

*INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.*

## Integrity

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## Integrity

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January-February 1976

# Integrity

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## Contributing Editors Named

We are thankful to Him from Whom all blessings flow to be able to announce in this issue one of the most significant developments in the history of *Integrity*—the appointment of a dozen contributing editors. Since they are men of very high caliber, we would naturally like to say a great deal about each of them, but space restricts us to giving a little information about each as follows:

**S. Scott Bartchy** is Associate Professor of Biblical Hermeneutics at Emmanuel School of Religion and Director of the Institute for the Study of Christian Origins, Tuebingen. He holds S.T.B. and Ph.D. degrees from Harvard and is a member of Harvard's Research Team for the Study of Religion and Culture of the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity. His numerous writings include the widely-acclaimed *First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21*, which is scheduled for release in German translation by a distinguished German publishing house this year.

**Bill Bowen** is presently serving as minister of Princeton (New Jersey) Church of Christ and writing a dissertation (entitled *Faith and Knowledge in Religion: A Comparison of John Locke and Alexander Campbell*) for his Ph.D. at Michigan State University. He holds an M.A. in New

Testament Studies from Harding Graduate School and an M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Alabama. He has devoted several years to campus ministry, including assisting in establishing and for six years ministering to the University Church of Christ in East Lansing, which serves students at Michigan State.

**Dan G. Danner** is Associate Professor in the Department of Theology, University of Portland (a Catholic institution), being the first non-Catholic faculty member of that department. He also teaches one course a quarter at Columbia Christian College. He holds an M.A. in Bible from ACC and received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa, majoring in the History of Christian Thought and specializing in the Reformation in England. He has written articles and reviews for *Mission*, *Restoration Quarterly*, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, *Church History*, *University of Portland Review*, and *CLIO*.

**Don Finto** is preaching minister for the Belmont Church of Christ in Nashville, a church that is widely recognized as a model of fellowship and dynamic outreach. He spent eight years in Hamburg, Germany, in evangelistic work, and another eight years teaching at David Lipscomb College, where he was head of the Modern Language Department when

he left in 1971. He studied at Abilene Christian College, then received a master's from Harding and a master's and Ph.D. from Vanderbilt. He is a member of the editorial board of *Koinonia*.

**Don Haymes** has worked for the past several years as a writer and consultant in urban affairs. He has been board member and/or board chairman of several organizations dealing with urban problems in East New York and, more recently, in Memphis. His recent pursuits have included writing foundation proposals and a television documentary about the public schools. He has won several writing awards and has worked for two newspaper chains as photographer, reporter, and editor. His contributions to religious journals have included articles and one short story in *Mission* and *Integrity*.

**Maurice Haynes** is Director of the House of the Carpenter in Detroit. In addition he teaches five hours each quarter in the Department of Family and Consumer Resources at Wayne State University. He is currently working on an M.A. in child development. He holds a B.A. degree from Harding College and B.D. and Th.M. degrees from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, where he specialized in Old Testament studies. As a preaching minister he has served the Romeo and Conant Gardens churches in the Detroit area.

**Elton D. Higgs** is Professor of English and Associate Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences and Letters, University of Michigan—Dearborn. He graduated from Abilene Christian College and finished his Ph.D. in English at the University of Pittsburgh. His major field of academic interest is Middle English literature, and he has published scholarly articles in his field as well as numerous short articles and poems in religious journals. His "Three Poems

from Luke's Gospel" won the award for "Best Article" in *Mission* last year. He is president of the board of the House of the Carpenter in Detroit.

**W. Carl Ketcherside** is well known as the editor of *Mission Messenger*, which he retired in December after thirty-seven years of publication. A few years ago he was credited by one editor with almost single-handedly carrying the Restoration plea to the various churches of America, and his influence within the Movement remains unexcelled (a fact that is underscored by the frequency with which he is quoted by friend and foe alike). He has written and/or published a great number of books and has written countless articles for religious journals. His present pursuits include writing an autobiographical series for *Restoration Review*.

**John McRay** is Professor of Religious Studies at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, and for the past few years has also been involved in archaeological research in Israel. He has held teaching posts at David Lipscomb, Harding, and Harding Graduate School. He earned an M.A. at Harding Graduate School and a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. He has written many articles for scholarly and popular journals, and has either written, edited, or contributed to several books and dictionaries (he wrote nineteen articles for the new *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*).

**Norman L. Parks** recently retired as head of the Political Science Department, Middle Tennessee State University. He has also taught at Peabody and Vanderbilt, and was dean of David Lipscomb for eight years. He holds degrees from David Lipscomb, Abilene Christian, Peabody, and Vanderbilt. He served for a number of years as senior editorial writer on the *Nashville Tennessean*, and has published

articles in the *Boston Globe*, *Toronto Sun*, *New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and numerous professional and religious journals. One series of articles by him has been widely used in leading law schools.

**Jim Reynolds** is preaching minister for the Park Row Church of Christ, Arlington, Texas. A former All-American basketball player, he gave up a promising career in sports to devote full time to the ministry. He holds the B.A. and S.T.B. degrees from Abilene Christian College and the Th.D. degree from Graduate Theological Union. One of his areas of interest is Christian ethics, and his book *Secrets of Eden: God and Human Sexuality* was reviewed in *Integrity* last June. His articles and reviews have appeared in *Restoration Quarterly*, *Mission*, and other religious journals.

**J. Harold Thomas** is preaching minister for the Westchester Church of Christ, Los Angeles. He is a graduate of Abilene Christian College and received his S.T.B. from Boston University. From 1958 to 1962 he was president of Northeastern Institute for Christian Education (now Northeastern Christian Junior College). Otherwise he has been engaged in full-time preaching for more than forty years. Several years were spent in mission points in the Northeast. His articles and reviews have appeared in both scholarly and popular journals, including *Mission* and *Restoration Quarterly*.

These contributing editors will help us by writing articles, soliciting material from others, and providing counsel. They are a somewhat diverse group, and that is the way it should be. Although they vary in age, background, and experience, they share a common commitment to the Lord and to serving the needs of his body. Since most of them are already heavily

burdened with work, the fact that they are willing to assume yet another responsibility seems to us to imply a loving concern for the people to whom this publication is directed.

Our guidelines in selecting contributing editors were very strict. A journal will be exactly what its editors and writers make of it, and we wanted people who could be trusted with the highest editorial responsibility. It is to the credit of our communion that this group falls so far short of comprising the eminently qualified people within it, yet we feel it would be very difficult to find a finer collection of talent for our purposes. This fact gives us confidence that with God's guidance and help we will be able to have some impact on the age in which we live.

In view of our stance some will find it curious that no women are included in the foregoing list. Why not? One reason is that our fellowship has not encouraged the kind of development among women that would enable them to meet our strict qualifications. There are a good many highly qualified women among us, but we failed to find among our acquaintances one who was not already too overextended to assume another responsibility. But our search will continue.

#### ADDITIONAL NOTES

As we announced last month, we have decided to combine January and February and get back on schedule. Barring some unexpected catastrophe, this issue will be mailed the last week of January, and any delay beyond that will be an indication of how fast the mail is delivered.

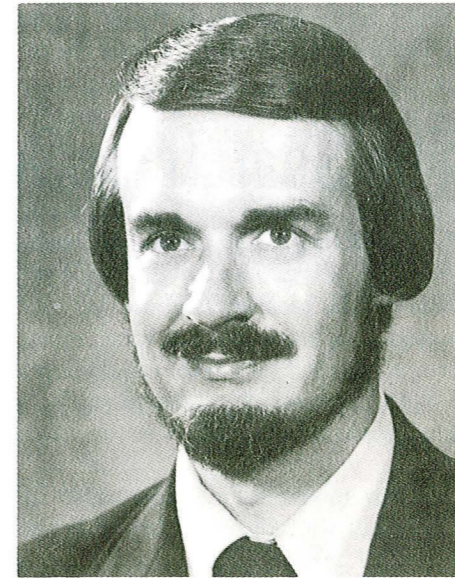
We have now converted to our own addressing system. Although it will not be as sophisticated as the computerized system we have been using, it will at least be under our control. We have no reason

to doubt the trustworthiness of the people who prepared our address plates, but a few mistakes will likely occur. We can only hope that they will be minimal and that no readers will be lost.

This is a good time to remind you once again that whenever the postal service notifies us of an address change, our policy is to drop the recipient unless he also notifies us. On several occasions that we know of we have received such notifications when the recipient has in fact not moved. We have no control over such carelessness, and all we can suggest is that you write us when your copy seems to be inordinately late. However, you should make sure that your address on our label is exactly as it should be.

We start the new year with deep gratitude to God who is so patient with us, and to so many of his people who have strengthened us. In addition to our writers without whom all other concerns would be superfluous, and to our local helpers who have worked so faithfully, and to the many contributors who have shared the financial load, we are deeply in debt to Herb Johnson of Broomfield, Colo., and Stan Plowman of St. Paul, Minn., for much help over a long period of time—although mentioning their names will probably embarrass them.

The February *Mission* is a special Bicentennial Issue which you can get free with a year's subscription. *Mission* is already a real bargain in reading material at \$6/year, and the bonus issue makes it an even better one. Under the able editorship of Ron Durham, *Mission* has entered a new phase of constructive journalism from which you should be benefitting. Write to Box 15024, Austin, TX 78761.



Last winter *Integrity* sponsored a series of lectures by Scott Bartchy that were so enthusiastically received that we felt compelled to arrange a similar program for this year. Therefore he will lecture at the Wesley Center & Inn, 100 S. Washington, Owosso, Michigan, on Saturday, February 21, on the theme: "Freedom in '76 and Forever." There will be three lectures (one in the morning, starting at 10:45, and two in the afternoon) on the themes: (1) "Freedom and Idolatry: Israel as the Slaves of God"; (2) "Freedom and the Law: Jesus as Manumitter"; (3) "Freedom and the Spirit: Suffering and the Community." Each lecture will be followed by a discussion period.

Bartchy is an excellent scholar, yet his ability to communicate in down-to-earth terms has made him a popular lecturer. Hearing him will be well worth the registration fee we are asking participants to pay to help defray expenses (\$5/person, \$8/couple, \$10/family). Lodging and meals are available at the Center at reasonable prices. The telephone number is 517/723-8141.

# The Search for Self-Understanding

## PART ONE

NORMAN L. PARKS

Murfreesboro, Tennessee

"We have never been able to reach the point when we should say, 'Let us divide the Church of Christ.'" —David Lipscomb, *Gospel Advocate*, 1888, p. 351.

When thousands of members of the Church of Christ have almost no knowledge of the Independent Christian Churches or the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), or that all three of these three wings of the Restoration Movement marched together long years ago, the question as to why these groups separated may appear to be an anachronism to the present generation.

Not so! It is very much a vital question, not in order to clarify an unhappy phase of American religious history, but to understand ourselves. Such a need is particularly urgent now. An understanding is necessary if we are ever to bridge the score of chasms fissuring the Churches of Christ, and, equally important, if we dare to give strength to the nascent rapprochement with the Independent Christians and a growing wing of Disciples who have become alienated by the highly institutionalized "Restructure" movement now in progress.

Is it possible to gain this self-knowledge? For our own well-being it must come, and a beginning point is to find the

basic cause for the trifurcation of a great religious movement which had as its worthy goal the union of all Christians in one loving fellowship.

Why did we divide? Without attempting to discuss this question, Editor Hoy Ledbetter in an arresting editorial in the August issue of *Integrity* nevertheless put his finger on the most explosive reason for the division with his title "Foiled by Fear." In explaining what keeps us apart, he also points to the psycho-sociological bomb which blew us apart almost a century ago.

There is a rich literature on the history of the Restoration Movement and it grows yearly. It has advanced far enough to explode the widely believed explanation that the division was the result of two "innovations," the missionary society and the organ. Practically all of the recent historians from all three Restoration wings have taken the view that these two things were symptomatic, not decisive in the rift.

Tennessee played the crucial role in the first division in the movement,<sup>1</sup> and

our analysis will center largely on that state. By the time the division in Tennessee was an accomplished fact, David Lipscomb's testimony in the historic Newbern Christian Church trial of 1903-05 showed that only a handful of congregations in the state had organs—two in Memphis, three in Nashville, one in Henderson, one in East Tennessee, and one in Newbern. By that time it was also evident that the Tennessee Christian Missionary Society was much more of a failure than a success and that its long-range prospects were far from promising in East Tennessee, the only region of the state which was not to support the first division.<sup>2</sup>

### What the Historians Say . . .

To what, then, do the better historians attribute the breakup? David E. Harrell, Jr., a voice from the "Anti" wing of the Church of Christ and easily the foremost Restoration historian, finds the basic cause in the Civil War, which activated and brought to fruition the underlying sectional, sociological, and theological differences existing in the antebellum period.<sup>3</sup> To him the split was inevitable because of social factors. Harrell's excellent volumes have greatly expanded our knowledge of the movement, but his basic thesis cannot be accepted as definitive. The division was far less of a sectional matter than he makes it out to be. If David Lipscomb, the single most influ-

ential figure in the controversy, was a Southerner, he rose above sectionalism.<sup>4</sup> For twenty years after the war the major theatre of conflict within Restorationism was in the North between the *American Christian Review* of Ben Franklin, John Rowe, and Daniel Sommer, on the one hand, and the *Christian Standard* (Errett) and the *Christian-Evangelist* (Garrison), on the other. When the parting of the ways came around 1900, it was much more the middle class versus the lower classes and urban versus rural people in both sections than it was South versus the North.

William S. Banowsky, from the "main-line" Church of Christ, cuts the cause to one basic issue: the growth of Theological Liberalism among the Disciples, with the Church of Christ standing firmly behind the infallibility of the Bible and a "thus saith the Lord" position.<sup>5</sup> Banowsky's thesis cannot account for the separate emergence of the Independent Christians within two decades after the first break. As A.T. DeGroot, a Disciple historian, has observed, the Independent Christian movement is a "Church of Christ Number Two." Indeed, many of these churches, though they use the organ much or most of the time in auditorium services, call themselves "Church of Christ."<sup>6</sup> They subscribe fully to fundamentalism and evangelicalism and are only less legalistic than the non-instrument wing. Banowsky also fails to weigh the great amount of

1. The separation of the Churches of Christ from the Disciples of Christ took place in the years 1887-1906. The break between the Independent Christians and the Disciples may be dated in the decade 1920-30.

2. Symbolic of this break which shifted overwhelmingly the churches in East Tennessee away from the Disciples was the divorce of Milligan College from the state society in 1928.

3. It is a serious error to attribute Lipscomb's negative attitude toward the *Christian Standard* to sectional bias. Lipscomb had been opposed to the war on religious grounds. For this reason alone he would reject the efforts of the founders of the *Standard* to keep alive the animosities generated by the war.

4. David E. Harrell, Jr., *The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples 1865-1900* (Atlanta, 1973).

5. William S. Banowsky, *The Mirror of a Movement* (Dallas, 1965).

6. A.T. DeGroot, *Disciple Thought: A History* (Ft. Worth, 1965).

anti-Modernism among the Disciples and the outstanding role of J.W. McGarvey in the evangelical resistance to the shallow Liberalism of the Nineteenth Century.

### Early Warnings . . .

James DeForest Murch, an Independent Christian historian, gives appropriate emphasis to the development of exclusivism in the Church of Christ, but finds it rooted in the soil of rural isolation, ignorance, and uninformed leadership.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, he says, this wing of the Restoration took no part in the Fundamentalist-Modernist battle, but in recent decades embraced the evangelical defense after it had been already worked out. Murch curiously overlooks the fact that perhaps the first Restoration voice in this struggle was that of Tolbert Fanning before the Civil War. David Lipscomb was continuously alert to the issue and kept the readers of the *Advocate* adequately informed.

Walter W. Sikes, who was a professor at Abilene Christian College when I was a student there, and who left the college when the ACC "College of the Bible" came under attack and later identified with the Disciples, found a half dozen causes of the separation without attempting to rank them.<sup>8</sup> Among them were: urbanization, which broke down frontier barriers and forced association with other religionists; exclusivism (which he failed to develop); sectionalism (which Garrison and older historians under-emphasized and which Harrell over-emphasized); institutionalization of religion, as in the societies; cultural changes which promoted an interest in instrumental music, choirs, church dinners, and ritual; and the source and nature of authority.

The Sikes analysis has merits in that, like the varied nature of the Restoration religious body itself, its disintegration could be attributed to a complex of factors. However, in failing to weigh the factors or trace out their roots, his study does not advance us very far in the quest for self-understanding. A number of historians, in pointing out that personal ambitions and personality clashes among leaders, particularly editors, were as important as differences over doctrine, were close to the root cause. James Allen, an editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, was confident that the key to an understanding of the division lay in the "two" Alexander Campbells—the earlier, iconoclastic Campbell who set the bounds of the true church and the soft, decadent Campbell of later years whose mental powers and judgment went into decline following the shocking death of his young son.

### Charismatic Leadership . . .

Though Allen's thesis is not tenable, it does point to one aspect of the Restoration Movement too little emphasized by the historians, namely, the role of personality and the psycho-sociological roots of the division. One feature of the Western frontier, which gave birth to the Restoration Movement, was its attraction to dominant charismatic leadership. This tendency is clearly visible in Restoration history to the present. Few men ever shaped a religious movement throughout their lives as did Campbell. It is amazing to note that in the thinly settled and isolated West he had over 7,000 subscribers in Kentucky alone to the *Millennial Harbinger* in 1830, the first year of its publication. Carl Ketcherside's brilliantly

edited personal journal, *Mission Messenger*, which has had a powerful influence in contemporary Church of Christ and Independent Christian circles, came to an end in 1975 after thirty-seven years with a subscriber list of 8,500 around the world.

### Vanishing Optimism . . .

Issues tend to be self-selective of supporters. Obviously different personality types were drawn into the Restoration Movement by its two major appeals, unity of all Christians and restoration of primitive Christianity. It was not apparent at first that these goals might be understood differently or that one might be given greater emphasis than the other. So long as the movement retained its confident belief that it would soon absorb all Christians from the different denominations into a triumphant "Christians only" union, it marched forward in a solid front. When that optimism vanished under the impact of the Civil War, the industrial revolution, and the Modernist attack, a deep fissure emerged separating the two goals. The fissure was not in the main sectional, even though the Church of Christ was centered in the South. Its appearance was not an expression of Southern nationalism, but a response of the rural, frontier-persisting mind which united those Tennesseans and transplanted Tennesseans in Texas and Arkansas who identified Restorationism with the lower-class frontier values.

Robbed of its original optimism, this wing of Restorationism coalesced almost completely around one goal, the restoring of the primitive church. Giving up its original primary function of addressing Christians in denominational folds, it came to view other religious groups with hostility. The loss of concern for unity gave free rein to exclusivism, the root

cause of division within Restorationism. Baited by his Disciple critics, Lipscomb was belatedly tormented into defending exclusivism in 1905, something he would not have done earlier, by declaring that Christ was the "greatest exclusivist who ever lived."

Lipscomb was in many ways a remarkable and magnanimous man whose view embraced both goals of Restorationism. As late as 1894 he was writing proposals for uniting with the Baptists. In 1888 he stubbornly resisted all proposals to divide the movement, declaring, "We have never been able to reach the point when we should say, 'Let us divide the Church of Christ.'" Regrettably, events of exclusivism and opposing responses outran the man, leading him to make a choice which he accepted only in deepest gloom.

### No Compelling Reason . . .

I do not regard these developments as inevitable for the Restoration Movement as a whole. That an extreme right wing, which came to embrace Theological Modernism, to reject that basic proposition of Restorationism, and to accept its status as a coordinate branch with other Protestant denominations, would have detached itself, I have no doubt. But there was no compelling reason why the Churches of Christ, the Independent Christians, and the majority of the Disciples could not have stood together in the century-end crisis and remained in fraternal relationship to this day. Social, economic, or psychological determinism does not dictate the course of our religious life. What happened could have been averted. What did happen can to a great extent be overcome. In another article I will look for the key to the behavior of the second-generation Restoration leaders in that crisis in the pursuit of self-knowledge within the Churches of Christ. □

7. James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, 1962).

8. Walter W. Sikes, "Heritage and Promise: A Portrait of an American Religious Movement" (unpublished manuscript in the library of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville).

# An Unpopular Truth

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

St. Louis, Missouri

I have been around long enough to learn that one does not gain in popularity by speaking critically of the historical religious group with which he is affiliated. There is always an "open season" upon others and anyone can take the field and blast away at them as long as his verbal ammunition holds out and he can keep his powder dry. But it isn't "cricket," as our British brethren would put it, to take public aim at "our brethren," and let folks in general know there is anything out of line with us.

You can talk about brethren in private as much as you like and lambaste them in secret conclaves, so long as it doesn't get out. In fact, the great American pastime in most gatherings is talking about the brethren—who are not there! But the unpardonable sin in many quarters is to reveal our shortcomings openly and let "the outside world get hold of it!" I will probably get in hot water for some of the things I shall say, but I have been scalded by professionals, so I am going to risk expressing a few honest convictions I hold. You need not concur with them for me to love you and I'll not become uptight if you disagree. It just seems as if someone ought to say a few things out loud, and, like Jeremiah, I am weary from holding in!

## "Denomination" . . .

As a starter, let me say that the Church of Christ, as it exists today, is a denomination in the fairest sense of that word. I mean the non-instrumental "Church of

Christ" which is fragmented into about two dozen parties. Of course I know that "denomination" is a term we apply to others. It is a derogatory expression, a derisive expletive, which we use to characterize heretics and apostates, because we are as ignorant of the meaning of those two words as we are of the meaning of denomination. Any group which denominates itself is a denomination. The word comes from the Latin *denominare*, to name, to designate by a specific name, to give a distinctive title.

The term "Church of Christ" is as much a name for a specific group as are the terms Baptist Church or Methodist Church. A religious group does not become a denomination by its particular doctrines. The Baptists are not a denomination because of the practice of immersion. The Reformed Presbyterians are not a denomination because of their rigid refusal to employ instrumental music in their corporate praise to God. It makes no difference whether the words used as an appellation are found in the scriptures or derived from some other source, any segment of believers in Christ which brands itself to distinguish its adherents is a denomination for the simple reason that it has denominated itself. Dressing a practice in the livery of heaven does not make it right.

The community of reconciled ones has no official title. It has no name which can be recorded in the files of the United States Census Bureau. That community of the redeemed is designated by a great

many words in the apostolic writings but every one of them is a common noun, serving as a description or a relationship. There is only one body of the called saints and it needs no title with which to differentiate it from any other. There is no other in its category. The "church" is not a human organization but a divine organism. It is not an earthly concoction but a heavenly creation. There is only one church, there never was but one, and there never will be another. The body of Christ embraces every saved person on this earth, and some of them are squatting behind some strange signboards. God does not judge men by what other men have written on signboards, but by what

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## FOR THE NEW YEAR, 1976

Would to God

That one of the faces of Janus  
Were altruistic; but both,  
So far as I can see,  
Reflect the inability of mortal me  
To espouse the good for its own sake.  
I hardly make the turn toward love  
Before I find my comfort  
Has not been left behind.  
There seems but relative difference  
Between the good I choose  
And the evil I refuse.  
Thanks be to God that he makes  
Neither too much of the backward aspect  
Nor too little of the hopeful prospect.  
He set the model when He looked  
Two directions at once,  
But with a single eye.

—Elton D. Higgs

Dec. 28, 1975

the Spirit has written on "the fleshly tables of the heart."

For a long time I did not know this and that accounts for the tract I wrote in Red Cloud, Nebraska years ago, under the heading, "Whose Name Shall the Bride Wear?" It had long been one of my favorite protracted meeting themes, and I thought it was pretty hot stuff. So did the brethren in the party with which I was allied at the time. They circulated fifty-thousand copies of it. I wish I had them back. I found out that "Church of Christ" is not the name of the bride at all. Christ was not the second name of Jesus, but his office or function. He was Jesus *the* Christ, or Messiah. A bride does not wear the name of her husband's office or function. The wife of Mr. Brown, the carpenter, is not called Mrs. Carpenter. The wife of Mr. Smith, the painter, is not called Mrs. Painter.

Besides that, the wedding has not yet taken place as anyone can see by reading Revelation 19:7-9. I have an invitation and I intend to be there. I have been called. But even after the wedding the bride will not be called "Church of Christ." On the basis of our reasoning she would have to be called Mrs. Jesus. What would you think of a signboard which read "Mrs. Jesus Meets Here for Worship—Romans 16:16"? Even our brethren who use the argument they have cooked up for debate know better. They talk about the name of the bride and then insist upon using the small "c" for church, so they will not appear "denominational." Whoever heard of a person spelling her name as a common noun is spelled? We do not write about "mrs. brown" or "mrs. smith." It is easier to admit there is no divinely-given name for the called-out ones and quit trying to drum up titles which only reveal that "our slip is showing." □

# THE CHURCH UNDER GRACE

DAVID F. GRAF

*Ann Arbor, Michigan*

Several years ago I heard one of our evangelistic counselors recommend a fool-proof response to that difficult question frequently raised by potential converts to the Church of Christ: "Isn't that the church that believes they will be the only ones saved?" He fully realized that the traditional response ("Y'betcha") was destined to encounter indignant resistance if not hostility. It appeared that he had observed that outsiders had a difficult time understanding why everyone but us would roast in hell.

In order not to lose our proselyte or suffer a black eye to match our black Bible (a striking case of the "blind leading the blind"), he proposed an ingenious alternative by recommending we reply with the rather amicable answer, "I believe the same thing you do about that." In amazement, he assured us, our querist would say, "You do?" Then all we had to do is quote Matthew 7:21 and the words, "I believe only those who do God's will can be saved. Don't you?" Eventually we would have our convert and hopefully it would be years later before he realized that he was right in his first query.

The reverse side of this situation is the suggestion by anyone within our ranks that other churches are included among the redeemed. It has the same shock value as the original question on most

No being is worthy of being loved, if by worthiness is meant something which would objectively draw love to itself: merit. Love is always necessarily a grace; the order of love is beyond the relative world of merit and demerit—it is the order of the free gift.

—Gabriel Marcel

Christ *loved* the church and gave himself up for her.

—Paul the Apostle

Church of Christ members. The prevailing attitude is one of exclusion, not inclusion. For example, recently J.D. Tant (October, 1975) has expressed strong reservations about Thomas Lane's suggestions that fellowship should include "denominationalists" (August, 1975). He feels uncomfortable at the widening of the pearly gates to include Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Lutherans. For him, the brotherhood is restricted to only those who comply with the faith and practice of the New Testament, i.e., those who are baptized as adults for the remission of sins. In contrast, Lane is willing to include all evangelical denominations who give "assent to the principle of fidelity to Scripture alone." Thus the guiding principle for engaging in fellowship and separating the sheep from the goats is the Reformation hallmark of *sola Scriptura*.

In my opinion, both of these viewpoints are wrongheaded. I would like to make a few suggestions for consideration. These remarks should not be taken as personal, since I assume each of the views expressed by Tant and Lane are representative of many others.

First, it seems that it is imperative that questions concerning salvation should take their starting point from *above*, not *below*. These are matters that can be

viewed only through divine eyes. It is entirely presumptuous of us to make any attempt to demarcate the limits of the redeemed. The church is a collection of saved sinners, not an institution which dispenses salvation. We do not have the ability to render judgment nor the authority. It is God's privilege and prerogative to deal with humanity as he wishes without being subject to the dictates of the church. In this, as in all matters, it is his will and not ours which will be done.

This should be a source of comfort to us, for the God we serve is not some whimsical or capricious deity. God is love, and love is not limited to objects of merit but is free to choose that which it desires. God is not some magnet which is attracted only to those segments of his church where there is "perfect" knowledge or obedience. After all, the church is the product of God's downward movement, not man's upward grasp for heaven.

## The Primacy of Grace . . .

Secondly, if one is going to isolate one of the slogans of the 16th century Reformation as the starting point for fellowship, that of *sola gratia* is far more appropriate than *sola Scriptura*. The focus of Luther's theology was not the problem of the church but the problem of salvation. In this, he attempted to establish the primacy of grace. The modern effort to reconstruct a "model" church from the pages of the New Testament has often obscured this important theme which has dominated God's relationship with his people. As R. Lanny Hunter has warned, "restoration theology is a system with its roots in law—not grace" (*Mission*, June, 1974).

The inherent problem of the principle of "Scripture only" is the problem of interpretation. A unity of inquiry of an es-

tablished authority, as Lane recognizes, will never result in unity of belief. Sociological and cultural factors do influence our response to the Gospel, as the pages of the New Testament itself clearly reveal. It is naive and self-deceptive to think we can take a leap into the first century without dragging along any of the developments of the intervening centuries, much less those of our own time.

Even if it were possible to perfectly restore the model church of the first century, would it require the wholesale elimination of all subsequent innovations and traditions? Is it even necessary? Imagine the mission of Jesus as a crusade to restore the ancient order of the Israel of Moses. It would have meant among other things the elimination of various sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes), institutions (synagogues, sanhedrin) and practices (Hannukah). However, the ministry of Jesus was not occupied in a "back to the Torah" movement. Traditions were not rejected for *sola Scriptura*, but assimilated into his obedience to God (Lk. 4:16; Jn. 10:22). When Jesus did enter into controversy over tradition, it was always over the "abuse and not the lawful use," to use the words of Thomas Campbell in his *Declaration and Address* of 1809. The modus operandi of the church has always been Scripture *and* tradition, whether it realized it or not.

Finally, let me suggest that in discussion of the question of fellowship, our focus should be the *real* church, not the ideal church. The extrapolation from the New Testament of the beliefs and practices of the model church excludes those marks of imperfection which were part of the real church's existence within history. We must confess, along with Everett Ferguson, that the "first century fell short of the apostolic standard" (*Mission*, August, 1973). Is not the same thing true of

the contemporary church? The church without spot or wrinkle is purely the result of God's activity, not ours. Neither is it just a matter of observing the "essentials." As Alexander Campbell observed, "The preachers of 'essentials,' as well as the preachers of 'nonessentials,' frequently err" (MH, 1837, p. 413).

### A Constant Necessity . . .

This means that it is necessary to always consider the church as in need of God's grace. Fellowship is founded solely on Jesus Christ alone, not our adherence to a model church. This does not mean we should be satisfied with our imperfection, but rather to be receptive to any effort to bring us into closer agreement with God's purposes. In the words of Pope Paul VI in his encyclical on the Paths of the Church (*Ecclesiam Suam*), reform and renewal are the constant theme of God's earthly pilgrims:

the actual image of the church is never as perfect, as lovely, as holy or as brilliant as that formative divine idea could wish it to be. Hence there arises the unselfish and almost impatient need for renewal, for correction of the defects which this conscience denounces and rejects, as if standing before a mirror, we were to examine interiorly the image of Christ which he has left us.

However, those who view their particular church as the perfect institution can only look in the mirror and ask, "Which is the fairest church of all?" If any answer other than their own name is sounded, they storm away in a mad tirade like the wicked queen in Snow White. The problem with operating with such idealistic concepts is that when the ideal becomes reality, the church loses its offensive and becomes defensive. As Yves Congar said of Vatican I (1869-1870), "they built ecclesiology like they built the temple of Jerusalem—with sword in one hand!" Re-

forms are lost in a spirit of protection, and all who dissent from the accepted ideal are labeled traitors to the cause. "Love it or leave it" becomes the response to any critics. The dangers of such a viewpoint are well outlined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his analysis of Christian fellowship:

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself (*Life Together*, pp. 27-28).

The church began in the first century and continues unto the present day as a community which exists by *sola gratia*. The church will always be a sinful church (*communio peccatorum*). This is a principle we have come to understand as far as the individual Christian is concerned. Why is it lost in the transition to a collection of individuals? When asked if we believe our church will alone constitute the redeemed, why do we sometimes respond, "No. I believe God *by his mercy* may save some people in the denominations"? Are we saved by our doctrinal correctness to the exclusion of grace, while they are saved by grace to the exclusion of doctrinal correctness? I think not. Perhaps Ernst Käsemann is right in observing that "a broad way leads, not only to hell, but also from anthropology to ecclesiology!"

In the Reformation it was said of the individual that he was at the same time

justified and a sinner (*simul justus et peccator*). Cannot this be translated to the church? Is not the church merely a community of sinners which through the forgiving grace of God also becomes really and truly a church that is holy and without blemish (*communio sanctorum*)? Should this not affect our attitude towards fellowship of others? Will this not give us greater confidence in viewing the church as a center of God's redemptive activity? The church as an object of God's love has been well captured by Hans Küng in his excellent treatise on ecclesiology (*The Church*, pp. 343-4):

We need waste no time speculating what would happen if there were no Church, or no holy Church. God will ensure that there will always be a Church and that it will be holy . . . it can become a beggar-woman, set itself up as a trader, sell itself as a prostitute;

but through God's preserving, saving and forgiving mercy it will always remain the bride of Christ. It may wander through the world poor, hungry and helpless, but the Father will always run to embrace and kiss it on its return. It may lose its way in the desert, but the shepherd will always go out after it. It may roam through the town, but the Bridegroom will always find it. It may desert him, but he will never desert it. The Church goes on its pilgrim way through the ages, along a road not of its own choosing, along the way to which it is irrevocably called. It may lose the way, make detours, take wrong turnings, it may stumble and fall, it may fall among thieves and lie half-dead by the roadside. But God the Lord will not pass by on the other side; he will pour oil on its wounds, lift it up, give it a lodging and provide for its healing even that which could not have been foreseen. The Church will always remain the holy Church. This we know in faith: *credo sanctam ecclesiam*. □

### TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

Accumulating year-ends is a purely human occupation:  
Piling up tinsel monuments  
And stacking shards of shattered plans.  
Only the illusion  
That things which matter have beginning or end  
Spurs mortals to wrap up one year  
And open another.  
Celestial perception  
Tolerates imperfection,  
But gently urges us not to mistake  
Our clocks for absolute.  
Let us accept warily, then,  
The fragmentation of experience,  
And search for the splices of God  
By which the worst of the past  
And the promise of the future  
Are always joined.

—Elton D. Higgs  
Dec. 28, 1975