

*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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### THE BROKEN JAR

(Mark 14:3-9)

The ointment with abandon  
Runs down His cheek,  
Sweetly joining tears of love  
Set flowing by her extravagance.  
Beauty and prescience  
Are mingled there,  
While spare and cautious faces  
Grimace at the waste.  
They advocate the shorter way—  
Slipping pennies to the poor,  
And making sure the books are kept.  
But Jesus wept  
That one should share His sacrifice,  
And break the jar to pour out all.

—ELTON D. HIGGS

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## FROM THE EDITOR

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Often criticized as unspiritual intrusions into the services, and not infrequently poorly executed, announcements are reluctantly accepted in some church gatherings as necessary evils. Necessary they are; evil they are not—except in the sense that an inappropriate or bungled sermon could be called evil.

The spiritual significance of announcements is often overlooked, not only by those who would restrict worship to “five items,” but by the more astute authors of books on worship, who seldom mention them. This fact challenges us to analyze such scriptures as the last chapter of Colossians—an epistle intended to be read in church—or 1 Corinthians 16.

Paul did not succumb to the extreme spiritualizing tendency which prevents some church services from being concrete expressions of fellowship, but he laid on the assembled saints such “worldly” items as personal plans and reports, expressions of affection, individual greetings, and news of the brethren, which would enhance their mutual involvement and inspire prayer and praise. Worship which is so narrowly defined that such communications are excluded would, I suspect, be too “solemn” for Paul.

Perhaps our low view of announcements is the main reason we so often feel obliged to apologize for them, since it permits us to leave them in the hands of those who either have nothing to say and say it or who clearly lack public speaking ability. If we made the same rigorous demands of the announcements that we do of the sermon, they would not only be a vital asset to the community life, but might also be so appraised by all participants in the meeting. —HL

*The author sets forth a model of the church which is a call back to the true path of restoration.*

## Restoration and Models of the Church\*

NORMAN L. PARKS

*Murfreesboro, Tennessee*

Though Alexander Campbell generally spoke of the religious movement which he spearheaded in America as a “reformation,” others boldly proclaimed it to be a “restoration.” The historians sealed the development by naming it the “Restoration Movement.” Now, four generations later, prodded by its own ugly divisions and by the hermeneutics of theologians like Krister Stendahl, writers within the movement have been reexamining the concept of “restoration” within recent years.

From the “Mainline” Church of Christ side, the reexamination has not been productive of new insights, better hermeneutics, or a passion for the unity which must flow from restoration. Indeed, out of this reexamination has grown a renewed rationalization for and justification of division and exclusivism. As one such apologist put it, “Division is always preceded by digression. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Since charismatics, premillennialists, and “liberals” are “digressives,” logically they must be cut off. It is small wonder that some who have been offended by division and exclusion have come to question the restoration

\*The author owes a particular debt of gratitude to Prof. Curry Peacock of Middle Tennessee State University in the shaping of this article. His inputs were many, making him in a real sense a co-author.

1. Jimmy Jividen, “Is the Restoration Principle to Be Rejected?” *Mission*, Sept., 1975.

principle, while others in examining the spotted actuality find that it is not applied.

That restoration is the very heart of the gospel is the burden of all of the Pauline writings. Jesus is the restorer. His mission was to undo the consequences of the Fall, to rescue man from the Adamic age, to reveal to them the Father, to create anew the family of God, and to call together a united people. It follows that restoration has to do with people, not with institutional structure. The liberated

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human spirit, seeking, inquiring, and growing, cannot flourish within the confines of rigid structure and control. As Jesus put it, man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man.

It is at this point, I think, that the whole American Restoration Movement—including Disciples, Independent Christians, and Church of Christ—has gone astray, for its thrust has grown increasingly institutional. Out of this thrust have emerged models of the church that are foreign to the restoration principle. I bypass the Disciples and the Independent Christians by noting only the elaborate





may be tolerated if kept silent, and who is to be excommunicated. They are the final judge of truth, which may vary from "eldership" to "eldership," but within a given congregation, it is a settled matter. For practical reasons a member may be permitted to hold a contrary truth provided he does not vocalize his belief.

Deacons are held to be junior officers, well above the mass of laymen in honor and responsibility. They are generally chosen on the basis of their pliability. Promotion to the inner sanctum of power is ultimately open to the most cooperative and biddable deacons. There are no deaconesses and no place of responsibility for women. The pyramidal model is strictly a male enterprise.

The only alternatives open to ordinary members are to stay or leave. This is well illustrated by a split in a Murfreesboro church recently. More than a decade ago a preacher had organized his own church and, in order to erect the building, had chartered the institution under a board of trustees and had sold bonds. For eleven years the preacher as chief trustee had handled the church funds, wrote all of the checks, and got along without elders, though the members had grown up within the Church of Christ. When the remaining trustees charged the preacher with mishandling church funds and called for his resignation, elders were speedily chosen, including the preacher, and the challenging trustees were excommunicated. The trustees took their case to court, but the members had only to decide whether to stay or leave, and apparently about half of them chose to leave.

### The Eldership . . .

Interaction of language and model is a phenomenon of any culture. This is well illustrated in the growth of the unbiblical hierarchical model in the church within the Restoration Movement. The shaping of the corporate life of Christians into a

close-knit community of love projected in the New Testament is being almost fatally handicapped by the existence of the institution called "the eldership" among the people denominated "Church of Christ."

The term "eldership," which is actually nonsensical "Americanese" and has not made its way into any of the better English dictionaries, is a part of the peculiar vocabulary of the Church of Christ which has helped us move along sectarian by-paths. Such a vocabulary has been inspired by—and in turn has supported—the actualization of a full-fledged power model among us. Let us examine this doctrinal construct. Nobody uses such expressions as "the deaconship met and decided to

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### Around the coined term "eldership" there has collected a galaxy of power concepts.

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paint the church" or "the secretaryship decided to omit the birthday announcements from the church bulletin." Not only would they be regarded as ungrammatical, but also in conflict with the fact that deacons and secretaries decide nothing. Around the coined term "eldership" there has collected a galaxy of power concepts. They include "rule," "authority," "decision-making," "control," "withdrawal of fellowship" (excommunication), and "unaccountability." So far has this process developed that "the eldership" is frequently held to mean "the church." When the late Batsell Baxter's interpretation of the instruction by Jesus in Matt. 18:17 on settling a dispute with a brother was challenged, he repeated, "No, that does not mean to 'tell it to the church,' it means to take it to the elders." Also important in the development of this cultural institution is the understanding that "the eldership" is an *en camera* body, acting only in its collegiate capacity. An elder does nothing *ex cathedra*, the "eldership" does everything.

### "Under the Over" . . .

A doctrine of magical import which has grown up in recent decades is "under the oversight," spun largely from Paul's farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church "among whom the Holy Spirit made you shepherds." E.G. Sewell, one of the early editors of the *Gospel Advocate*, viewed with alarm the gradual emerging of a power "eldership" and pointed out that the King James translation—"over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers"—carried an erroneous connotation of power. Elders are "among" and not "over," Sewell insisted, and under no circumstance do they have authority or power. Yet the fact remains that the moving appeal of Paul, couched in the language of submission and tender, loving care, has been reshaped into the foundation for driving, authoritarian rule in many churches and made to extend to every aspect of the corporate life of the congregation. Now everything must be "under the over"—be it a television broadcast, a missionary in Japan, a senior citizens home, a campus evangelism program, a children's home, a home study group, a retreat for worship and fellowship, a youth meeting. So long as an activity is "under the over," it is held to be sound and safe. In one case an "eldership" undertook to pass on all books donated for use to the Hong Kong churches. Since they had not read the books, and their preacher had not read them either, they had him to undertake the job of weeding out all "unsound" works.

If the Pauline view of elders is that of gentle, concerned souls who inspire and lead by personal example and who, out of their long experience and pious meditation on God's word, teach, admonish, and counsel brethren in spiritual matters, the present view is that of a corporate board of directors running the affairs of the church by fiat. Though the New Testament presents their chief function as teaching and counseling, few elders today

have ever stood before the flock in a teaching role or sat down with a troubled member in a counseling session.

"Under the over" connotes hierarchy, a concept which Jesus flatly rejected. The modern dogma has been fed by theories of administration derived from the business culture and the effort to adjust the doctrine of congregational autonomy to modern widescale approaches to social and religious action. Spelled out, the "under the over" doctrine has come to mean a hierarchical system of administration from the top down in which no religious activity can take place involving groups of members without permission and supervision of the authoritative "eldership." On every committee there must be an elder *ex officio*, even the flower committee composed otherwise of women. Such inherent worthiness of the "office" may put on the library committee an elder who has not read five religious books in his whole life.

The dominance of the administrative role as distinct from the spiritual role of

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### Responsibility is seen as a one-way affair . . .

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the "eldership" is revealed in two pervasive standards of the church. Once constituted, this body is above responsibility to the congregation, enjoying something of the status of divine-right monarchy and is self-perpetuating. Responsibility is seen as a one-way affair, that of the members to the ruling body. Boldly interpreted as an office in the political or business sense—a claim strenuously denied by David Lipscomb and other pioneer writers<sup>2</sup>—its primary role is seen to be managerial on the grounds that "the business of the church is like any other business."

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2. See my series of articles under the title, "It Shall Not Be So Among You," *Mission*, Jan., Feb., April, 1975.



## The Spotted Actuality . . .

The evils flowing from the policing and control of authoritarian "elderships" are evident on every hand. One church member has been denied any participation in any church activity of a Tennessee church for 17 years because he does not believe that elders have the authority to rule the church. One writer for *Integrity* received a cease-and-desist order under threat of excommunication. One group meeting during the week in Borger for worship and edification were told that they had to stop unless the program was approved in advance and an elder present at the meeting. In Murfreesboro impromptu singing was stopped by the order that nobody could start a song except the official song-leader. In another church folk songs were banned by the order that only songs in the songbook could be sung. In still another church girls were told that they could not vocalize prayers in prayer circles in private homes. Only officially approved literature may be displayed in the library or reading shelf. Sunday school teachers may be advised not to call on certain members for class participation. Voluntaryism may be totally squelched and spontaneity banned, though both seemed to be major features of first century worship.

In Midland the address of a distinguished archaeologist of Bible lands was cancelled when the elders learned that he wrote for *Integrity*. In Atlanta prospective vacation Bible school teachers had to score 100 on a written examination designed to establish their orthodoxy. In Wakefield three men installed as "the eldership" on Sunday morning took action Sunday night against a member whom they accused of "insubordination" because he admitted under questioning that, though he had no intention of resisting them, he did not believe they met the Bible standard for elders. As a result, almost half of the congregation found the atmosphere too inhospitable for them and sor-

rowfully moved out. Further inquiry into the Wakefield story makes clear, I believe, the impact of model upon church life. Two of the elders brought with them from the South the institutional image of the church topped by an authoritative "eldership." Wakefield was radically different, its dynamism residing in an enthusiastic, participatory body who sought to win people to Christ rather than to an institution, who addressed themselves resourcefully to a predominantly Catholic community, many of whose youth had become alienated from formal ritual and institutionalized religion, and who baptized new converts with their own hands. Their joyous religion found expression in a delightful sheet filled with poems, essays, and personal testimony to the Good News. Feeling the need for greater maturation, they employed the services of an inspiring teacher, paying his livelihood

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### . . . three men installed as "the eldership" on Sunday morning took action Sunday night . . .

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out of their own pockets without touching the church budget. The new "eldership" moved quickly to monopolize all decision-making, asserted its power to rule, discontinued the publication, fired the teacher, and laid down an ultimatum to the membership to "shape up or ship out."

This list could be expanded a hundred-fold by almost any informed reader. The point is not that there is no elder on the Pauline model and no church which has escaped authoritarian subjection. There are unquestionably congregations which are open and free. But the fact remains that the cultural institution called "the eldership" is pervasive among the churches and is the apex of the church model which has materialized out of our history. Moreover it is diametrically opposed to the model which emerges from the pages

of Holy Writ. If the church is enervated, if the members have been largely reduced from participants to attendants, if the teaching function has drifted into the hands of a professional clergy, if the religious institution has replaced the religious community, if administration has become

more important than spiritual example and leadership, if knowledge of the Bible is shallow and spotted, if doctrinal orthodoxy counts for more than spiritual living, if passivity and alienation are visible phenomena, the chief cause is to be found in the hierarchical, authoritarian model.

## THE COMMUNITARIAN MODEL

In contrast to the pyramidal model of authoritarian rule of the church stands the spherical, organic model revealed in the pages of the New Testament. It is a participatory model, providing simultaneously the maximum of interdependence and the maximum of individualization. In this model the sole authority is Christ, who long ago claimed all authority and never delegated any of it to any man. Its chief feature is the absence of power, which Christ rejected in the great Temptation incident. All are members of a body, all are equal, all belong to the royal priesthood. In it there is neither superordination nor subordination, only voluntary submission one to another.

The sphere represents the total organism, with all members functioning and participating. The older members (*presbuteros* and *presbuteras*) by virtue of their growth in Christ and by means of example, teaching, and encouragement lead the younger ones, who follow out of love for their elders and respect for the superior lives they live.

In this model each member functions as aptitude and taste direct, but within the framework of freedom and love. The freedom which pervades it, in contrast to imposed control from above, inspires growth and productivity. Many rather than the few are involved in teaching, all rather than a selected few lift voices in thanksgiving and invocation, and all help formulate the corporate decisions, since the decision-making process is a growth process. Exploring the possibilities of creative service, each member is a deacon

or deaconess. There are not any officers, but many involved in many roles. Attendants and spectators—pew occupants—are replaced by participants. The fields of service are so numerous and varied as to find employment for any kind of talent either limited or rich. It is a model of mutual ministry, mutual encouragement, mutual effort—the very body of Christ living, thriving, loving. The restraints are the restraints of love—the discipline for the saving and not the punishment of the dissident.

It is not to be assumed that problems will not arise within this model. The difference lies in the fact that the problems will be faced openly and courageously by the totality. Readers of Paul's letters are aware that never did he call upon an elite group of church officers to deal with issues arising at Corinth or in Galatia. In most instances he does not even mention elders, much less an "eldership." He called upon the whole church. It is significant that in the greatest doctrinal crisis to face the early church, the leaders at Jerusalem involved the whole membership. The history of the American Restoration Movement reveals very successful churches functioning on the communitarian model, leaving one to wonder why the rejection of this model in the present century.

## The Test of Worship . . .

The nature of the hierarchical and communitarian models of the church reveals contrasting tendencies in the man-



ner in which God is worshipped and fellowship shared. They are:

HIERARCHICAL MODEL	COMMUNITARIAN MODEL
1. non-participatory	1. participatory
2. clerical	2. non-clerical
3. formal	3. informal
4. rigid	4. responsive
5. traditional	5. creative
6. non-learning environment	6. learning environment
7. collection of saved saints	7. "members one of another"
8. liturgical	8. spontaneous

**1. Participation.** The significance of the members as members and high priests is illustrated either by the participation or lack of participation in the worship. The hierarchical model requires that no one but those selected in advance and approved by the "authorities" may participate in the "worship service." The communitarian model more precisely parallels one of the few passages in the New Testament which describes corporate worship—1 Cor. 14:26. Each member is free to join in the worship to God.

**2. Clerical.** The pyramidal model depends on the paid minister around whom the entire service revolves. All activities prior to his performance are preliminary and all following are anti-climactic. The clergyman not only drains the financial resources of the church community, but discourages the growth of teaching and leading talent among the members. The communitarian model does the opposite. It supplants the one with the many.

**3. Formality.** The communitarian model is based on the needs of its members and requires no specific format, although centered around the Lord's Supper and the will of the Lord. The hierarchical model requires a known and accepted format, and deviation is held as dangerous because "nobody will know what is going on" and may cause someone to "criticize the church."

**4. Responsiveness.** The hierarchical

model allows no responsive activity to occur, under the guise of maintaining "decency and order." This ban carries over into all matters of the church; one must conform to rigidly established programs if he seeks to "work for the Lord." The communitarian approach is to respond to the needs of the members as they personally articulate them and to allow each member to select the mode of worship most expressive of his love of God. Decency is maintained by acknowledging the worth of the individual and allowing him freedom of expression. This extends over to the whole spiritual life, with each member given the opportunity to pursue those activities into which he feels God is leading him.

**5. Learning environment.** The spherical model attempts to create an effective learning environment by interchange and dialogue with each other as they explore the "unsearchable riches of God's word." Instead of being passive listeners, they are active participants. The communication system of the pyramidal model places the body in a passive listening posture, unable to question the speaker or request clarification of ideas. The result is a minimal learning situation.

**6. Nature of the body.** The authoritarian model tends to make the church a collection of saints who watch performances and activities as they unfold. The architecture of the building is in conformity with the model. The members cannot see each other, viewing only the backs of heads. Christian empathy in such a physical environment is out of the question. In such an impersonal setting, it is small wonder that saints are not greatly moved when berated to "forsake not the assembling of yourselves together." The mutual ministry model reaches out toward the goal of being "members one of another." It revolves around the indispensable ideal of building one another up, of ministering to each person's needs, and, on the whole, of developing an intensely personal rela-

tionship among the body of believers.

**7. Ritual.** The communitarian model is devoid of planned ritual and depends to a large extent on the movement of the Spirit to lead the body in worship. As such it acknowledges only the authority of Christ as Lord. The authoritarian model suppresses all spontaneity and therefore weakens vitality.

## SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*1. Are not elders to "rule" the church, as the Bible says? No, Jesus specifically prohibited ruling or lording it over the elect by saying that "it shall not be so among you." The expression about ruling was forced into the King James version by a divine-right king who declared, "No bishop, no king." The real meaning is that elders are to be "out front" in example, service, humility, and dedication.*

*2. Then who are to make the decisions for the church? Obviously decisions should be made by those who are affected by them.*

*3. Why is decision-making by the whole church important? For the same reason why it is important for the individual to make decisions. It is a growth process, a maturing process, a responsibility-developing process. The involvement of all members makes a strong body, whether the human body or the body of Christ.*

*4. Why do churches split? Because under the authoritarian model of the church they have never learned to be a community. It is through the continuous interpersonal relations of its members that a community develops. Decision-making and group responsibility are essential to the making of a community. Under the elitist model of the church, the members have only the alternative of leaving or staying if a challenging problem arises. The pyramidal model makes the church an organization to which individuals belong. The communitarian model*

When religion becomes institutionalized, dogmatized, ritualized, and professionalized, it ceases to be a shaping influence in the world. The American Restoration Movement in its beginning rejected each of these aspects and raised the hopes of many. The communitarian model of the church is a call back to the true path of restoration.

makes the church a *community*, and that is exactly what the Biblical term *ecclesia* means.

*5. Are not elders told to feed the flock? Does this not mean to perform the role of shepherds and decide for the flock? Feeding the flock simply means providing spiritual food by teaching. Elders are primarily teachers. One cannot teach by proxy any more than one can be an example by proxy.*

*6. Cannot elders meet the teaching qualification by teaching privately, while they devote most of their time to running the church? No. Very little private teaching is actually done by elders. But feeding the flock implies a clear relationship between the elder and the whole congregation publicly.*

*7. In projecting the communitarian model, have you not been impractical by describing the ideal church when actually it is difficult to get very many members to do anything except attend services? The only kind of church the Bible sets forth as the model is the ideal church. Would you want a lesser model?*

*8. Would you eliminate elders from decision-making? Elders are a part of the community. Why should a community of five hundred have only five elders? Should not every Christian as he matures grow into an elder? But whatever the number, they should lead the whole community into making the decision rather than supplant the whole in the decision-making process. □*



# Toward a Sound Departure

## A HEALTHY WAY OF LEAVING THE CHURCH

HERBERT A. MARLOWE, JR. and MARJORIE S. McDUFFIE

Tampa, Florida

One of the unfortunate but real events in the life of any religious body is that there are members who leave because they can no longer affirm the faith-stance required for continued good standing in that community of believers. Too often these people are discounted as backsliders, sinners, as people weak in faith, and their departure is viewed as a personal failure on their part. This article will offer psychological insights to those who do leave so that their experiences are less self-destructive.

To begin this analysis let us acknowledge that leaving the Church of Christ is a traumatic event, especially for those persons "raised in the church" with a prolonged and serious commitment to it. Obviously the person for whom the church has never been an important place is much less stressed by the act of departure. But when a true believer reaches a departure point, there is guilt, anxiety, pain, fear, and confusion. To leave the church which baptized you, taught you, and loved you in its own way is a heart-rending act. The uncertainty, the regret, the hurt all exact their toll, and the toll will be steep.

Each person who leaves the Church of Christ reacts uniquely to that process and its aftermath. There probably is no one right way to leave, and there certainly is no way to leave without experiencing pain in some form or another. But once having departed, there are alternative positions one can assume toward the Church of Christ which can be rated in terms of

their healthiness for the departed member.

Before examining these positions, let us clarify what we believe to be two needs of anyone who leaves the Church of Christ. By explicating these needs now we can later use them as criteria on which to rate various departure stances. One need is to find a religious body or format which allows or provides a fuller experience of God. The second need is to achieve closure on the Church of Christ experience. Each stance toward the Church of Christ taken by departed members, to be described below, will be evaluated in light of these two needs.

There are basically three stances available to former members. One is to remain attached psychologically to the Church of Christ while physically leaving. A second is to radically cut off contact with the Church of Christ by ending church-related contacts, giving away one's Church of Christ books and journals, and closing that chapter of one's life. The third is to integrate and affirm the Church of Christ experience as a legitimate part of oneself. Let us examine each in turn.

In the first stance one removes one's body without removing one's mind, heart, or psychic investment. It is still the Church of Christ and its theology and practice which defines and shapes one's person, except that now personhood is defined by opposition instead of affirmation. The Church of Christ continues to play a critical identification role, but this time the person is saying "I am not" instead of "I am." It is almost impossi-

ble to achieve any degree of psychological health through this approach because one's personality is being determined (1) negatively, and (2) by an external agent over which one has no control. In terms of the two needs delineated above this stance does not facilitate a fuller experience of God because one is still trapped with the God of the Church of Christ toward whom one is actively opposed. More importantly there is no closure, only continued negative contact. In sum, this stance is self-debilitative because one is still psychologically engaged in the Church of Christ without the psychological supports that accrue to members in good standing.

At a different point from the active denial and active nonmembership position is the stance of radically closing off one's Church of Christ experience. It might be graphically described as a no looking back, no reflecting on the Church of Christ world. It involves a total burning of one's bridges. This stance attempts to end the pain by excising it totally. This position basically assumes that the Church of Christ portion of one's life is over and done with and that one starts anew. In some ways this stance is preferable to the first alternative, for at least the continual psychic toll of the first stance is not present. But neither is this position conducive to psychological health because it essentially denies an important portion of one's history and personhood. Even if excision were possible (and it isn't—observe author James Joyce's comparable struggle with Catholicism) it would not be desirable because such an action would deny the presence of God as creator and persuader in all of life. Experiencing the fullness of God is in reciprocal relationship to experiencing the fullness of oneself so that neither exists without the other. And the closure which one achieves by this path is a false closure similar to closing the door on a messy room instead of cleaning the room and then closing the door.

## The Healthy Path of Departure . . .

The healthy path of departure lies in one's ability to grasp the conception of departure not as a rejection of the Church of Christ but rather as a step in one's lifelong search for a fuller experience of God. The person who has undertaken the exodus from the Church of Christ must be able to appreciate the value of his experience in that church.

One is better able to understand this conception of departure if he is cognizant of the ambiguous and fragmentary nature of human existence. Furthermore, he must be aware that the Church of Christ does not escape this human and historical reality. With such an awareness one can accept the imperfections of the Church of Christ while at the same time admitting the benefits of that experience.

But beyond the step of acknowledging the humanness of the church and beyond admitting its benefits, one must take the bolder step of affirmation—affirmation of the Church of Christ experience as one in which God revealed himself as an integral and formative part of one's life. It was in this church that one first learned about God, first made his commitment to God, first sought to know God.

The ability to accept the fragmentary and ambiguous nature of life, "the knowing in part," along with the realization that one finds God in the strangest places will help one find God in another context which will be equally partial, ambiguous, and strange. One learns the facets of God not from one denomination, one person, one perspective, but from all Christendom, all Christians, all perspectives—orthodox and unorthodox, conservative, liberal, intellectual, charismatic, etc. . . . any place one is open to learn.

But this process of acknowledging the church's humanness, admitting its benefits, and affirming its value promotes closure only if it is underlain by steps toward a fuller God. The essential step is recognizing intellectually and experien-



tially that the love of God is unconditional. Deep within the Church of Christ is an understanding of God's love which sees it as predicated on conformance with Church of Christ theology and practice. This functionally places the church in a mediator role between the individual and God. Only when the unconditionalness of God's love is accepted does the Church of Christ fall back into true perspective as one part of God's Kingdom here on earth. The person who has experienced the love of God is able to accept the incompleteness in all varieties of churches. Such a person can let go of the Church of Christ

or any church and still love it because that church is no longer perceived as the force which binds him to God in love. He is alone before God with only Christ as mediator. The foundation of his personal existence is no longer the Church of Christ (or any other denomination) but rather the person of Christ himself.

The individual who understands the fragmentary and conditional nature of any church but who also comprehends the whole and unconditional nature of God's love is achieving closure. This person is experiencing the freedom in Christ wherever he chooses to worship God. □

*the signs of the times . . . don haymes*

### "A NICE GUY"

In the beginning, 30 or more years ago, he was Young Lochinvar riding out of the West, a newly-minted Doctor of Philosophy from Berkeley, boldly slaying the dragons of Error and rescuing the distressed damsels of Truth. If today he seems more like Don Quixote, loping along on a flea-bitten nag, helmet slightly askew, armed with a pen rather than a lance, befuddled by the alchemy of the printed word—it is perhaps only our perceptions which changed; where once we saw dragons and giants, the cold light of time reveals only windmills, and the fair damsels are seen to be homely harridans hawking their wares.

Long ago, some wag at Harding College—where James David Bales has taught since 1944—tagged him as “the only man in America who has written more books than he has read.” To many students and other awe-struck observers of Dr. Bales' prodigious production, that line has often

seemed to be more than a joke; but any survivor of Dr. Bales' lectures—emerging with a near-terminal writer's cramp—will tell you it isn't so. A Bales book of 200 pages may include more than 700 footnotes, and he is one of the very few men in the world to have read, with careful annotation, all 26 volumes of the *Warren Commission Report*. He has ploughed through Communist Party propaganda, speeches, committee reports, legal briefs, and Congressional testimony that would put Gus Hall to sleep. Herakles in the Augean Stables never shoveled through more slop than James D. Bales, in pursuit of Facts.

As an author, Dr. Bales assumes legendary proportions. The Harding Graduate School Library lists 64 separate titles, from *The Christian Conscientious Objector* (1944) to *Psalm for Frightened and Frustrated Sheep* (1976). He has published most of this remarkable output

himself, or with the imprint of obscure purveyors of tracts and Bible school literature; but Baker Book House has issued three volumes and Christian Standard has published another; several, including his most notorious work, *The Martin Luther King Story*, were put out by Billy James Hargis' Christian Crusade. Beyond the books are countless articles on every item of religious controversy from the Pope to the Pentecostals. Through several serious illnesses and the siring of a trainload of talented and attractive progeny, James Bales has managed to propel himself into the eye of almost every storm confronting the Church of Christ for more than three decades.

With a prose style reminiscent of a dentist's drill—no mysteries, no music, no metaphors seduce or beguile the reader—Dr. Bales piles Fact upon Fact and assertion (often disguised as Fact) upon assertion to confound his opponents. He is amazed by the emotional response his method engenders; his book about Dr. King, published less than a year before the assassination, was the focus of a protest by black students at Harding in 1969, and was caustically criticized by black Church leaders. But Dr. Bales was undaunted. “Only a bigoted racist,” he had written, would identify his work as racist. “We are dealing with ideas and actions, and not with racial backgrounds.”

Dr. Bales began as a pacifist, in a time when pacifism was a “conservative” position in the country and in the Church. But by 1967 he was calling Dr. King a “pink pacifist”—somehow the world had changed. In the early 1950's, he was dubbed “The Arkansas Windjammer” by a *Gospel Guardian* writer inundated by the flood of articles Dr. Bales had published in the “co-operation” controversy. In those hectic days, Dr. Bales once sent off an article, but later discovered an error in a copy of the manuscript; he immediately dashed off a correction, but the article ran with the error. As he recounted

it later, in the *Firm Foundation*, “I sent in a correction, but I must have forgotten which paper had the article submitted to it, and sent the correction to the wrong paper.”

Today, Dr. Bales is again in the thick of the action, in a somewhat new role, having broken with his most “conservative” brethren—his closest associates—over the issue of divorce and remarriage for Christians. An article in Roy Lanier's *Rocky Mountain Christian* recounts a public discussion between Dr. Bales and Roy Deaver at Harding in April, while voicing strong opposition to Dr. Bales. Space does not permit an account of this battle or its background, which is also interesting, but the discussion is likely to continue for months and even years. Again, Dr. Bales' dispassionate Facts are met with emotion; at the conclusion of the Harding meeting, Roy Deaver lauded Dr. Bales for his “valiant battle fought against Liberalism and Atheism” and then inserted the rhetorical knife: “But brethren, what have we done if we save the Church from Liberalism, and fill it with fornicators?”

I suspect that Dr. Bales will, as always, have the last word. But the last word on James Bales came from Yater Tant more than 26 years ago, after a brief but “extremely nice” visit with his adversary in the “co-operation” schism: “He isn't half bad; if his logic were as convincing as his spirit is genial, we'd be persuaded in spite of ourselves. . . . He is a nice guy; a wee bit argumentative, perhaps, but who are we to say that is a fault?” Mr. Tant, ever an astute observer of human nature, was right. One on one, ideology aside, Jim Bales is a nice guy; he is a strong man with strong beliefs, and when those beliefs are questioned, he can be as tough an adversary as one would ever want to meet. Only our self-styled “moderates,” who have made indifference and apathy the badges of sainthood, would have it any other way. □