

*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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universally acknowledged causes, of all the corruptions and divisions that ever have taken place in the Church of God.

12. That all that is necessary to the highest state of perfection and purity of the Church upon earth is, first, that none be received as members but such as having that due measure of Scriptural self-knowledge described above, do profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures; nor, secondly, that any be retained in her communion longer than they continue to manifest the reality of their profession by their temper and conduct. Thirdly, that her ministers, duly and Scripturally qualified, inculcate none other things than those very articles of faith and holiness expressly revealed and enjoined in the word of God. Lastly, that in all their administrations they keep close by the observance of all Divine ordinances, after the example of the primitive Church, exhibited in the New Testament; without any additions whatsoever of human opinions or inventions of men.

13. Lastly. That if any circumstantial indispensable necessary to the observance of Divine ordinances be not found upon the page of express revelation, such, and such only, as are absolutely necessary for this purpose should be adopted under the title of human expedients, without any pretense to a more sacred origin, so that any subsequent alteration or difference in the observance of these things might produce no contention nor division in the Church.

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### OLD LIGHT ANTI-BURGHER SECEDER PRESBYTERIANS AND OTHERS

In the summer of 1809 Thomas Campbell composed a document which set forth the basis for "a permanent scriptural unity amongst the friends and lovers of truth and peace throughout the churches." Although Campbell was from Ireland, his religious roots went back to Scotland, where a break with the established church had resulted in the Seceder Presbyterian church. The Seceder Presbyterians further divided into Burghers and Anti-Burghers. These factions then split into New Light Burghers, Old Light Burghers, New Light Anti-Burghers, and Old Light Anti-Burghers, each one claiming to be the only true church. Although these divisions actually resulted from Scottish issues, they were nevertheless perpetuated in Ireland and the United States, where Campbell's irenic spirit quickly cost him his pulpit.

This story will sound painfully familiar to some of us who, although we may never have heard of the Old Light Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian church to which Campbell belonged, have seen an excellent replica of the sectarian art which he found so repugnant. And so the *Declaration and Address* which he composed that summer is quite relevant to our contemporary situation.

For this reason, and because a good many of our people have never read it, we are printing a portion of the *Declaration and Address* in this issue (pp. 142-144). If in reading the thirteen propositions we note, as a careful reader must, Campbell's great respect for the authority of the Bible, perhaps that will ease the discomfort some of us will inevitably experience in trying to digest them. At the very least those of us who like to claim the Campbells as our religious forefathers need to come to grips with what they actually stood for. In our opinion the world would like very much to see some more signs that we are indeed the unity movement that we claim to be, and we are very fortunate in being able to draw such signs from our history. At least the thirteen propositions tell us what we once were, and reflect what many of us would like to be again. □

## Biblical Ecology: Man and Nature in the Religion of Israel

### PART TWO

DON HAYMES

Memphis, Tennessee

### II. THE COVENANT PEOPLE

Israel's history and literature, as seen in the Old Testament, are inextricably bound up in the *covenant* relationship of Yahweh and his chosen people. In the unconditional commands of the Decalogue and the volumes of case law which proceeded from them, Israel carefully defined its responsibilities to God, to other human beings, and to the created universe they shared.

In the Law, the people of Israel were constantly reminded that the "good land" which they inhabited was the gift of God (Deut. 8:7-10), and its bounties were described in the metaphors of paradise. Indeed, biologist Michael Balick reports that Palestine today harbors "a remarkably high number" of plant species, which he attributes to its "unique location . . . at the meeting of the three phytogeographic regions of three continents."

. . . this area of 117,000 square kilometers, more than half of which is desert, today includes 2,250 species of vascular plants. . . . In fact, within an 8-kilometer radius of Jerusalem alone, there are 1,000 species. This is a remarkably high number. The British Isles, covering an area about twice the size of the Holy Land, have approximately 1,750 species of vascular plants, and Poland, with about two and a half times the area, has about 2,000 species.<sup>27</sup>

This land of plenty "is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come,"

dependent on the yearly flooding of the Nile, but it "drinks water by the rain from heaven" (Deut. 11:8-12). "The early rain and the later rain" (Deut. 11:14) were a source of wonder to the Egyptians, who referred to "the Nile in the sky."<sup>28</sup> Forty-eight cities in Israel, reserved for the otherwise landless priestly clan, were required to maintain a 3,000-foot "green belt" of open land encircling the city proper for public use (Lev. 25:34; Num. 35:4-5). The land was to be "rested" and withheld from planting every seventh year (Lev. 25:1-7, 18-19), and the weekly sabbath was mandated as a day of rest for work animals as well as humans (Deut. 5:14). The fruit of newly-planted trees was not to be consumed until the tree was five years old, "that they may yield more richly for you" (Lev. 19:23-25). And in a remarkable passage the imperatives of warfare and national security are specifically denied as a rationale for despoiling the environment:

When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them; for you may eat of them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field men that they should be besieged by you? Only the trees which you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down that you may build siege-works against the city that

27. Michael Balick, "Ecology of the Holy Land," *Horticulture* (December, 1976):29.

28. "The Hymn to Aten," tr. R.J. Williams, in Thomas, *Documents from Old Testament Times*, p. 147.

makes war with you, until it falls (Deut. 20:19-20).<sup>29</sup>

The Law's protection is repeatedly and specifically extended to animal life. Shedding the blood of an animal—unless the flesh is to be used for food or a proper sacrifice—is “murder” (Lev. 19:23-25). A cow and its calf may not be killed at the same time (Lev. 22:28), nor may both a mother bird and its eggs or young be consumed (Deut. 22:6-7)—statutes meant to ensure continued survival of each species. And the Law's concern for a just relationship with the natural environment extends even to the details of human waste disposal!

You shall have a place outside the camp, and you shall go to it; and you shall have a stick with your weapons; and when you sit down outside, you shall dig a hole with it, and turn back and cover up your excrement (Deut. 23:12-13).

As Alfred von Rohr Sauer points out, this regulation may be intended to promote fertilization of the soil as well as improving sanitary conditions.<sup>30</sup> In any case, the entire environment was likely to benefit.

These texts present a quite different picture of the religion of Israel from that imagined by Lynn White and Ian McHarg. The Old Testament, over and over again, emphasizes that man's life is inexorably bound together with *all* created life and the resources of the earth. For the Old Testament is neither naturocentric nor anthropocentric, but *theocentric*:

For thus says the Lord,  
who created the heavens  
(he is God!),  
who formed the earth and made it  
(he established it;  
he did not create it a chaos,  
he formed it to be inhabited!):  
“I am the Lord, and there is no other. . . .”  
(Isaiah 45:18)

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
(Psalm 19:1)

Praise him, sun and moon,  
praise him, all you shining stars!  
Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord!  
For he commanded and they were created.  
And he established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!  
Beasts and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
Young men and maidens together,  
old men and children!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.  
(Psalm 148:3-13)

Here, in poems of pulsating power, the essential unity of man and nature—God's “very good” creation—is proclaimed. Faced with his own insignificance in comparison with the splendor of the whole creation, the Psalmist asks, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (Ps. 8:4). This is not the arrogance of anthropocentrism; all that man has, he holds in trust from God, “for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof” (Ps. 24:1). Men are seen to be

like grass which is renewed in the morning;  
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;  
in the evening it fades and withers.  
(Psalm 90:5-6)

As the Old Testament understands man, he is unique among all created life; yet his

acts and his beliefs have direct consequences for all of nature. When he breaks his covenant relationship with God, he also—inevitably, from his first mistake in the primeval Garden—breaks with nature. When man uses his enormous powers to oppress other men and to exploit them, he inevitably exploits nature as well, and ecological disaster ensues. The oracles of the Old Testament prophets—who guarded the Covenant tradition against every encroachment by pragmatic despots and alien superstitions—graphically depict the ecological consequence of man's inhumanity:

And I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians,  
and they will fight, every man against his brother  
and every man against his neighbor,  
city against city, kingdom against kingdom;  
and the spirit of the Egyptians within them  
will be emptied out,  
and I will confound their plans;  
and they will consult the idols and the sorcerers,  
and the mediums and the wizards;  
and I will give over the Egyptians  
into the hand of a hard master;  
and a fierce king will rule over them. . . .

And the waters of the Nile will be dried up,  
and the river will be parched and dry;  
and its canals will become foul,  
and the branches of Egypt's Nile will diminish and dry up,  
reeds and rushes will rot away.  
There will be bare places by the Nile,  
on the brink of the Nile,  
and all that is sown by the Nile will dry up,  
be driven away, and be no more.  
The fishermen will mourn and lament,  
all who cast hook in the Nile;  
and they will languish

who spread nets upon the water.  
The workers in combed flax will be in despair,  
and the weavers of white cotton.  
Those who are the pillars of the land will be crushed,  
and all who work for hire will be grieved.  
(Isaiah 19:2-10)

No man, no matter how great his station, will escape the ecological catastrophe which accompanies the breaking of the Covenant.

The earth mourns and withers,  
the world languishes and withers;  
the heavens languish together with the earth.

The earth lies polluted  
under its inhabitants;  
for they have transgressed the laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.  
Therefore a curse devours the earth,  
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;  
therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched,  
and few men are left.  
(Isaiah 24:4-6)

But when man keeps the Covenant, loves justice, and treats all created life, man and beast, with respect, then his blessings and rewards are couched in the metaphors of nature:

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine  
within your house;  
your children will be like olive shoots  
around your table.  
(Psalm 128:3)

Under the just guardianship of man in covenant with God,

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
(Isaiah 35:1-2)

### III. POSTSCRIPT: THE ROOTS OF OUR ECOLOGIC RENEWAL

We have seen how the Old Testament emphasizes and glorifies in the interdependence of man and nature under the sovereignty of God. It is not the Judeo-Christian tradition of creation which has “licensed” modern man to pillage the

earth. In his *Ecology in Ancient Civilizations*, J. Donald Hughes has carefully examined the concepts of man and nature in ancient Greece and Rome. His conclusions are striking, and invite close scrutiny: Early Roman animism was overcome less by

29. For a survey of Rabbinic amplification of this and other statutes dealing with nature, see Eric G. Freudenstein, “Ecology and the Jewish Tradition,” *Judaism*, Vol. 19 (Fall 1970):406-414. See also Aharon Shapiro, “God, the Ecologist,” *Environment*, Vol. 18 (April 1976):38-41.

30. Alfred von Rohr Sauer, “Ecological Notes from the Old Testament,” in Bream, Heim, and Moore, eds., *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), p. 432.

the ingestion of Greek ideas than by the Romans' own demonstrated ability to dominate and to turn most things to their own profit, but both Greek influence and Roman practicality helped the Romans to develop attitudes toward nature which are remarkably similar to those expressed and demonstrated today. The Romans treated the natural environment as if it were one of their conquered provinces. If they needed any justification of this beyond their own pragmatism and cupidity, they could find it in Greek philosophy, which reached them in a late, skeptical form that had removed the sacred from nature and made nature an object of manipulation in thought and, by extension, in action. Our Western attitudes can be traced most directly to the secular, businesslike Romans. Today the process of dominating the earth is seen not as a religious crusade following a Biblical commandment but as a profitable venture seeking economic benefit. In this, we are closer to the Romans than to any other ancient people, and in this we demonstrate to a great extent our heritage from them.<sup>31</sup>

I would add that mediaeval Christianity and its heirs in Europe and the Western Hemisphere can be shown to have taken much more from Imperial Rome than from Jerusalem, if only because of geography, politics, and a regrettably pervasive anti-semitism. Even before Constantine, dominant elements in the Western Church had begun to display an inordinate fascination with Imperial pomp and power. One may be permitted to hope that institutional Christianity will learn to profit from its proper forebears and come, belatedly, to appreciate the way of justice for man and nature, the way of the Law and the Prophets.

Forty years ago, on the eve of the Nazi holocaust, Dietrich Bonhoeffer summoned his fellow Germans, new men born of technology and howling to conquer the world, to ponder again the teaching of Genesis. His words have not lost their significance as we contemplate our own calamities and calamities.

Man is to rule—of course as over God's creation, as one who receives the commission and power of his dominion from God. Being free from created things is not the ideal freedom of the spirit from nature. This freedom of dominion directly includes our tie to the creatures who are ruled. The soil and the animals whose Lord I am are the world in which I live, without which I am not. . . .

I am to *rule* over the earth which is and remains my earth, and the more strongly I rule it the more it is *my* earth. It is by no other commissioned authority except that given by the Word of God to man—which thus uniquely binds and sets him over against the other creatures.

This we are told, we who in the middle know nothing of all this any more, to whom all this is pious myth or a lost world. We also try to rule . . . we think we are pushing and we are being pushed. We do not rule, we are ruled. The thing, the world, rules man. Man is a prisoner, a slave of the world, and his rule is illusion. Technology is the power with which the earth grips man and subdues him. And because we rule no more, we lose the ground, and then the earth is no longer *our* earth, and then we become strangers on earth. We do not rule because we do not know the world as God's creation, and because we do not receive our dominion as God-given but grasp it for ourselves. . . . There is no dominion without serving God. . . . Without God, without his brother, man loses the earth. In his sentimental backing away from dominion over the earth, man has always lost God and his brother. God, our brother, and the earth belong together. But for those who have lost the earth, for us men in the middle, there is no way back to the earth except the way to God and to our brother.<sup>32</sup>

Bonhoeffer was right, and time has not altered the acuity of his observations. We need, in our own time, to recover the message of the Covenant, and to rediscover our communion with the earth by resuming our responsibility to rule it with respect. In that we would fulfill the marvelous vision of the prophet Amos, who longed for the restoration of man's

communion with God and God's creation:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord,  
 "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper,  
 and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;  
 the mountains shall drip with sweet wine,  
 and all the hills shall flow with it.  
 I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,

and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;  
 they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,  
 and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.

I will plant them upon their land,  
 and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land which I have given them," says the Lord your God.

(Amos 9:13-15)

## A Model for Church Leadership

MARK REYNOLDS

Waynesville, Ohio

In the very first chapter of Acts we come across an incident which seems important for church leaders in any period, but especially in our day. The incident relates to the activity of the apostles in the period between the ascension of Christ and Pentecost. All too often we skip over this chapter in our hurry to talk about pentecostal events, but we ought not do so. Luke records this period of the church's history for very important reasons, and we miss a vital part of the point of his book if we overlook this portion. If the church today wishes to experience the kind of growth the early church experienced, it must get leaders like that first church had.

What went on in that upper room where the apostles met and prayed that made Pentecost possible? What must we learn from them to experience that kind of church vitality again? And most especially, what kind of men were they who were waiting there for God to move?

**They were men of obedience.** Christ commanded them to go back to Jerusalem and wait, and they went back, and waited. Just that. No discussion of

how long, or when to stop, or how they would know to go home. Christ said to wait, and they waited.

Now that may not seem especially significant, but it is a vitally important qualification for a leader. The ability to follow orders is one of the things necessary for advancement in business, in the military, or in one's own personal growth. Why do we consider it unimportant in the church? No man has the right to be a leader in the church unless he is obedient.

But note that the apostles in their waiting were obeying the command of *their Lord* (not merely other leaders), and surely this is a requirement for church leaders today. The church will not grow if we give authority to men who are not submissive and obedient to Christ. If that seems too trivial to bother stating, I can only say that I wish it did not need to be stated. Far too often the church has made the only prerequisites for leadership to be long-standing attendance at a given congregation and moderate respect in the community. But the leaders of the early church were more than that. They were obedient to the will of God.

31. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

32. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, tr. John C. Fletcher (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), pp. 39f.

**They were men of prayer.** When the apostles, in obedience to Christ, returned to Jerusalem and waited, they made the best possible use of their time—they prayed. “Then they returned to Jerusalem . . . When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. . . . They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:12-14, NIV).

There are several things I find interesting about this prayer meeting. First in order of the text is the abruptness with which it is called. There is no discussion of where or when to have the meeting, or of how long it would last, or of what they would pray about. These were not important questions. Where? Why, wherever is convenient and close by, of course. When? Well, right now; there are important matters to be prayed about, and no time should be wasted. What will we pray about? We will pray about the things that come to mind first, then we will pray about the things that come to mind next, and so on until we run out of things to pray about or time to pray about them.

Another interesting thing about this prayer meeting is its inordinate length. Upon entering the upper room they began to pray, and they prayed constantly. But for how long? Acts 2:1 implies that on the day of Pentecost they were still praying, that they were still together, that the meeting was still going on. And how many days were there from the ascension to Pentecost? *Eight!* Then did the prayer meeting last eight days? At least. According to some calculations, it could have lasted as long as nine or ten days. The apostles were men of prayer indeed!

And what did they pray about for those eight days or so? In the question of Judas Luke gives us a sample of the items of prayer and what they did about it. It is here that we learn that the apostles were not just men of prayer.

**They were men of action.** The minis-

try of Christ was in some ways confined to teaching these apostles. Several times he called them aside from the crowd to teach them, and that teaching paid off. The prayer of the apostles is an example. It is hard to picture Peter and Andrew and James and John, the rugged outdoorsmen—or any of the other apostles for that matter—praying for a week, but in the three years they had spent with Jesus they had learned to wait, to pray, to be patient. But these were the same fellows who were washing their nets in the sea when Jesus called them; who had been fishing all night when he showed up and told them to fish a while longer; who wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritan village that rejected Christ; who were ready for a fight in a minute in Gethsemane; and three years with Christ had not changed that.

It was good that it had not, because those were the qualities that caused Christ to choose them in the first place, instead of others in Israel who were more intelligent, better educated, wealthier, or more talented. Christ chose the men he did because they were men of action. He could teach them to pray. He could teach them to trust God. What he did not have time to do was to break the habits of a lifetime of laziness. The leaders of the church of Christ must be men of action.

One thing that sets off this meeting of the apostles from a modern church board meeting is the fact that the apostles acted on the decisions they made. Let us look at this decision-making process and what it shows us about the men who made the process work.

**They were men who knew the word of God.** Being men of action, they were not satisfied to pray the way most of us pray. They did not pray for God to solve their problems. Instead, they prayed that God would use them to solve the problem (cf. Acts 4:23ff. where the disciples pray, not as we do that the word of God might be preached, but that they might be given

boldness to preach it). So it ought not be considered unusual that Peter’s speech does not sound like a prayer, for it is the *result* of the previous prayer. “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus—he was one of our number and shared in this ministry. . . . For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, ‘May another take his place of leadership’ ” (Acts 1:16-25, NIV).

It is important that the first words Peter spoke are “the Scripture had to be fulfilled.” The scriptures had become so much a part of the life of these church leaders that they naturally saw the fulfillment of them in their own lives. The ease with which they found passages to apply to their situation is indicative of their knowledge of the word.

This sort of knowledge of the word ought to be a qualification for church leadership today also. We often read the qualifications in 1 Timothy and concentrate on those dealing with character. But an elder must also be “apt to teach,” and how can he teach without a thorough knowledge of the Bible?

**They were men who applied the word of God.** If that sounds a lot like the last section, be assured it is not. Many people have a good understanding of the Bible, but only a few ever learn how to apply the word of God to a situation. That is the special weight of Peter’s statement that the word of God had to be fulfilled. The leaders of the early church not only *knew* the word of God; they could *apply* the principles of that word to the situation at hand.

Ultimately this is the only guardian against “proof-texting.” When the leaders of the churches know the Bible to the point that they are not reduced to quoting a verse here or there to “prove” their point, but can speak of the general princi-

ples which the Bible teaches and how those principles apply in the daily life of their congregation, not only as a corporate body but as individual members, *then* the church will grow. We fail to grow because we are not eating the right food, and we are not eating the right food because the people who are watching over us do not themselves know the principles of good spiritual nutrition.

In this matter the leaders of the early church were the true descendents of the prophets. They could speak with authority because authority had been given them, not only by the words of Christ but because they had absorbed the word of God. Both of those authorities are still available to the elders of the church. They have been given the authority of shepherds by virtue of their position and office, but only if they have this authority of teacher, which comes by immersion in the word, will they be able to exercise that other authority.

**They were men of faith who trusted the activity of God.** This is perhaps the most important lesson of Acts 1. The apostles were not afraid to let God move. They admitted their inability to do the work of God and left room for him to act. They knew that they could not see the heart of either Matthias or Barnabas, or see the future to know what would be required of Judas’ replacement, so they let God take care of those things, and they went on to matters that they could deal with.

Perhaps this is what sets off the contemporary church so strongly from the church of the Acts. We are afraid to let God do what he can. Before we begin any new project we want to know, “Can we do it?” Well, the answer must be, “No, we cannot.” But the leaders of the church in Jerusalem were not satisfied with that answer. They had the audacity to ask, “Then will God do it?” More than that, they had the faith to believe that God would. □

# Decisions and Divisions

## THE ELDERS' AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

E. NEIL WORLEY

Hampshire, Tennessee

The restoration movement was born in rebellion against human authority which claimed divine sanction. The Springfield Presbytery willed "that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that people may have free course to the Bible."<sup>1</sup> Thomas Campbell felt that "it is high time for us not only to think, but also to act, for ourselves; to see with our own eyes, and to take all our measures directly and immediately from the Divine standard."<sup>2</sup> The rebellion was aimed primarily against ecclesiastical hierarchies, but even against the local authorities the individual's responsibility to decide for himself was upheld. Tolbert Fanning wrote of the "unscriptural and unchristian course of churches, assuming that, elders are the church's officials, who possess, by virtue of delegated authority, power to Lord over God's heritage; and perform deeds, in obedience to their vested rights that are binding upon their brethren."<sup>3</sup>

This attitude is not surprising when it is remembered that all of the first-generation restoration leaders faced hostile authorities in the established churches who demanded adherence to their decisions even if the laymen of the congregation were united in opposition. In the areas where they held influence, early restoration leaders worked to avoid such conflicts thereafter. William Lipscomb wrote:

While we honor as highly as anyone, the wisdom, the experience, and the weight of authority which belongs to those who have been faithful servants of the Lord, we have never seen in the New Testament, the least ground for the authority of certain individuals, termed officers, to act independently of the congregation.<sup>4</sup>

David Lipscomb went so far as to deny the existence of an "office" in the church by virtue of which one could exercise any authority not given to all Christians. He seemed to visualize elders whose authority lay only in the respect they held among the members of the church. Lipscomb did admit that it was necessary to have someone to appoint people to do neglected duties, to adjudicate differences when the church was evenly divided, and to function as spokesmen for the congregation on some occasions.<sup>5</sup>

With such a limited view of official power and with the elders chosen from the most respected men in the congregation, major disputes between elders and congregation were relatively rare. The elders would not act unless they could well justify their action, and when they acted, it was with the concurrence of the whole church, as nearly as a consensus could be reached.

But now among the spiritual heirs of the restoration movement, a new situation is becoming more prevalent. The elders of some congregations, feeling the burden of their responsibility as leaders, have de-

termined to ignore the opinions of men and govern by authority of God's word alone. This appeal to scripture is, of course, another essential part of the restoration heritage. The new element seems to be the feeling that the elders' interpretation of the scriptures is normative for and binding on the whole congregation, even when most of the members hold a different view. The influential Guy Woods claims that:

Elders, when functioning properly, are engaged in a work divinely authorized, and to oppose them is to oppose God. . . . They are overseers; it is our duty, therefore, to be overseen. They are bishops of our souls; it is, hence, our duty to submit our souls to those who watch for us. . . . we are taught to obey such. We cannot do less and be guiltless at the last day.<sup>6</sup>

Kenneth Jarrett sums it up, arguing that "Every member must be content to let the elders rule."<sup>7</sup>

With elders claiming so much more authority than they previously did, some Christians are complaining that elders not only disregard the views of the congregation, but make policy decisions for which they refuse to explain the reasons. The elders reply that their responsibility is to God, and not to the church, and that the congregation must trust the elders' judgment in these matters. In the end, there has often been an open feud between the elders and a large portion of the congregation, sometimes leading to a permanent division.

How, then, can the views of Campbell, Stone, Fanning, and the Lipscombs be reconciled with those of Jarrett and Woods, who also claim the restoration heritage? What authority does scripture clearly give to the elders? Can they lead only by persuasion and example? Can they take action without the support of the congregation?

Those who would most severely limit

the power of the elders often base their claim partly on the memory of past abuses of ecclesiastical authority. They claim that in the absence of specific scriptural command, power corrupts; and with specific command of scripture, any other authority is unnecessary. They cite 1 Peter 5:2-3 and Matthew 20:25-26 to show that any authority of the elders must be based on their influence as good examples.

On the other hand, Hebrews 13:17 and Acts 20:28 are cited to establish the authority of the eldership as "overseers," "rulers," and "guardians" by those who feel the elders' decisions should be binding on the congregation, even if made independently of the membership at large. The argument is made that the elders are answerable only to God, and should base their decisions only on the scriptures, not being influenced by the congregation, which is, after all, composed of fallible men.

If taken alone, any of the scriptures mentioned above could lead to a rather extreme position. But when all are taken together, each being interpreted in the light of the others, key words begin to appear, and other relevant passages come to mind.

### In the Garment of Humility . . .

The first key word is *humility*, found implicitly in Matthew 20:26 and explicitly in 1 Peter 5:5. If elders act from pride, there is indeed much danger; they may indeed be "rulers" and "overseers," but of the same sort as among the gentiles, condemned by Jesus himself in Matthew 20:26. As servants, the leaders cannot ignore the desires and beliefs of those whom they serve, the congregation. And if they must give account, they need wisdom from above, which is open to reason, not

1. Barton Stone, *et. al.*, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*.

2. Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address*.

3. Tolbert Fanning, "Questions Involving Authority in Churches," *Gospel Advocate*, January 12, 1871.

4. William Lipscomb, *Gospel Advocate*, 1859, p. 118, quoted by J. Ridley Stroop in *Restoration Ideas on Church Organization*, p. 59.

5. David Lipscomb, "Office and Officers," *Gospel Advocate*, November 30, 1871.

6. Guy Woods, "Authority of the Eldership," *Gospel Advocate*, April 20, 1978.

7. Kenneth Jarrett, "Majority Rule or Elder Rule—Which?" *Contending for the Faith*, August, 1978, p. 7.

thinking too highly of itself (Jas. 3:16-17). Even with this idea of humility in mind, though, it cannot be well argued that Hebrews 13:17 gives the elders no status at all. While submission and obedience are not required in the same way as to the gentile rulers, the counsel of the elders (who are, after all, respected, intelligent men well versed in scripture and with considerable experience in life) should carry more weight than that of most men. Only when the vast majority of the congregation, having considered the situation, is opposed to the elders' decision should the elders' advice go unheeded, and then not because the majority creates its own truth and right, but because the force of many opposing judgments throws doubt on the elders' decision. It is absolutely essential that the members as well as the elders must always be humble, never overrating themselves but acknowledging that the elders are experienced and respected men who, while not infallible, are serious seekers for the truth, not to be lightly disregarded.

### Feed the Church of the Lord . . .

A second key word is *feed*, found in Acts 20:28. It calls to mind Paul's admonition to the Corinthians, "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Cor. 14:26). If every one in the congregation is to be fully convinced in his own mind of the propriety of congregational policy and action, the elders must be willing to fully explain and justify any policies or actions they propose. This explanation must build on quality teaching, which is a major duty of the elders. It would seem that elders who have taught well and act in accordance with their teaching should very rarely find themselves opposed by the majority or even a large minority of the congregation. If much opposition exists, the situation may call for more teaching and explanation—not censorship of others'

teaching, but a positive emphasis in the elders' own public and private teaching.

If the elders act humbly to feed the flock, there should be little occasion to oppose them. If one in the congregation has questions about policy decisions, the elders should indeed respond in love. The questioner should also ask with humility. All should seek edification towards the truth; all should be humbly open to reason and experience. No brother should be set at nought; no one should feel that he has already arrived at the point of perfect understanding. In the end those in the distinct minority would probably be wise to submit to the informed consensus of the congregation, with which the elders should be generally in line if all goes well. Thus the elders can lead without domineering, and the congregation can willingly be led without abdicating their individual responsibilities to someone else's exclusive control. Perhaps this is what Woods means by an eldership functioning properly and a congregation actively being led and overseen. Certainly such elders will command a high level of respect and obedience.

Of course, no system composed of fallible men will always function perfectly, even if its blueprint is divine. There will arise cases in which an eldership which thought it was acting properly finds itself opposed on some issue by most of the congregation. If both sides are actively seeking the truth, however, the result should be as forecast by J.W. McGarvey:

In almost all conceivable cases, such an eldership will know beforehand the sentiments of the congregation and will either postpone the presentation of the case until they can instruct the disciples more fully on the subject involved, or they will conclude, from the predominance in the church of an adverse judgement, that their own decision is of doubtful propriety, and that action should therefore be postponed indefinitely. Such a thing as a rupture between the church and the Eldership is, therefore, almost an impossibility.<sup>8</sup> □

8. J.W. McGarvey, *A Treatise on the Eldership*.

## What was to be a prayer of petition became a prayer of praise because

### "IN MY LAST PRAYER GOD DID ALL THE TALKING"

"Hello, my child.  
Yes, I was expecting you.  
It has been sometime, you know.  
I was wondering how long it would be—  
How deep into the maelstrom you would  
allow yourself to tumble  
Before you finally remembered."

I kept waiting for him to say:  
"It's your fault, you know."  
"Why come to me now?"  
"Why didn't I hear from you when things  
were going well?"  
"How much of this is of your own making,  
because of your pride and down-  
right disobedience?"  
"How will you ever learn your lesson if I  
keep bailing you out?"  
"What kind of punishment do you think  
you deserve?"

But He didn't.  
He didn't have to.  
He showed me my family—  
and I saw I was blessed above all others  
with the most important people in my  
life,  
and I had failed to show Him my grati-  
tude and them my love.  
He brought to my mind the family of  
believers  
who were constantly praying for me—  
and I saw those for whom I should  
have been praying  
instead of myself.

He asked me how I had managed to live  
in such nice homes—  
and I thought of those who had worked  
longer and harder and  
more effectively than myself  
and how they were happily making do  
with much less.

Then there was my health—  
I've never been in the hospital, you  
know,  
and I've only been to a doctor twice in  
ten years.

I was afraid to ask why I had been chosen  
to have  
a faithful wife  
healthy sons  
a good education  
a Christian background  
lest I call attention to what seemed to  
have been a "divine oversight."

So I remained mute,  
knowing that reason and justice were  
against me.

God said a lot without speaking much.  
He just bludgeoned me with my own self-  
centeredness,  
and clobbered me with my ingratitude.  
Every blessing was an indictment.

And, when I was thoroughly softened up,  
He Himself applied the salve  
and answered my unasked questions:

"You have these blessings because  
This is the way I want it.  
I love you.

You don't have these blessings because  
of you:  
You have them because of Me.

There are others I love just as much  
Who don't have as much,  
And some who have more.

Because that's the way I want it."

I was too overwhelmed to say it,  
But He knew it was in my heart:

"That's the way I want it, too, Lord."

—David Huddleston

The Historic Propositions from  
Thomas Campbell's  
DECLARATION AND ADDRESS  
First Published in 1809

Prop. 1. That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.

2. That although the Church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies, locally separate one from another, yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them, to the glory of God. And for this purpose they ought all to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same thing; and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

3. That in order to do this, nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God. Nor ought anything to be admitted, as of Divine obligation, in their Church constitution and managements, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles upon the New Testament Church; either in express terms or by approved precedent.

4. That although the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inseparably connected, making together but one perfect and entire revelation of the Divine will, for the edification and salvation of the Church, and therefore in that respect cannot be separated; yet as to what directly and properly belongs to their immediate object, the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline, and government of the Old Testament Church, and the particular duties of its members.

5. That with respect to the commands and ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, where the Scriptures are silent as to the express time or manner of performance, if any such there be, no human authority has power to interfere, in order to supply the supposed deficiency by making laws for the Church; nor can anything more be required of Christians in such cases, but only that they so observe these commands and ordinances as will evidently answer the declared and obvious end of their institution. Much less has any human authority power to impose new commands or ordinances upon the Church, which our Lord Jesus Christ has not enjoined. Nothing ought to be received

into the faith or worship of the Church, or be made a term of communion among Christians, that is not as old as the New Testament.

6. That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.

7. That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of Divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion; unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the Church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; whereas the Church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.

8. That it is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge or distinct apprehension of all Divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the Church; neither should they, for this purpose, be required to make a profession more extensive than their knowledge; but that, on the contrary, their having a due measure of Scriptural self-knowledge respecting their lost and perishing condition by nature and practice, and of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, accompanied with a profession of their faith in and obedience to him, in all things, according to his word, is all that is absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into his Church.

9. That all that are enabled through grace to make such a profession, and to manifest the reality of it in their tempers and conduct, should consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as brethren, children of the same family and Father, temples of the same Spirit, members of the same body, subjects of the same grace, objects of the same Divine love, bought with the same price, and joint-heirs of the same inheritance. Whom God hath thus joined together no man should dare to put asunder.

10. That division among the Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils. It is antichristian, as it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ; as if he were divided against himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of himself. It is antiscriptural, as being strictly prohibited by his sovereign authority; a direct violation of his express command. It is antinatural, as it excites Christians to contemn, to hate, and oppose one another, who are bound by the highest and most endearing obligations to love each other as brethren, even as Christ has loved them. In a word, it is productive of confusion and of every evil work.

11. That (in some instances) a partial neglect of the expressly revealed will of God, and (in others) an assumed authority for making the approbation of human opinions and human inventions a term of communion, by introducing them into the constitution, faith, or worship of the Church, are, and have been, the immediate, obvious, and