Integrity

between the two is not really necessary, since both are (or perhaps we should say the body viewed from either perspective is) God's sphere of action "for you." Thus we may easily move from the incarnation to the crucified body to the resurrected body to the body which is the church. Let us remember that the church IS the body of Christ, and as such it is also "for you." This is what the Corinthians lost sight of in their attempt to have direct individual fellowship with God apart from their brethren. In seeing themselves as self-contained individuals rather than "individually members one of another," they did not discern the body.

The heresies of the Corinthians provide a backdrop against which the genuine body of Christ may be viewed more clearly. That body consists of those who "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body" (Col. 1:24), who gain their freedom through submission because they fear Christ, who suffer and rejoice with other members whether they are near or far away, who do not try to live or die for themselves but try to please their neighbor for his good, who maintain a healthy balance between feelings of inferiority and superiority, and who, in a word, are truly human because they are truly social. If it is charged that Christian marriages fail, that churches are factious, and that ministers try to enslave with their words, we can only reply that the body has always survived such abuses, and that they are far from being the whole story. □

JULY/AUGUST 1979

Integrity

SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE SELF

FROM THE EDITOR

WHY THIS ISSUE

Ayn Rand recently remarked that one of the problems with our youth is that they are not selfish enough. Although she was evaluating them in terms of what is good for America, it still struck me as an odd thing to say. I do not detect any massive movement toward the sort of commitment which characterizes unselfishness.

If we think of society in the original sense of the term—which comes from a Latin word meaning fellowship, sharing—we have every right to question how well off our society is. We see, among other symptoms of trouble, homes breaking up, churches involved in cold and hot wars, and widespread distrust within the community (another word we must use loosely). If we were to invent a word to describe these prevailing conditions, we would hardly come up with one like society.

And if we judge ourselves in terms of peace, we can only do so by watering that word down too. There certainly seems to be a shortage of the positive establishment of right relationships which peace entails.

But we should not expect too much from a humanist society which has no real basis for fellowship, nor should we be surprised at the selfishness which abounds among people who do not know how to answer the question, "What is man?"

Yet we should try to do something about the problem by helping our neighbors to achieve the mature selfhood which they so often seek in self-defeating ways. That is why we are printing this special issue on the self. Laquita addresses the subject from the standpoint of history. Joe combines insights gained from the study and the clinic in his discussion of autonomy and love. My part is a brief survey of some Biblical texts which will lead us in the right direction, even if they are inadequately expounded. We hope they will be of some help and encouragement to those who can so fully sympathize with Lot, who was "shocked by the dissolute habits of the lawless society in which he lived."

The Individual and the Church, Past and Present

LAQUITA HIGGS

Some journalists have labelled the 1970's as the "Me Generation," and historian Christopher Lasch asserts that ours is the culture of narcissism, of self-love. The large number of pop psychology, self-help books and the emphasis on one's personal happiness and fulfillment and on "doing your own thing" all point to the validity of such epithets. "I did it my way," sings Frank Sinatra, proudly proclaiming, in his own way, that authority and values are based on one's own feelings and opinions; the individual thus becomes the measure of all things. The "rugged individualism" which has served as an ideal in American society has in too many ways degenerated into sinful selfishness. Manufacturers greedily raise prices and trade unions seek the highest possible wage increases; people steal from their employers and cheat on taxes and in school without compunction; few seem to have regard for the common welfare.

We cannot help but be partly shaped by the temper of our time, and the heightened self-centeredness of our generation is reflected in current Christianity. For example, we evangelicals often stress our own personal salvation to the exclusion of the needs of the rest of the world, and some Christians take their own feelings and emotions as criteria for the "rightness" of their actions. As Christians we must not merely be "shaped" by our society's thinking; rather, we should be a moderating and corrective influence in our society. My primary concern here, however, is not with society as a whole, but with Christians, who need to be aware of the dangers of excessive self-love and to realize the need for a healthy balance between satisfying our personal needs and meeting our responsibilities to God, to others and to the church. But the problem lies not just with the individual Christian—we need to look at the church as a whole to see if it has maintained that proper balance between the individual and the community of Christians. Particularly, we should see what is the state of our own heritage, the Restoration Movement, in this regard.

In order to gain insight into the emphasis on self which is so characteristic of the 20th century, I should like to investigate briefly the history of the concept of self in Western society. I wish to examine the relationship of consciousness and awareness of one's own being to Christian doctrine and the life of the Spirit. Of late, historians have begun to take an interest in the rise of individuality, and we can certainly profit from their studies, though we shall not be considering the political and economic implications of individualism which so many scholars find intriguing. We shall note that though Christianity strongly encouraged individualism, it also had a strong concern with the collective manifestation of Christianity; that historical Christianity had a long period in the Middle Ages of imbalance in which the church's role was supreme; and that in seeking to correct that imbalance,

Christians played a leading role in developing Western individualism. Then, in light of that background, we shall look more closely at our own society and the church today.

Acute self-awareness is a distinctive feature of Western man and woman. Historians tell us that interest in the individual can be observed as early as ancient Greek and Roman cultures, though certainly not to the extent that we experience individualism. Hellenistic philosophy had no equivalent to our concept "person," although their vocabulary was rich in words expressing community of being; one was a man because one was a member of a city. But in Rome, even before the time of Christ, lyric poetry, expressing the feelings of the individual, flourished, and Roman historians began reflecting upon the motives and characters of statesmen, although they more often saw them as types rather than fully formed personalities.

. . . triumphant affirmation

Probably contributing most to the Western view of the individual, however, was Christianity, with its belief that God came to earth to live and die for each individual, a triumphant affirmation of human dignity. Judaism had shown God as concerned with the moral responsibility of each individual, and Christianity further encouraged self-awareness and a concern with inner character. Furthermore, the Christian belief in life after death gave added confidence to the belief in the value of the individual. Equally strong in the New Testament, however, and modifying individualism, was the language of community—all Christians are stones in the living Temple of God, limbs in the Body of Christ, and all share in the one Spirit. Each believer, being identified with Christ, is therefore identified with all other believers.

In the late 14th century, in the years just before Rome was to be overrun by the Germanic tribes, a Christian bishop,

Augustine of Hippo, was writing works which would be highly influential for centuries to come. Augustine never attempted to construct a system of theology, but he emphasized the Christian doctrine of God and creation and the individual soul. Philosophically he was quite original in his assertion of the self-knowledge possessed by each human being, and, as David Knowles writes (in *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*), for Augustine, the certain knowledge of God arose directly from the realization of the soul's own existence and capacity for knowledge. Augustine based his ideas on the Scriptural teaching that the soul is made in the image of God, and Augustine's main concern was the relationship of the individual soul to its Creator. His preoccupation with the spiritual self was manifested in his *Confessions*, an autobiography which traced his own path to God.

Interest in the individual was in eclipse for several centuries after the fall of Rome. With the decline of the secular order which the Roman Empire had imposed, the Church, helping to provide a needed governance in Western Europe, began emphasizing the corporate body of the church. The hierarchically ordered church which had developed was in a society based on a large peasant population tied to its communal villages, and neither the church nor the society considered the rights and needs of the individual. To be truly religious in that period meant that one renounced the world—and self—and joined a monastery. Authoritative, institutional religion reigned supreme.

. . . rites and symbols

The church in the Middle Ages, in being in a society whose membership was identical with the membership of the church, had lost the sense of personal choice and of being a part of a distinct community of people, conditions which had obtained in the earliest centuries of the church, when the church's strength had been the balance between the indi-

vidual and the community of Christians. In the Middle Ages the church expressed itself through rites and symbols, and one did not have to be personally pious so long as he or she conformed with the practices of the church. However, the devotion to religious relics and the numerous pilgrimages to holy places do reveal that the individual was often devoted. Yet, relics and pilgrimages are outward signs, and there was not, it seems, the sense of an interior, personal religion in very many until it began to develop in the late 11th century. By that time, the destructive "barbarian" raids had almost ceased, and, with the increasing stability, Western Europe began developing economically, an occurrence which in itself marked a rise in individualistic initiative.

. . . an interior religion

In the 12th century, a kind of renaissance in thought and literature developed, with, as Colin Morris tells us in *The Discovery of the Individual*, a new interest in man and a fascination with individual experience. The revival of classical learning at that time was certainly a factor, but in most writers, the delight in humanity was theologically directed: the dignity of man lay in his divine vocation and calling, and in the potential for fellowship with God which was available to every person. Self-knowledge was a dominant theme of the age, and theologians began emphasizing Augustine's idea of self-knowledge as the path to God. The desire for self-expression was widespread, and one area in which this was evident was the sermon. In the 12th century there was a large increase both in the preaching and in the preservation of sermons, many of which simply expounded the Word and the doctrine of the Church, but one school of preachers, among them the influential Guibert of Nogent and Bernard of Clairvaux, stressed the value of their *own experience* in the interpretation of the gospel to others.

A part of the change to an interior reli-

gion was the view of Christ. Earlier, the divinity of Christ had been stressed, and Christ had often been pictured seated on his throne of judgment, but in the later medieval period the humanity of Jesus and his suffering, readily observed in the art of the period, came to be emphasized. The pious individual could more easily identify with a human Jesus who had endured suffering, and there came to be an increasing interest in the details of Jesus' life on earth.

. . . the mystical movement

Emerging gradually as an outgrowth of personal piety was the mystical movement, which reached its height in the 14th century. The mystic had an intense longing for a personal experience of God, and he (or she) often expressed his or her contact with God in terms of the senses rather than of the intellect (probably a partial reaction to the pedantic Scholasticism of their time); they often used the language of intimate lovers to describe their relationship with God.

The search for a direct rapport with God, either through mystical union with Him or through direct contact with the Word as advocated by Wyclif, could not help but undermine the institutional form of the church. Of course other factors, particularly the corruption within the Catholic Church, were of real importance in the initiation of the Reformation, but the gradual adoption of the belief that the individual could have a direct relationship with God meant that the people were ready for Martin Luther and his message of the priesthood of all believers.

The Italian Renaissance reached its height in the latter 15th century just a few years before Luther's Ninety-Five Theses came on the scene, and scholars continue to debate as to whether the Renaissance and the Reformation were part of one big movement and about their various effects on history. Certainly both movements stressed the individual, and 19th century historians, particularly Jacob

Burckhardt, popularized the idea that the Italian Renaissance was the first expression of secular individualism in the West, but, as we have noted, more recent historians believe that interest in the individual emerged earlier and had a more religious orientation than 19th century scholarship wanted to think. Some of the best recent scholarship (see Charles Trinkaus, *"In Our Image and Likeness"*) has proven that many of the Italian humanists were quite religious, with their idea of human nature conceived only in relation to the divine nature. Well versed in classical thought and the Church Fathers, particularly Augustine, they thought of themselves as well-fitted to become the spokesmen of a new layman's view of religion, and, by reviving the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, they certainly laid the foundation for Protestantism's emphasis on the Word of God.

. . . a God-given dignity

Indeed, belief in the dignity and excellence of man reached its height in the Italian Renaissance, but for most thinkers of that time, it was a God-given dignity which they stressed. New for their age, however, was an emphasis on action and achievement, and they gloried in the secular triumphs of mankind, seeing man's achievement in the world as the rightful execution of a God-given task. Theirs was a man-centered religion.

Luther did not share the humanists' belief in the natural worth of man, but Luther's belief in the depravity of man nevertheless made him concentrate on a personal salvation which resulted in a promotion of individualism. For Luther the individual's relationship to God was direct and unmediated as opposed to the Catholic view of a relationship between God and the whole of mankind and of the collective church as the object of redemption. Luther gave the Bible to the people in their own language, for he believed it was to be interpreted by the individual, which was a tremendous personal respon-

sibility. The scrutiny of one's own intents and thoughts, especially practiced by the Calvinists, went even further in making each Christian very aware of self, and an extreme belief in subjective experience was found in the Quakers' "Inner Light." Many scholars believe that Protestantism directly contributed to the rise of economic individualism (capitalism) and to the modern political emphasis on individual liberty and equality. Our own country was first peopled by strict English Calvinists, and their stress on self-scrutiny and individual responsibility played no small part in our country's development.

Christianity, then, and particularly Protestantism, has contributed much to the development of individualism in our society. Our awareness of self has meant that some of our country's most vital religious movements (early Methodism, Pentecostalism, Billy Graham's Crusades) have been based to a large degree on individual consciousness.

. . . new faith in man

As society began to be secularized in the 18th century, a new faith in man (without God) and in human reason developed. The establishment of various scientific disciplines in that period evidenced the faith in man's own ability to understand and to fashion a better world, and that faith in science and progress, if not the faith in man himself, has lived on. Also, possibly in reaction to the great emphasis placed on the Fall of man by the Calvinists, theologians in the latter 17th century began assuming the principle of a benevolent, divine order, believing that the earth was designed for man's terrestrial happiness. Thus we have the modern idea of personal happiness as a goal of man which is still so prevalent today, though it is no longer connected with divine order.

Around the mid-18th century came a new awareness of individual uniqueness, especially among the early German Romantics, where some began to glory in the

anarchic liberty of the individual; generally there was a concern to help the individual find inner freedom. The trend in thinking toward individual liberty was very important, not only in the French Revolution, but in the establishment of our own country, where social and political theories of individualism have had their clearest expression.

. . . rugged individualism

Although in New England Emerson preached self-reliance and Thoreau had his Walden Pond, the center of American individualism was the frontier as it moved westward. Heroes such as Andrew Jackson and Davy Crockett were examples of rugged individualism, and we still admire the John Wayne type who is tough but good-hearted.

As the concept of self in modern times has lost its sense of man's being made in the image of God, the concept has become distorted. With little regard for objective authority, the individual is the measure of all things, but, unfortunately, the individual in our society has a heightened sense of his rights without the sense of duty which those rights entail. Ironically, a factor in helping to bring that about has been the formal discipline established to study human behavior. Freudian psychology, in asserting that hidden impulses in the subconscious are a basic cause of human behavior, often operating with compulsive force, has removed a sense of one's being responsible for his own actions. If one's actions come from a force over which he has little control, then he cannot be blamed for those actions. Another example is behaviorism, which, when it contends that one's will and behavior can be conditioned, removes individual choice and freedom from the picture. It is not surprising that talk of sin is no longer "fashionable" in our society, for sin implies responsibility for one's actions; such "problems" as alcoholism and drug addiction are said to be illnesses, a concept which gives the impression that

the individual has no power or responsibility to try to alleviate those problems. According to many, Jim Jones was just "sick" when he led his disciples in Guyana to their deaths.

Another modern movement taking away from the responsibility of the individual has been determinism, which sees the individual as the helpless pawn in the hands of fate; or, if one does not want to describe it as fate, then the individual is said to be caught up in environmental, hereditary, cultural, or economic forces over which he has no control. That, too, neatly removes the individual from choice and responsibility.

. . . individualism and community

With this picture, then, of the highly aware but distorted concept of self in our society, it is no wonder that we Christians sometimes indulge in the temptation to ignore the objective authority of God and make our feelings or opinions the judge of what is right—the I-can't-be-wrong-because-it-*feels*-so-right attitude. Other self-reliant individuals, glorying in their personal relationship with God, isolate themselves from the community of Christians, and many consequently experience a withering of the soul. God made us thinking, responsible individuals, but he did not mean for us to be isolated units seeking answers just from within ourselves. We each need the community of Christians, and furthermore, each has a responsibility to the community, just as the community has a responsibility to its various parts. Throughout the history of Christianity, it has suffered when individualism and community were not *both* strong.

We may refer to a contemporary wave of individual awareness which shows the need for balance: the "women's liberation" movement, with which the church is still struggling. Its emphasis on a woman's personal identity has had positive effects for many women in our society and in the church, and I heartily applaud the

new self-worth which many have found. On the other hand, we must also be aware of the pitfalls of an excessive interest in self-fulfillment which goes so far as to disregard the needs of others, even of our families. It is not easy to be both assertive and responsible.

. . . the Restoration Movement

But where, in this consideration of balance between the individual and the church, do we place the Church of Christ and other branches of the Restoration Movement? Truly, the Campbells had a magnificent vision of the unity of the mystical Body of Christ; a reading of Thomas Campbell's lengthy *Declaration and Address* reveals that he repeatedly spoke of the Body's "unity, peace, and purity which belong to its constitution, and constitute its glory."* Campbell, "tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of a party spirit" (p. 73), strongly based his call for unity on individual liberty: "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" (p. 71). Repeatedly Campbell stressed that no human has authority over another in religious matters—human authority "can have no place in this business" (p. 90)—and Campbell declared that the "bitter root of almost all our divisions" is "the imposing of our private opinions upon each other as articles of faith or duty" (pp. 158-9). Campbell issued a revolutionary clarion call to the individual Christian: "Resume that precious, that dearbought liberty, wherewith Christ has made his people free; a liberty from subjection to any authority but his own in matters of religion" (p. 104). Campbell's strong

regard for individual Christian liberty had as its end, however, a concern for the mystical Body, for it is "a duty equally belonging to every citizen of Zion to seek her good" (p. 89), to seek the unity and purity of the church.

. . . revelation and common sense

We have already noted in historical Christianity that there are two general ways of establishing an individual approach to God: through a "mystical," direct experience of God or through the Word of God in Scripture, and the Campbells chose the latter. The strong individualism in the Restoration Movement had its base in each person's intellect and reason, on one's common sense, as Thomas Campbell phrased it; his call for the restoring of the church was predicated "upon the plainest and most obvious principles of Divine revelation and common sense—the common sense, we mean, of Christians, exercised upon the plainest and most obvious truths and facts divinely recorded for their instruction" (pp. 188-9). For Campbell, Scripture was a kind of mediator between God and man, and each person had the responsibility to know the Bible thoroughly. One could not know God or himself without knowing Scripture; furthermore, the voice of God came through the Word: "We take it for granted that no man either knows God, or himself, or the way of salvation, but in so far as he has heard and understood his voice upon those subjects, as addressed to him in the Scriptures, and that, therefore, whatever he has heard and learned of a saving nature, is contained in the express terms of the Bible" (p. 178).

There was indeed a balance between the church and the individual in the early Restoration Movement: the stress on every Christian's having the liberty to interpret the Word was counterpoised by the ideal of restoring the primitive church as revealed in the Bible. But the intended balance did not long remain, and today, unhappily, too many of our leaders have

forgotten the liberty which God has given to every Christian. Our thinking has solidified into the dogmatic pattern theology of our leaders, and the individual is allowed neither the freedom of intellect nor the freedom of subjective experience. Too, many of us have forgotten the vision of the "unity, peace, and purity" of the Body, and we too often have gloried in a myopic view which shuts many out, rather than drawing them in. We in the Church of Christ must attempt to leave behind a reliance on our own authoritative patterns and regain the heavenly vision of free Christian men and women united into One.

Our sense of distinctiveness as persons has been given to us by God, but when that divine origin of selfhood is ignored, then the concept of self becomes distorted, as is so evident in our society. Neither is the church exempt from the twin dangers of glorifying or suppressing the individual consciousness; each of us must exercise his or her unique responsibility to fulfill himself or herself, but with proper concern for the community of which God has made us a part. □

*Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address,* in *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union,* ed. Charles Alexander Young (1904; rpt. Rosemead, Calif.: The Old Paths Book Club, 1955), p. 92.

Autonomy and Agape

JOSEPH F. JONES

In a recent article entitled "The Fractured Family: Following It into the Future," Harvard University psychiatrist Armand M. Nicholi II gave a penetrating, if abbreviated, treatment of the ills of the contemporary American family. Raising the question of the church's responsibility in ministering to the wounded or fractured family, Nicholi offered several suggestions, one of which reads:

> Christian moral values need to be spelled out more clearly. As a nation we appear to be more confused morally than at any time in our history, and the church has failed to give leadership. Perhaps we need to hear a little less about self-fulfillment and a little more about self-denial. Could it be that denial is a key to fulfillment?[1]

In this terse reference to "self-fulfillment" there is summarized much of the orientation and thrust of our contemporary society. And the church and Christian families are caught up in this present glorification of the self—"The Cult of

Self-Worship," as Professor Paul Vitz of New York University refers to it.[2] In Nicholi's reference to "self-denial," readers will immediately feel anew the spirit and message of our Lord: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt. 16:24).

It is the intent of this article to explore, within a limited scope, the nature of self-theory so prevalent in our present society, expressed variously in such semitechnical phrases as "self-fulfillment," "the autonomous self," "self-enrichment," and the "assertive self"; or in even more familiar terms which couch the same basic ideology: "I Ain't Much Baby—But I'm All I've Got," "If it feels good, do it," "I just tell it like it is," or the hackneyed words, "Do your own thing."[3] Having looked at the self-theory concept and its contemporary social impact, some effort will be made to assess critically this philosophy and its concomitant social move-

ment in the light of the Biblical notion of agape, or pure, unselfish love.

Personal Search for Clarification

For many years the writer has served as a Christian minister of the Word while also engaged in the mental health field as a psychologist, marriage therapist, and social worker. In diagnostic work I have often suggested that the client needed to develop a "healthy self-assertiveness," "become more autonomous in the marital relationship," strive for more "self-actualization," or experience new growth in "self-acceptance," "self-enrichment," and "self-love."

But while employing these well-known psychological terms in therapeutic treatment plans, I have constantly sought to define them more sharply in keeping with Biblical truth, realizing that without this framework the end result could be a narcissistic self-absorption, an egoistic self-yes, sinful person—concerned only with what happens to him, his interests, and his needs.[4] Believing in the inherent and immeasurable worth of every person, based upon God's creative work, and knowing that God's image is stamped deeply upon every life (regardless of how it might be marred), I have seen with increasing clarity that the psychological focus of self-theory of necessity had to be tempered with the divine purpose or goal for man. It is inadequate to hold as a personal life goal the desire for "self-fulfillment," or "self-actualization," without realizing that the self has potential for other than good; indeed it can be actualized into something very ugly and selfish and disruptive to others.

Certainly these terms (self-actualization, autonomy) employed in the communicating of self-theory contain truth. The root meaning of autonomous, for instance, is "rule or law of self," and it has come to be used of any person or institution which is self-governed or controlled. We speak of an autonomous individual as one who decides for himself, "strives toward self-actualization," and is not dependent on what others think in making a certain decision. And our Restoration heritage in the churches of Christ has led us to at least talk of the autonomous nature of the local congregation of God's people.

But as a characteristic or personality trait of individuals, churches or other social groupings, autonomy is not adequate as a guideline for social interaction, since it tends to focus only upon the individuality dimension of reality. No person can live meaningfully and acceptably in a societal context if he is conscious only of his own feelings, needs and desires. Autonomy without some controlling factor (which we shall discuss momentarily as agape) is easily reduced to the behavior of ancient Israel during the period of the judges, when "every man did what was right in his own eyes," with social chaos and moral corruption the end result (Ju. 21:25). Cyrus Gordon perceptively concludes that "such freedom [i.e., self-theory] is not far removed from anarchy."[5] Further spelling out the implications of self-interests, R.K. Harrison, distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, writes:

> Yet the concluding pronouncement of the book [i.e., Judges] gives some indication of the way in which the Israelites had already departed from the advanced moral and ethical spirit of the Sinai Covenant, and were living as their pagan neighbors had done for centuries, that is to say, *according to local tradition and personal inclination rather than by law.*[6]

When "local tradition," that is, cultural and social standards, and "personal inclination," that is, self-interests or self-actualization, become the final norm for behavioral expression, without some source of moral, ethical and spiritual truth transcending the self, then intensive interpersonal conflicts and societal deterioration are the local consequences. The necessity of clarifying, therefore, the self-

theory concept and its concomitant terms should be obvious.

Society's Worship of Self

Exaltation of the self is not the newly found prerogative of our modern generation. By whatever designation it may be characterized, selfism has been present since man first found himself in confrontation with God in the Garden; and the perennial struggle of man through history is nowhere more dramatically portrayed than when Jesus talked about the divine "I would have" and man's selfish "you would not" (Mt. 23:37-39). The creation narrative of Genesis recounts how God made man with dignity, worth and rational powers (Gen. 1:27). Man's divinely prescribed role to harness the forces of nature, to rule over the plant and animal world, is clearly delineated (Gen. 1:28); but the rule of man in the ultimate sense God retained for himself. Certainly part of the original sin (whatever else may be said) is man's assertion of his autonomy to flout God's will for his life, listening to the serpent more than to God, as the Evil One tampered with the Eternal, "Hath God indeed said?" (Gen. 3:1).

Since another writer is dealing with the concept of self in its historical perspective, no overlapping is necessary here, other than to generalize that the history of man is the age-old conflict of selfism arraying itself against the efforts of God to fit the creature into His benevolent purposes. But a more concentrated look at the nature of selfism in our society—how it subtly and insidiously makes its way into our very life-styles—is appropriate in this discussion.

The "Self-Made Man"

The early history of our nation challenged the individual's ingenuity and personal resources to assure survival. From frontier days came the spirit of self-reliance and the notion of the "self-made

man." There are countless biographies of individuals who rose from poverty and adverse family or social conditions to become national heroes and sources of inspiration for the young; many of these, we are told, "lifted themselves up by their own bootstraps." And indeed there is no intent here to disclaim the self-discipline, personal commitment and successes of such individuals. However, the notion of a self-made man, standing alone as a witness to "what man can make of man," is but further evidence of the deceptiveness of selfism which tends to deify man the creature while minimizing his creaturely dependence upon God.

Self-theory extended to its logical end tends to stifle man's sensitivity to others' needs, feelings, and values. It is such selfism which is at the heart of the do-your-own-thing, if-it-feels-good-do-it philosophy. Without a frame of reference which places God as central in life, and the "absolutes of God" (as Francis Schaeffer calls them) as basic controls for behavior, selfism ends in man becoming the measure of himself.[7] There is little guilt (yes, guilt can be healthy and essential!) to curb man's behavior or turn him to repentance, since there are no recognized divine standards beyond man's own autonomy, his own self rule. In self-theory there is understandably little or no conception of sin, for the very idea is repugnant to human pride and arrogance. Arnold Toynbee's assessment of man's preoccupation with self sustains this criticism of self-theory:

> I am convinced, myself, that man's fundamental problem is his human egocentricity. He dreams of making the universe a desirable place for himself. . . . All the great historic philosophies and religions have been concerned, first and foremost, with the overcoming of egocentricity. . . . You will find all of them addressing themselves primarily to the individual human psyche or soul; they are offering it the means for achieving this. They all find the same remedy. They all teach that egocentricity can be conquered by love.[8]

Dr. Karl Menninger comments on Toynbee's judgment: "Egocentricity is one name for it. Selfishness, narcissism, pride and other terms have also been used."[9]

Selfism, Marriage and Family

Not only does the autonomous man, if untouched with the redemptive and constraining agape of God, become a basically selfish individual, but he tends to impose his selfism upon all interpersonal relationships, the most immediately observable one being the family. As a mental health professional who specializes in marriage and family therapy, I have opportunity hundreds of times each year to see the fruit of self-theory demonstrated in the interpersonal relationships of family life.

Paul Vitz suggests that there is strong reason to believe that the philosophy of selfism in society has contributed significantly to the disruption of family life.[10] The selfist literature, much of which is popularized for mass consumption and readily available on the book market, is filled with case studies demonstrating that much contemporary marital and family disruption originates in persons in conflict with spouses or families over some purely self-defined goal. "With monotonous regularity," writes Vitz, "the selfist literature sides with those values that encourage divorce, breaking up, dissolution of marital or family ties."[11] With many therapists in the psychological and psychiatric disciplines, social or religious values of the family rank very low.[12]

Another dimension of the negative impact of selfism on family life is the theoretical bias against parents in numerous schools of therapy. While this bias is not new, since it has its early roots in the Freudian (and related) views of human behavior, it seems ever present, and is subtly couched in the more recent TA (Transactional Analysis) approach, where the parent, in spite of some good things recognized about him, is still the major

source of family problems. Regardless of the age or sex of the individual seeking therapeutic relief from conflicts and personal distress, the parents (one or both) soon surface as the prime culprits in adult misbehavior.

It is time that we recognized the Biblical truth that each person must bear much of the responsibility for his own life style (Gal. 6:5), and stop the scapegoating of our old prejudice on others. Selfism advocates need the honesty to allow us "the dignity of accepting that the fault is not in our parents—any more than it is in our stars—but in ourselves."[13] We can be grateful that at least in some therapeutic circles (i.e., the school of Reality Therapy), focus is again being directed upon the individual's responsibility for his behavior.

While it must be recognized that each member of a family constellation is a unique individual, having infinite worth and dignity as a person and needing personalized respect and acceptance, nevertheless there needs to be a renewed emphasis on the values of corporate family life reflected in the Hebrew-Christian tradition. The joy of sharing, the necessity of confession and forgiveness, the unselfish concern (agape) of each member for the other, and the rights and privileges of all members are only a few of the essentials which provide an atmosphere wherein adults and children can become truly self-actualized and, within a Christian family, can "grow into the stature of the measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

Autonomy and Agape

Is there, then, a realistic, Biblical harmony between autonomy of the self and Christian love? Certainly the Scriptures recognize the need for an individual to believe in his inherent worth and dignity, as a creature stamped in the very image of God. Quoting the Old Testament, Jesus taught that his disciple must love his

neighbor as his own self (Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22:34-40). Thus the Master gave his endorsement to a centuries-old Jewish concept that healthy self-love—genuine concern for one's own well-being—is essential in order to love another meaningfully.

It is necessary that the Christian have a realistic assessment of his gift(s) from God, whether they come naturally by birth or by the sovereign graciousness of the Spirit (Rom. 12:3). However, such assessment implies not only an avoidance of pride in thinking "more highly than he ought to think," but by implication a freedom from any pseudo-humility or sickly self-abasement which tends to deny what one is as a person. Such a healthy self-concept, rooting in an awareness of the creative work of God, gives honest assessment of oneself as a person and also recognizes that as a finite being he has failed God's expectations but is made new in his redemptive love. These dimensions, at least in part, express the Biblical view of the autonomy of man.[14]

The contemporary focus on selfism (I have tried to use the word consistently as synonymous with autonomy, or self rule untouched by a Biblical perspective) is incompatible with the nature of a pure, unselfish love (agape). The revelation of God's love in Jesus is the good news of One who cares infinitely about others, regardless of their ugly personalities, personal inadequacies, or disappointing failures (sins) (Rom. 5:6-8). Agape is God reaching out to welcome back a son who has not lived up to the Father's expectations (Lk. 15:11-24). The early Christians stood in absolute awe at this Divine concern for others which could claim them as His. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God, and such we are" (1 Jn. 3:1-2).

When an individual has experienced this transforming love of God in Christ, his self view will indeed be healthy, there will be a sensitive awareness of others, and he will fully intend to interact responsibly and lovingly with others in every setting of life. Then personal autonomy will be a control of self which has been purged of its narcissistic impulsiveness that mars individual happiness and wrecks interpersonal relationships. This seems to be the Biblical reconciliation between autonomy and agape.[15]   □

1. Armand M. Nicholi II, "The Fractured Family: Following It into the Future," *Christianity Today*, May 25, 1979, p. 15.

2. See Dr. Paul Vitz, *The Psychology of Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*, 1977, for a clinical psychologist's brilliant analysis and criticism of the psychological disciplines' focus on self-theory.

3, The book market is now glutted with a rash of self-theory works, most of which are devoid of even the name of God, unless it is used in a highly negative manner to indict religion as a major source of our individual and societal neuroticism.

4. See the controversial societal critic Christopher Lasch's most recent attack on this preoccupation with self in *The Culture of Narcissism*, W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978.

5. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Testament Times.* Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor Publishers, Inc., 1953, p. 143.

6. Roland Kenneth Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969, p. 693.

7. Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976, pp. 252-254.

8. From Toynbee's *Surviving the Future*, Oxford University Press, 1971, and quoted by Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1973, p. 227.

9. Menninger, *Ibid.*, p. 227.   10. Vitz, *Ibid.*, pp. 83ff.   11. *Ibid.*

12. Observe in sharp contrast the place of spiritual values recognized by a noted psychiatrist who is a Christian, Frank B. Minrith, *Christian Psychiatry*, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977, pp. 15-16.

13. Vitz, *Ibid.*, p. 85.

14. A brief but interesting chapter on the nature of man is presented by Minrith, *Ibid.*, pp. 57-70.

15. See *TDNT*, Vol. 1, pp. 21-55, for a rather definitive treatment of the Biblical term agape by Ethelbert Stauffer.

The Self in Scripture

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There is a widespread tendency, in both society and church, for people to view themselves, at least ideally, as self-contained individuals. This represents a radical departure from what God meant us to be, for true selfhood, according to the Bible, can only be realized in a voluntary binding relationship with another person. The mature self is defined as a "conditioned and conditioning member of a unit," as a social being in the richest sense of the term, and never as one who takes a solitary stance before God.

This does not mean that the individuality of each person is not recognized in the Bible, but that individuality is established only within the context of a larger whole. When one seeks to reverse that order, the result is not only disintegration of society but also a shrinking of the individual personality.

Man as Male and Female

In his instructions regarding marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33 (which is surely one of the most abused of all Scriptures), Paul directed the husband to love his wife "as his own body," as "his own flesh," and "as himself." However, the word "as" in these phrases does not set up the egotistic self-love of the husband as his model for loving his wife. On the contrary, "as" indicates an actual quality. A man loves his wife *because she is* his own body, *because she is* his own flesh, *because she is* himself. Even without other supporting evidence this should be clear from Paul's own explanation of his language: "He who loves his wife loves himself." In this sentence there is no "himself" apart from

the wife, and therefore there is no possibility of a man loving "himself" before he enters into the binding relationship under consideration.

This does not mean, of course, that the mature self cannot exist apart from marriage. There are other contracts in which true humanity can be achieved. Nor does it mean that every marriage leads to self-realization, for Paul is not talking about *every* marriage. But it does make it clear that one's own naturally selfish concern for himself is not the standard for his encounter with others.

The same point may be made with regard to the oft-quoted text, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In view of the Hebrew notion of solidarity and the context of the passage (Lev. 19:18, 34), the neighbor may actually be defined as "yourself." This interpretation, which is attractive because "lovers of self" are elsewhere in the Bible viewed negatively, keeps the text in harmony with Ephesians 5. A man's wife, then, is his most immediate neighbor, a touchstone for his relationship with other neighbors.

In our legitimate concern for liberation within marriage we should not forget that individualistic preoccupation with self, whether it shows up in the form of competition among equals or of tyrannical mastery on the part of the husband, brings no freedom. A wife who wishes to be independent of her husband is just as far from true humanity as a husband who must dominate his wife. Not only did Paul oppose sexual independence (1 Cor. 11:11), but he insisted that the husband or wife does not rule over his or her own

body, but the partner does (1 Cor. 7:4).

That man is a unity, bound to that which binds others, is supported by Paul's use in Ephesians 5 of Genesis 2:24: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one." But it is significant that Paul attaches that passage to Christ's relationship to the church, which is the real model for the husband-wife relationship. In his view the wife is the body of her husband as—and because—the church is the body of Christ. "No man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church"—and note this—"because we are members of his body." Christ's love for his body, rather than man's love for himself, is not only the basis for scriptural marriage, but also of man's achievement of true humanity in all bodily confrontation with others.

We are what we are *in Christ,* which means that our true humanity can never be understood apart from him. "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). "We are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25). "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). The form of these statements suggests the truth that the body is always before the individual; individual self-realization only comes after membership in the body. This is in keeping with the Hebrew way of looking at man as an individual only after seeing him as a society.

But incorporation into Christ establishes rather than frustrates individuality. Paul said, "Let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him" (1 Cor. 7: 17). Because unity is not uniformity, individual differences are not erased in Christ; they are transcended. True maleness and femaleness are sustained, since they are God's assignments. The same can be said for other differences. Under the common recognition that Jesus is

Lord, all members of the body will stand in their diversity.

In the language of Ephesians 5, selfhood is possible because of mutual submission, which in turn is possible because "you fear Christ." Since the husband's model—and the wife's too—is Christ as the Savior of the body, who loved the church and gave himself up for it, there is a strong implication that the development of the individual is achieved only through sacrificing what is most individual.

The Self and the Body

This is made clearer in 1 Corinthians 11. The ego-centered Corinthians had exhibited such individualism—"each one goes ahead with his own meal"—that Paul was compelled to teach them the meaning of the word body. "It is not the Lord's supper that you eat," he concluded, for what they were doing was wholly inconsistent with Jesus' words of institution: "This is my body which is for you." Since Christ's body is "for you," they should have viewed themselves as the *for-you* body of Christ; and if they were ever to have such self-awareness, it should have been during the eating of the Lord's supper. But since they did not, it was not a Lord's supper they were eating. Their problem was not that they had a common meal, but that they had a meal which was not common.

By failing to "wait for one another" the Corinthians sinned against the "body and blood of the Lord" (the words denote Jesus in the act of dying), that is, against Jesus' sacrifice of himself "for you." They were guilty of eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner," the meaning of which is indicated in verse 29: "For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself."

There has been much discussion about whether the "body" they failed to discern was the crucified body of Jesus or the body = the church. But distinguishing