what is central in the Gospels concerning Jesus? I still find appealing the famous statement and description of the Gospels by Martin Kähler as being "passion narratives with extended introductions" (*The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*, 1896). Nowhere is this more apparent than the Gospel of John where the "signs" performed during the ministry of Jesus point to the cross as the "hour" when his "glory" would be revealed and the post-resurrection appearances point back to it as a fact accomplished. It is precisely this emphasis that characterizes also the preaching

of Paul (1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 3:1).

It is then the cross which is pivotal to the Gospels and Christian faith. It is the supreme event of God's self-disclosure, the measure of all the revelatory history which was preparation for it and in which it was received. It is also the touchstone by which the contemporary church must evaluate its proclamation of the good news of Jesus to the world. For in the cross of Christ the feelings of love and forgiveness of humanity that exist in God were revealed, or, as Paul put it, "God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not holding men's faults against them, and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled" (2 Cor. 5:19).

## II SELF-EXAMINATION

Whether or not Christianity, in an alienated, divided and oppressive society, itself becomes alienated, divided and an accomplice of oppression, is ultimately decided only by whether the crucified Christ is a stranger to it or the Lord who determines the form of its existence.  
—Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 1974

Interpretation is not to end as an abstract intellectual exercise. It should provide the criterion for evaluating and examining the life-style, commitment and expressions of faith of the contemporary Christian. The personal encounter with the crucified Jesus and living Lord is a very challenging and demanding experience. We have all attempted at times to escape from the exacting demands of such an encounter which compel us to yield old ways and adopt new ones. The amazing ability to transform a radical message into one of harmless pap is a capability we find all too easy to perform. Because we struggle with written accounts and human messengers it is easy for us to be misled into thinking we are judges of passive and objectivistic words similar to the foreign

matter analyzed and scrutinized within a laboratory by a scientist. Indeed, the roles are reversed. It is our lives that are examined; it is Christ himself who is subject and judge. This is why we squirm to avoid and resist the truth of God's revelation. We would much prefer to run and hide in the darkness of the past, shielding our eyes from the brilliant and illuminating light which radiates from the presence of God. Indeed we do. This is why we must continually re-examine our presuppositions and beliefs with the assistance of others.

This does not mean that the hermeneutical task is to be reserved for a professional clergy or ministry—especially one which represents our own religious preference and bias. All the dimensions and sides of an issue

or question will not be provided by "company men" who might threaten or jeopardize the security of their position and future by expressing how they really feel. Such individuals have a valuable function, but we cannot restrict our exposure to the truth by the insights they might provide. The temptation is just too great for professionals to preach the resurrection without the cross and advocate what we *want* to hear, not what we *need* to hear. The popular proverbs "Whose bread I eat, his song I sing," and "He who pays the piper, calls the tune" express the reality of such tensions. The noted playwright Arthur Miller recently gave vent to similar feelings. Apprehensive about the dismal prospects of producing a successful play on the famed and prestigious Broadway of New York, where economic pressures and investments make theatre more like industry than art, he shifted instead the premiere of his *Up from Paradise* to the University of Michigan campus, since, as he put it, "frightened birds don't sing."

### A Slave to Every Man . . .

For those who find difficulty in understanding this phenomenon, the penetrating and incisive short story *I Place My Reliance on No Man* by the modern Jewish author Isaac Bashevis Singer should be required reading. In poignant fashion he describes the plight of Rabbi Jonathan Danziger who has begun work with a congregation in a rather large city. Already he has encountered the same problems which made his previous ministry a miserable one: every faction in the synagogue was engaged in an effort to manipulate and control him. If he failed to yield to their pressure, they carped and found fault with him or his family. Then one day while praying one of his favorite

prayers he was forced to come to an abrupt halt at the words "I place my reliance on no man." The words stuck in his throat, for he suddenly realized he was lying. No one relied on people more than he. The whole town gave him orders. Since his measly income barely provided the essentials for his family, he was a slave to every powerful man in the community for favors, gifts and support. Strangely, his troubled appearance disappeared, and an unexpected determination swept over him. The synagogue pulpit was empty the next Sabbath. The town was stunned as the news rapidly spread: Rabbi Jonathan, his wife and daughter, had gone off to pick fruit in the nearby orchards.

It is precisely this "tightness" of ecclesiastical organizations which has "squeezed" from the pulpit many a capable minister who refused to compromise his integrity or sacrifice his freedom. This is not to attribute noble motives to all who follow the footsteps of the Rabbi or impute bad motives to those who remain in the ministry. It is simply to emphasize a frequently forgotten principle: the staff of an institution are normally reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them. This is a service which most often must be provided by an *outsider*. This does not mean outside the church, but rather outside the control and management of the church structure. It is this expendable position and detachment from vested interests that provides the freedom for the prophetic voice to herald change.

One of the finest illustrations of this truth is the delightful and provocative children's story *The Emperor's New Clothes*, told by Hans Christian Andersen, about two dishonest weavers who have deceived the king into thinking they could weave a fabric so marvelous that it was visible only to the capable and wise. They proceeded to dress the king

up in garments they had made from the supposed material, and the naive monarch left their workshop to parade down the streets and show off his new clothes. All the attendants in the entourage were reluctant to admit they saw nothing more than a nude king for fear they would be stripped of their position or be considered stupid. Even the crowd in the streets was silent until a shrill voice of a child burst forth with the words, "Why, the king has nothing on." The truth had to come from one who was immune from fear and self-concern, unaware of the

presuppositions which kept the rest of the town silent.

The most clarifying insights can in like fashion come from the most unusual sources. Truth is not monopolized by any social class, church, sex or age group. The reverse is also to be remembered: no one has a monopoly on error either! We must be "seed-pickers" (Acts 17:18), gathering truth from every source. It is a mark of maturity to be able to find that which is good in those with whom we disagree or are at odds. The cross of Christ demands such humility.

### III COMMUNICATION

The conservatism of religion—its orthodoxy—is the inert coagulum of a once highly reactive sap. A rising religious movement is all change and experiment—open to new views and techniques from all quarters.  
—Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*

This personal encounter with the cross leads inevitably to one's neighbor. It is the task of the Christian to translate this message into terms and language that will be comprehensible to the world. As Albert Camus put it, "he is not the artist who speaks, but who causes to speak." This interaction with culture can produce two responses which the church must stubbornly resist.

The first is the absolutizing of its own particularness and viewing the temporal and culturally conditioned forms of its faith as arbitrarily universal and final. The church is understood in terms of a static, immovable pattern which must be perpetuated unchanged from generation to generation. It is certainly reassuring and reinforcing to speak about a normative pattern which can be superimposed over every situation. It is also self-defeating and destructive, for it will eventually relegate the church to the insignificant periphery and marginal areas of society. This is what we may call the "closed"

church, for it is captive to an anachronistic culture.

It can find no support in the N.T. Every effort was made to speak the language of the hearers. A careful scrutiny of Paul's language reveals traces of the nomenclature of the Greek philosophers, astrological fatalism, and the mystery religions. As the product of the sophisticated Greek milieu of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia, he was capable of quoting Aratus of Cilicia (Acts 17:28) or Epimenides of Cnossos (Tit. 1:12) when the need demanded it. Although a Jew trained also in the Palestinian rabbinics of Jerusalem, he may be considered the archetypal Hellenizer. His successors within a few decades would unfortunately make the transition complete, transforming Christianity into a philosophy and the Greek philosophers into prophets of Yahweh.

The second danger is for the church to abandon its identity for the fleeting popularity and success of relevancy. This may be

called the "open" church. It is the slave of *all* cultures, ready to change at the drop of a halo. In its love for recognition and status, it becomes "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22) in the worst possible sense.

There must be a third way which cuts through the absolute models of the "closed" church and the unproductive tolerance of the "open" church. There must be a refusal to compromise the unique and essential characteristics of the Christian faith. Only if the church resists conformity to the world can it ultimately exist for the world. But the only justifiable obstacle to the acceptance of the Gospel should be the offense of the cross, not our unwillingness to listen to the world and be sensitive to its needs. This third way may be called the "ventilated" church, open to the fresh air which should evoke a genuine responsive chord in the Christian, but closed to the foul air which would damage and destroy its identity with the crucified and risen Jesus.

#### No Sweeping Advance . . .

Adherence to such a position should not delude us into thinking that the message of Jesus will be successful numerically. The failure of the church to continue the rapid growth it experienced in the post-World War II period has been a source of discouragement and frustration to many. Perhaps the idealism of the early church as the model of successful evangelism has deceived us. The picture that we have generally painted is that the conversion of the ancient world was swift and rapid, as the dramatic and magnetic message of the Gospel swept across the Mediterranean world from Jerusalem to Rome in just a few decades of the first century. The emphasis has been on how the Jewish diaspora and Hellenistic culture had

prepared the soil for this amazing growth: A closer analysis reveals a contrary conclusion.

Adolph Harnack has suggested in his classic *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity* that the Jews represented about seven per cent of the total population of the Roman Empire in the time of Augustus. Even if these figures are accepted—and they are at best a reasonable guess—the greatest percentage of Jews were still located mainly in the eastern Mediterranean and Africa. When Paul engages in mission work on European soil he is moving outside this area of concentration; he must deal with the fact that there is no synagogue at Philippi (Acts 16). A new stage in his ministry begins; he is now in the full sense of the word an apostle to the Gentiles (Phil. 4:15).

Neither did Christianity enjoy great success in the areas of heavy Jewish population. The tension between Jew and Christian apparent in the N.T. grew in intensity. Justin states that "with few exceptions" most Jews rejected Jesus (*Apol.* I.53). Just a little later, at the beginning of the third century, Tertullian remarks that the "Jewish synagogues are the source of persecution" (*Scorpiace* 11) and tells of a renegade Jew who describes Christians as "donkey-worshippers" (*Ad Nationes* I.14). Harnack sums the matter up well when he states: "There is hardly any fact which deserves to be turned over and thought over so much as this, that the religion of Jesus has never been able to root itself in Jewish or even Semitic soil" (p. 64).

The attempts of Christianity to penetrate the Hellenized world of the Gentiles were hardly any more successful. The second century Greek graffito on the Palatine at Rome which reads "Alexamenos worships his god," below a caricature of a worshipper before a crucified figure with an ass's head, is symbolic of the encounter of Jesus with the Greek

world. The cultured pagan viewed Christianity as barbaric, vulgar and uncouth. The exceptions—Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria—must be considered precisely that, anomalies in an otherwise alien, indifferent and antagonistic world. The majority of the Greco-Roman governing class and urban populace were resistant to its advance. In the third century, great strides were made in the rural areas and countryside of the eastern provinces where natives were disenchanted with Greco-Roman institutions. In the western provinces, it was still the religion of the disinherited and a minority sect. At the beginning of the fourth century estimates indicate only about ten per cent of the Roman Empire was Christian. It was not until the impact of Constantine as protector, defender and legislator for Christians that any really great advances were made.

### An Unresponsive People . . .

None of this should appear surprising to those who are familiar with the prophets of the O.T. Their writings reveal a repertory of metaphors which reflect the lack of response of the recipients of their message: deaf ears, blind eyes, stiff necks, hard hearts. All of this was baffling, irrational and mysterious to them. As Johannes Lindblom expressed it: "The people *ought* to have understood and assented to their preaching; but they *could* not because their hearts were hardened. The content of the prophetic preaching was comprehensible; but the attitude of

the people was incomprehensible" (*Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, p. 314). According to the Gospels, the situation did not change in the first century. John the Baptist sang dirges, but the people didn't weep; Jesus played on pipes, but they didn't dance. They were unresponsive and hostile, charging that the strange and ascetic John was too otherworldly to be sane, and Jesus too worldly to be holy (Lk. 7:31-35). The effort was made to tune in on the audience, but the audience was obstinate. Yet, the failure to succeed did not terminate the efforts or experiments to reach the people. The ministry of reconciliation can't be accomplished by leaving the world behind.

None of these obligations—interpretation, self-examination, and communication—can be performed correctly in isolation from the others. We can only hope to avoid making the obstacle in communication the form of the message and not its content. Mistakes will be made, but the risk must be taken. The crucified Jesus makes all such gambles shrink in comparison. And, as James Russell Lowell said:

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth;  
They must upward still, and onward, who would keep ahead of Truth;  
Lo, before us gleam her campfires! we ourselves must pilgrims be,  
Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate winter sea,  
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key. □

Whenever I find my faith to be in danger of flagging, I have no difficulty in discovering how to revitalize it. All I have to do is hunt up an atheist acquaintance and ask him to be kind enough to deliver an attack on theism. If he should care to include a specific attack on the Christian faith, so much the better. In the intense egocentricity of the atheistic personality I unfailingly discover the most telling argument for theism.

—Geddes MacGregor

## Letters

### Amnesty

How can I say "amen!" enough times and with enough fervor to Lillian Ledbetter's article, "Amnesty for Apple-Eaters"? Thank you for stating intelligently, clearly, and good-humoredly (the title is classic) the major issues in the question of woman's role in the 20th century church.

I have become discouraged about the Church of Christ and have lost my ability to discuss non-stridently an expanding role for women in the church. When I read Janet Allison's article, I recognized that she stated quite well the "opposition's" view and should be answered, but I no longer cared even to try. Your excellent article truly was a blessing to me.

I find it very troubling to be involved with a church that refuses to grapple with the problems of its era unless it can find a specific, direct reference in the Bible. We have no help to offer in the matters of abortion, genetic manipulation, euthanasia—nor even, apparently, in racial matters. I rage to hear "fellow" Christians say that they can find "nothing specific against slavery in the Scriptures."

Thank you for providing encouragement to continue working and teaching and sharing. And especially—thank you—for "amnesty for apple-eaters."

Ithaca, New York CHARLOTTE H. RITTER

### Yes and No

Your policy of publishing divergent opinions on controversial material is so healthy. Praise the Lord for you and those working with you in this ministry. May He bless your work abundantly.

Allentown, Pennsylvania NORMA J. LEMLEY

Your publication *Integrity* seems to need a good deal more of it in the editors. Your publication has so much anti-Godly trash in it that I'm tempted to throw it in with the rest of the trash without even looking at it. You are doing more to spread

the "do your own thing" type of sinfulness than *Playboy*. (This is an assumption since I am not familiar with *Playboy* but have heard excerpts from it.) The horror of the thing is that you set yourself forth as "spreading the gospel of Christ" whereas the obviously vile publications make no pretense of being godly.

However, occasionally there is an article run in your publication that is a jewel. Even so, if you care to cut down expenses by eliminating [name of reader who "moved on two preachers ago" deleted] from your mailing list it won't tear me up too much.

Haskell, Oklahoma

HERB SMITH

### A Little Late but . . .

. . . I would hate to miss any issues of *Integrity*, for I enjoy the articles immensely. "Getting to the Point," the interview with Craig Watts and Ken Carter, was great. "The Restoration of Christ" by Philip Roberson was so good I have shared it with many brothers and sisters. It was a very timely article.

Chester Springs, Pennsylvania ANDREW BURTON

### A Walloping Thought

You recently published a response to an article on the subject of *worship*. In Jn. 4:24 the master said something awfully revolutionary; it must have "blown that woman's mind." Why? We are too accustomed to talking about congregational exercises or the like as "acts of worship" to see it. That Samaritan girl had probably never heard the word used of anything but an external bowing to the earth. It was something within itself. As far as *proskyneo* is concerned, it does not name a set of subordinate rites or performances. In order to do it, one normally fell down like the *magi* in Mt. 2:11, like the leper in Mt. 8:2 or like the elders in Rev. 4:10. What a walloping thought, to think of doing such a thing in spirit and in truth.

NAME WITHHELD