

INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is basically a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers who seek accurately to reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as he is one.

Integrity

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happened in A.D. 70 was only a Roman-Jewish war and had nothing to do with the establishment of the kingdom of God (in contrast to Luke 17, 21). I've been told that if my wife prayed in a family devotional in my presence, she was "sinning." And that idea was carried to such an extreme that I was told that chain prayers were very "unwise" because of the possibility of a non-Christian participating in the prayer. (I wonder if Cornelius would have been allowed to participate (Acts 10:4)?) I've also been told that the "law written on the heart" (natural law — Rom. 1-2) in no way meant that any Gentile in the Old Testament ever had the possibility of salvation by following that natural law. Maybe you can see why I am writing out of frustration.

No Christian man or woman has the right to believe *anything* he or she wants. But we *do* have the right to be truth-seekers and to study the New Testament diligently and come to conclusions based on that kind of serious investigation. That is exactly what Paul was discussing when he wrote Romans 14:4-5, 10, "It is before his own Master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand . . . Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind . . . Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." God offers every Christian the ultimate right — to be a truth-seeker. Will you, as my brother or sister, offer me the same thing? □

May-June, 1982

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Dangerous Assumptions

It would be hard to imagine anything more harmful to our relationships both inside and outside the church than our assumptions. One illustration is the murderous undertaking of certain Jews who thought Paul had brought Greeks into the temple and defiled it. "They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area."

The Philippian jailor almost killed himself because he assumed his prisoners had escaped. The people on the day of Pentecost almost closed their minds to God's vital revelation because they assumed that Peter and his companions were drunk instead of Spirit-inspired. And the youthful Jesus was left behind in Jerusalem because his parents assumed he was in their company.

People acted upon these assumptions, sometimes with terrible consequences, although there were no facts to support them. But are we any better? If a brother does not share our tendency to equate nationalism with Christianity, we assume he is a subversive. If a sister supported the late lamented ERA, we assume that she resents being submissive to her husband, and perhaps that she is pro-abortion and soft on homosexuality. If a young preacher does not understand an issue as much as we think he should, we assume his ignorance is either wilful or hypocritical. It is easy for us to suppose that one who does not rally around our dogmatic flag has gone over to the opposition. If someone fails to speak to us, we take it for granted that we have been deliberately slighted. If we were not visited when we were in the hospital, it must be because nobody cares. If the teacher happens to discuss one of our peculiar weaknesses, it can only be an attempt to use his position to make a personal attack.

The list could go on indefinitely. All of us have seen homes torn apart, churches divided, communities set at odds, and lives ruined, because of assumptions. This is such a waste, for all we need to overcome the problem is a little self-discipline. Practicing that, we may find that our world is much more congenial than we supposed.

—HGL

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Women in the Church at Rome

HOY LEDBETTER

A while back a young woman complained that Paul (she meant the apostle) had a very low view of women. My response to her view, which, unfortunately, is shared by quite a few others, is that she just did not understand Paul. In fact, there is substantial Biblical evidence that the very opposite is true. One indication that Paul readily recognized the important function of women in church life and service is that approximately one-third of the twenty-seven persons mentioned by name in his greetings in Romans 16 are women. And what he says about his valued female coworkers hardly betrays a negative attitude.

The "Official" Woman

One of these women is Phoebe, regarding whom Paul says, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well" (Rom. 16:1-2, NASV).

According to this version (and also KJV, ASV, NIV), Phoebe was a "servant" of the church at Cenchrea. But she is also called in other translations a "deaconess" (RSV, Phillips, NASV margin, NIV margin), one "who holds office" (NEB), or simply one "who serves" (TEV). A weakness of all of these versions is that they give no hint that the Greek word here is *diakonos* (which is translated in the King James Version three times as "deacon," seven as "servant," and twenty as "minister")

and that exactly the same word is used of both men and women (there is no separate feminine form). Either English equivalent could be used here; that is, Phoebe could be called a "deacon," a "servant," or a "minister" just as well as anyone else in the New Testament, because the same Greek word is used of her. The word *diakonos* is applied by Paul to himself, Epaphras, Tychicus, Apollos, Timothy, and Phoebe, and there is no reason why the same English counterpart should not be used of each one, including Phoebe.

If the "women" in 1 Timothy 3:11 are "women-deacons," as is almost certainly the case, then the work of deacons in the New Testament period, whatever it was, could be done by either men or women. Besides 1 Timothy 3, the only reference to "deacons" in the standard versions is Philippians 1:1 (where Paul greets the "bishops and deacons"), and it is hard to argue with what C.H. Dodd said in alluding to this passage: "We may assume that, whatever the 'deacons' were at Philippi, that Phoebe was at Cenchreae" (Romans, 235).

It is not easy to choose an English word for *diakonos* in Romans 16:1, for none of the usual renderings is without susceptibility to misinterpretation, but it is disconcerting when the versions betray a bias against women, making assumptions about what Phoebe was at Cenchrea which are neither supported by what we know of the circumstances nor by the language of the New Testament.

Phoebe had also been "a helper of many, and of myself as well." "Helper" is from the Greek noun *prostatis*, which is not used elsewhere in the New Testa-

ment, but that does not mean that its precise meaning is not enlightened by any other New Testament passage. The cognate verb is used by Paul eight times, usually as a substantive participle (which functions as a noun). This word (*proistemi*, literally to stand before), when used of church workers, can mean either to "lead" or to "care for," and it would be immensely helpful if we could come up with an English equivalent which would include both ideas.

The difficulty of choosing between the two, when we must do so, is brought out in the differing translations of Romans 12:8, where the RSV says, "he who gives aid, with zeal," but the NASV has it, "he who leads, with diligence," and puts "gives aid" in the

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nothing. Quite literally.

margin as an alternative. The context of this passage seems to favor the idea of giving aid, or caring for, but the distinction between the two possibilities should not be too sharply drawn.

It will enhance our understanding of the ministry of the early church in general, and Phoebe's work in particular, if we will examine the other passages in which *proistamenos* (the substantive participle of *proistemi*) is applied to church functionaries to try to determine exactly what they did.

One of these is 1 Thessalonians 5:12: ". . . appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction" (NASV). Other versions use the simple "are over you" (KJV, RSV, NIV) or "leaders" (NEB, Phillips). These all favor the notion of leading, and the translations might be understood in a mild authoritarian sense, but

TEV ties this responsibility to the one which follows it and translates "who guide and instruct you in the Christian life." There is, of course, no reason why the meaning "to care for" should not be used in the translation, for the hard-working church workers under consideration in the passage are those who indeed "care for" the Thessalonian Christians.

This same word is used three times in 1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12, in reference to elders and deacons managing their own households, where the versions overwhelmingly favor "manage" (KJV, "rule") as the English equivalent. But it should be noted that these ministers are said to "manage" *their own households*; they are not required to "manage" the church. However, it is often assumed that church leaders are to direct the church as they direct their families, i.e., with considerable exercise of absolute authority. But this assumption is made invalid by at least two contextual facts.

That the meaning "to care for" cannot be very far in the background is indicated by the fact that the ability of the elder or deacon to "manage his own household well" is related to his assignment to "take care of the church of God." In other words, the leader's function in his family must have demonstrated his aptitude for taking care of the church. And how is that done? The simple answer would be that he has shown he can "take care of" his own household, i.e., "manage" in that sense, if the word manage is to be used at all.

The word "take care of" (*epimeleomai*) is used two other times in the New Testament: in reference to the Good Samaritan who "took care of" the injured man, and to his charge to the innkeeper to "take care of him" (Lk. 10:34-35). Such selfless ministrations are the responsibility of leaders to the church; this is the way they need to "manage" God's people.

The second consideration which seems to point to the word's stress on service in 1 Timothy 3 is Paul's declaration that "if any one does not provide for his own, and especially for his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8, NASV). The word "provide" (Greek *pronoie*) means to "look after" (Phillips), "make provision for," or "take care of" (TEV). This responsibility of taking care of one's family seems to have required great emphasis at the time this letter was written, and it was especially desirable in church leaders, who also had a corresponding obligation to the church.

The substantive participle of *proistemi* is also used of elders in 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (NASV). The versions usually pass over the notion of "caring for" altogether and choose a word here which means to rule, direct, or lead. But this choice is not demanded by the context, and in fact the "especially" clause is as much against it as for it. It would be quite suitable to translate: "Let the elders who do well in caring for the church be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." At any rate, one would have to strain the text a great deal to find in it the authoritarianism which has so often afflicted the post-New Testament church.

But however we interpret this term in the contexts in which it appears, the fact remains that it (in the noun form) is used of Phoebe. And we ought to have something better to go on than our presuppositions (not to mention chauvinism) if we are tempted to give it an entirely different meaning in reference to Phoebe from what it has when used of other functionaries. If we are to make rulers out of the other church workers,

then why not Phoebe also? And if Phoebe is "merely" a helper, then should not the others likewise be so regarded?

I am inclined to think that "helper," unless it is used disparagingly, is an adequate term for Phoebe, and that it also does equally well in the other passages. As an alternative to "rule" or "wield authority," it is much more consistent with Jesus' requirement that "their great men exercise authority over them, but it is *not so among you*" (Mk. 10:42).

The Case of the Missing Woman

The King James Version renders Romans 16:7 thus: "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." Junia, of course, is feminine, and there is no hint in text or margin that she might be anything else. But notice what happens to her in the Revised Standard Version: "Greet Andronicus and Junias . . . they are men of note among the apostles . . ." Junia is replaced by the masculine Junias, and the word "men" is arbitrarily inserted into the text. Which version is right?

It is impossible to decide on the basis of the Greek text because the feminine and masculine forms of the name are identical in the accusative case, which is used here. But lexicographer F.W. Gingrich has asserted, "If the name is masculine, it is found nowhere else than in this passage . . ." (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, II, 1026). And the King James rendering of "Junia" has the solid support of the older authorities. S. Scott Bartchy states that recent research "has shown that all commentators on this text before the thirteenth century regarded this person as a female . . ." ("Power, Submission, and Sexual Identity Among the Early Christians," *Essays on New Testament*

Christianity, 67). The tendency of recent versions (there are exceptions) has been to adopt the masculine form, although some (e.g., NIV, NASV, TEV) do put the alternative feminine in the margin.

This tendency to switch the name from feminine to masculine goes hand in glove with the widely held view that "of note among the apostles" means that the persons mentioned: (1) were in fact apostles themselves, and (2) were outstanding ones at that. And female apostles have been very hard for the modern church to accept.

But we must take into account the fact that Chrysostom, who was much closer to the New Testament scene than we are, saw no difficulty with a woman apostle. He comments on this passage: "And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even amongst these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!" (cited in Sanday-Headlam, *Romans*, ICC, 423).

Hard-working Church Workers

Several times the Greek New Testament uses a very colorful word (*kopiaō*) to indicate an exertion which causes "weariness as though one had been beaten" (it is in fact related to the word "to beat"). It means to "tire oneself out" in toil and leads to what we have in mind when we say, "I'm beat."

This is a favorite term in the New Testament to denote the severe and exhausting burden of missionary and pastoral work, but it has been pointed out that in the second century, when there was an increasing tendency to elevate the church leaders to positions of eminence, this word became less prominent, perhaps because it had connotations of manual labor which were

not thought to be quite proper for church dignitaries!

But the Bible knows no such reluctance. So the word is used in Paul's direction to the Corinthians to "be in subjection to . . . everyone who helps in the work and *labor*" (1 Cor. 16:16). It appears in his request to the Thessalonians to "appreciate those who *diligently labor* among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction" (1 Thess. 5:12). He applies it to those elders "who *work hard* at preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). Naturally, then, Paul uses this word in reference to the goal of his own laborious toil in ministry: "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I *labor*, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Col. 1:28).

Now this word is applied to four different persons in Romans 16: Mary "has *worked hard* for you"; Tryphaena and Tryphosa are "*workers* in the Lord"; and the beloved Persis "has *worked hard* in the Lord." But the striking thing is that all of these are women! The nature of their work is not stated, but they are identified by a term that would undoubtedly carry overtones of evangelistic and/or pastoral distinction in the church at Rome. And because of the word's close association with the ministry of the church, T.B. Allworthy insists, "It is therefore impossible to regard the work of Persis and of the other women as limited to practical benevolence, such as the showing of hospitality" (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, II, 190).

The Beloved

But Persis is something more than a hard-working church worker; she is also described by a term which has a rich history in the gospels. When Jesus was

baptized to "fulfill all righteousness," the voice from heaven acknowledged "my beloved son." And when his glory was previewed at the transfiguration, the Father again owned "my beloved son." And in the parable of the wicked tenants, when all else failed to win the hearts of those rebels, the "beloved son" was finally sent in the hope they would respect him. Thus in the gospels the term "beloved" is repeatedly applied to Jesus. He is "the beloved" par excellence.

It is not surprising therefore that the early church took up this term of endearment and frequently applied it to those who belonged to him. In Romans 16 Paul uses it of Epanaetus, Ampliatus, and Stachys, whom he calls "my beloved." He also uses it of Persis, but — probably to avoid the impression of undue familiarity with a sister — he avoids the use of "my" and calls her simply "the beloved."

I believe there is a lesson for us in this. When we really come to know the love that exists between God and his children, which is like that between God and his Only Son, it is only natural that we should begin to use the divine language of endearment in referring to other Christians (remember, we love because he first loved us). After all, if we love the brethren, why should we not say so?

The prefix *be-* in "beloved" means thoroughly. The beloved are those we love thoroughly. And that term is not being used as much as it might be in many of our churches. Perhaps we are too reticent when it comes to expressing our love for each other. We have already lost the *agape* — the love-feast — of the early church. The holy kiss, or kiss of love, is almost never seen. We even shy away from the congregational "Amen" which once "resounded like thunder." Surely in God's assembly we should retain some of the signs of closeness and affection. Of course, we talk in

vague general terms about loving one another, but we would do well to apply our expressions of love to *specific* brothers and sisters, as Paul did at Rome.

Paul's Female Coworker

The order of this discussion may have obscured a fact which is not without some significance. The very first person designated for greeting in Romans 16 is a notable woman — Prisca, who, along with her husband Aquila, was so highly esteemed among the churches in Paul's time. Paul says, "Greet Prisca and Aquila my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house (Rom. 16:3-5).

Prisca (who is called Priscilla by Luke) has been the subject of a great deal of speculation, including the theory that she was the author of Hebrews; but such is not necessary to establish her considerable prominence in the apostolic church. The fact that her name comes first in four of the six instances in which she and Aquila are mentioned together is almost invariably taken by scholars to indicate she was the more influential. But even more convincing is the fact that she and Aquila (note that she is mentioned first in this connection) undertook to instruct the eloquent and erudite Apollos, one of the early church's most powerful preachers. Certainly she constitutes an exception to Paul's rule that a woman should not teach a man (1 Tim. 2:12).

In Romans 16 Paul is pleased to call Prisca his "fellow worker." But what work did she share with Paul? The Scripture is not specific, but one clue we may tend to overlook is that the Greek word used here (*sunergos*, which corresponds to our "coworker" and may have so-called "official" connotations

which slip by us) is Paul's term for Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Mark, Luke, and various others who shared with him the mission of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Whatever her specific task, the indications are that Prisca was an aggressive participant in that evangelistic work. And just as the Bible declares no restriction on the activity of Philip's four daughters "who were prophetesses" (Acts 21:9), there is no hint that Prisca was disqualified for any teaching function on account of her sex.

Wherever Prisca and Aquila went the church seems to have gone with them, for in two of Paul's three allusions to them he refers to "the church that is in their house." And while no effort is made to account for the origin of these house churches, one is not encouraged to view Prisca as the passive type of Christian woman who had to wait for someone to give her an assignment, but rather as one whose courage and initiative would enable her to take the lead in starting and maintaining the congregations that used their home as a meeting place. She surely was Paul's coworker, both in his presence and in his absence.

Conclusion

This chapter invites several questions about the nature and constituency

Partly Blind

MICHAEL SPRADLIN
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"Oh, excuse me, sir . . . I thought you were a tree."

"That's okay, I guess I should have moved or something. I saw you cross the street here the other day and wondered if you were, uh, blind."

"Oh, I can see, but I don't see very well; just enough to kinda' get around. I used to couldn't see at all, though."

"Really? How well *do* you see? You

of the church at Rome, and we do not as yet have a clear answer to many of them. But one thing is beyond doubt: Paul viewed with the highest respect his sisters in the church and was pleased to acknowledge their considerable influence upon and service to the community. In that respect he was way ahead of many in his time — and in ours too, for that matter. We could hardly hope for more than that we today would catch up with Paul in recognizing the vital function of women as "coworkers in Christ Jesus."

Perhaps we could do no better than to close this discussion with a question posed long ago by one of our forefathers in the reformation:

Is there no work to be done by Christian women of the present day, which would rank them among the noble women named in this chapter? I confess to think the question worthy of something more than a sarcastic smile. We have Marys capable of work, and more than willing. Whose tyrannous hand, then, is it that lets? Dreams are not the only things in which crooked lines and errors blend. Grantitized church life might reveal some of them, if closely inspected (Moses E. Lard, *Romans*, 455).

Whose tyrannous hand indeed?

seem to be able to manage, but it must be frustrating."

"Well, I can see most things. I can get around, and unless something unexpected gets in my way, I usually do okay. At least I'm not *legally* blind, that's the important thing. You know there's a difference, and this way, I can say I'm like everybody else. You know what I mean?"

"But isn't it hard; like doing your job and all? I don't see how you get by, to tell you the truth."

"Well, actually, I depend a lot on what I learned when I was blind . . . like knowing where everything is and remembering how far it is to different things. I still think that way a lot. In fact, sometimes I even forget that I can see. You know what I mean? I know it sounds crazy, but that's what I do. And I'll tell you something else. Sometimes *looking* like you can see is as important as seeing itself! Do you know what I'm talking about?"

"Well, I'll have to say, I never thought about it that way before. But I guess that I do know what you mean. Except, to me, seeing is *everything*. And you sound like it's not such a big thing to you. I hope you don't mind my putting it that way."

"Oh, that's okay, it doesn't bother me. Sometimes, though, I do wonder what it would be like, you know, to be able to see everything clearly. I can't imagine what it must be like. But I heard one of my friends describe a beautiful sunset once, and, I don't know why, I just started to cry."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said what I said. But it did seem kind of sad that you thought so little of seeing."

"Don't worry about that, I know you were only trying to understand. And besides, I'm the one who said what I did. You know, about going around acting like I'm still blind and all. And on top of that, you're the first person I ever told that to. About wanting to see that sunset so bad. And do you know what? I never think about that at all . . . except at night, just before I go to sleep, I think about it a lot. Do you think that's normal? I mean, I always heard we were supposed to be contented. And I really try to satisfy myself with the way I am. But sometimes I think about what it must be like to see, and I just hurt all over. In fact, just

standing here talking to you causes it to just well up inside of me."

"Well, do you mind if I ask you something? You said that you used to be completely blind. How come you're able to see some things now? I mean, what happened?"

"You're not going to believe this, it's so crazy, but I'll tell you anyway. Some friends of mine took me to this man who everybody said was able to heal people. Of course, I was willing to go, but it was their idea, you understand. I don't know how much good they actually thought he could do. They said they had heard that he had helped somebody else, and besides, it sure couldn't do any harm to try."

"Well, what did he do?"

"He took — this is the crazy part — he took some spit and put it on my eyes and then put his hands on my eyes. Then, for the first time in my life, I saw the light. And I saw the people in the distance, even if they were a little blurred. It was really something, but do you know what? Things got so excited after that, that I didn't even get his name. Now isn't that stupid?"

"Oh, no, that's a thrilling story. I'm so glad that you told me. Why don't you go back to that man?"

"Sometimes I think I will. I know most people are used to me being the way I am and all, but sometimes I think I really will go back to that man."

"Listen. I don't know how this is going to sound, but I am going to say it anyway. God does not intend for us to stumble around in the darkness. Or what's worse, to surrender to a life of just going through the same old motions day after day. God wants us to see!

"Oh, I would like to say so much more to you, but I see my ride coming; I have to go. Please go back to that man. Tell me that you will."

"I will! I really will!"

Mark 8:22-25

This article is clear, but it is a bit dry. The teaching part is good, but it needs some delight.

God's Own People Part Three: A Holy Nation

TOM LANE
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The apostle Peter describes the church as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation," indeed, "God's own people" (1 Pet. 2:9). His identification of the Christian community as a chosen race informs us about the church's *origin*: it is the assembly of faithful people who have been called out of the world by God for the ordained purpose of entering into present and eternal fellowship with Himself. The figure of the church as a royal priesthood tells us of the church's *mission*: we offer to God the sacrifices of explicit worship, of service to one another, and of witness to the world. Each of these two figures suggests a third facet of our identity as the people of God. We are chosen, ordained, called by God to come apart from a world that ignores or rejects him, in order to commune with Him in holiness. In order to function as priests in His service, we must consecrate ourselves to His will. To serve as priests, we must strive to be fit to stand in the presence of God.¹ And so we are "a holy nation." Holiness is the church's *character*.

Portraits of a Holy People

This expression "holy," in the Old Testament heritage and in its New Testament usage as well, denotes an object or person or community as set apart for the exclusive service of God. A thing thus consecrated receives special value because God has become involved with it. The burning bush which Moses beheld was holy because God was there. The temple was holy because it was God's house. We, too, become holy,

because we are dedicated to God and receive His presence by faith.²

The New Testament employs several figures or images to illustrate the holiness which we are to have as God's chosen people. For example:

1. Ours must be the holiness of a temple in which the presence of God may dwell. We are to be like "living stones . . . built into a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5).

One evening this author was invited to the home of a friend to see slides of his bike tour of England. One of the shots showed a small but picturesque country church made out of gray stone blocks. It was explained that the people of the community around this church when it was built many years ago were stone-cutters in a nearby quarry. When the church was constructed, each member of the congregation went to the quarry, cut a block of stone, carved a special identifying design into it to mark it as his, and placed the block upon the rising walls.

What an elegant figure, we thought, of how we really do build God's church, or, rather, are built into it. Each Christian is a part of the structure, bearing the mark of his own unique spiritual gifts, and yet contributing to the strength and support of the whole. And all of us are cut from the same sturdy substance, which is holiness. As we are all built upon the foundation of the apostolic message of salvation and obedience, and conformed to Christ as the cornerstone, the stone from which the position of all the others is determined, "the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in

whom [we] also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20-22).

2. According to another vivid New Testament figure, the church is the bride of Christ. Our purity, as men and women of faith, and, thus, as a people, must equal that of a virgin bride ready to meet her husband.

We are, in one sense, already made pure by Christ's atoning work, which, in securing for us God's forgiveness of our sins, permits Him to see us as without blame, suited for fellowship with Himself. So Christ loved the church, and gave His life that He might cleanse those who would be His people from the guilt of sin, "that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). "From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride; with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died."

This holiness which we receive from Christ in effect, we preserve in fact. We remain chaste by our refusal to practice sin, and by our faithfulness to our Husband in our fidelity to the fundamental doctrines of His gospel (2 Cor. 11:2-4). If we continue true to Christ in this way, we may look forward with joy to that heavenly ceremony in which we shall approach Him arrayed in the fine white linen which "is the righteous deeds of the saints" (Rev. 19:6-9).

3. Our Christian style of life must be that of pilgrims or strangers in an unfamiliar land (1 Pet. 2:11). Those of us who have traveled for a time in a foreign country can testify how out of place one can feel (until he learns the culture) not to know the customs of the people, or not to know the particular nuances of meaning in the local language by which one could communicate on an even basis with the natives. Our sojourn upon the earth is like that. We are not of this place; our home is

elsewhere, with the Lord (Phil. 3:20). We cannot take part in the corrupt ways of those among whom we briefly dwell; we do not know the customs or the language. We are a people apart, following other customs, which are the precepts of holiness and love that reign in our homeland. We are members of another culture, we are citizens of a *holy nation*.

Holiness: A State and a Life

These figures of the church seem to depict our holiness both as an accomplished fact and as an ideal toward which we grow. We *are* a holy temple of God's dwelling, a bride cleansed by the blood of Christ, the citizens of a holy heavenly commonwealth. But we also consciously strive to be worthy members for His temple, we keep ourselves chaste from the world as we await our Bridegroom, we walk as aliens and strangers in the world, following a different pattern of life. Our holiness is, in fact, both a status that we enjoy as the result of God's action, and a life-style which we undertake in affirmation of our relationship to the Lord.³

At the time of our conversion, we enter into a standing before God in which He no longer holds our sins to our account, but credits to us the righteousness of Christ Himself. We are freed from the guilt of our sins and from the condemnation which guilt would incur. God then designates us His special people, set aside from profane and mundane uses to be the vessels of His indwelling. We are thus made holy in a formal sense because of our relationship to God. We become, to use one frequent New Testament term for the church, "the saints," that is, the "ones-who-have-been-made-holy." This is God's choosing and His gift to us.

The climactic event in our conversion process is a beautiful picture of our inauguration into this status of conferred holiness, and of our launching

out upon a new life of personal purity. Baptism symbolizes the washing away of our sins (Acts 22:16) and a regeneration of our spirits (Tit. 3:5) — of our attitudes, our motivations, our deepest desires and aspirations, which now take a new direction determined by the standards set by Christ. The washing of the body with water speaks of the cleansing of conscience which faith is working within us (1 Pet. 3:21). In baptism, we figuratively die to our old life of sin, and rise to walk in a new life of obedience (Rom. 6:1-4, 6-12). It is fitting that God should have ordained this ceremony to initiate new citizens into His holy nation.

In addition to declaring us holy, that is, clean of sin-guilt, and now consecrated for His use, God calls us to a personal practice of holiness. We are set apart to His service; we fulfill our high purpose by actually living according to His teachings. That we do so is appropriate to our standing as “not guilty” in His eyes. That we follow a manner of life after His precepts of purity and love, is essential to our enjoyment of fellowship with Him. Our appreciative understanding of God in His nature and purposes, our capacity to identify with Him, to feel at one with Him, to acknowledge His love for us and to present our own grateful, joyful love to Him, wanes or deepens according to our faithfulness to the life He has taught us. Fellowship means shared thoughts, a common manner of life. If we are to share ourselves with the Father, we must come to be like Him.

To help us carry on our task of growing in personal purity and service, God Himself gives us strength through His Spirit who resides within us (Eph. 3:16). He helps us who are His temple to be a sanctuary fit for His habitation. Our life of obedience is a partnership between ourselves and our Lord. We make the decision to follow His ways, and His Spirit within us reinforces our

will, giving us power to accomplish our decisions to resist temptation and to strike out in bold service for Him. We pursue a life-style that is pleasing to God, we “work out our own salvation,” because it is God who is at work within us, helping us to do as He would have us (Phil. 2:12, 13). The very God who has chosen us to receive His fellowship will, if we desire to receive it, imbue us with the strength to live up to His call.

We Are His

We are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” We are, to put it all together, “God’s own people.” What, then, in sum, does it mean for us to be the people of God?

This concept has a dual thrust. It means, most fundamentally, that we perceive ourselves as designated for fellowship with God. As His people we have access to His presence. We receive His love as He endows us with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). We in turn express our love to Him by devoting ourselves to holiness and service. That is the “of God” part of our life as the people of God. That we are the people of God means also that we have fellowship with one another. This is how we are a “people.” Our fellowship with one another derives from our common faith. It is in supporting one another in our fidelity to our common faith that we live our identity as a people. Our identity as the people of God thus encompasses the whole tone and content of our life of faith.

Sisters and brothers, let us think upon these things. Let us recognize who we are as a people, and Who it is that makes us a united, privileged, practicing community in His name. Let us realize the high honor He has granted us in offering us His companionship. Let us determine to live by the standards of righteousness and love inherent in His call. Let us commit ourselves to one another, for it is to support one

another’s resolve and effectiveness in living for Him that we are constituted as a functioning body. Let us as priests teach God’s truth to others, that they might join with us in presenting to Him the sacrifice of praise. God has taken us to be His very own people: let us in

humility, gratitude, submission, and joy embrace Him as our Father and Lord.

1. M. Furness, *Vital Words of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 69.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-62.
3. Harris Franklin Rall, “Sanctification,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1939), IV, 2681-2685.

The Church as Theater

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What is Christianity? Is it a place, a building, an organization, a feeling? What are its characteristics? What words can communicate its essence, its pristine qualities?

From a historical perspective, Christianity is a movement Jesus initiated, which has manifested itself in the lives and teachings of the people who have striven to follow him. But Biblically, it is the individual, personal and collective *relationship* that a man or woman has with the Master. His mission was oriented to *people*. He died to liberate people from sin’s slavery and, by his recreative touch of healing, make them whole persons. Jesus did not die for ideas; he died for people. Christianity is the participation of people with God. This explains why we assemble: assembly is a rallying time for believers, that they might be built up and renewed in their commitment to the Person.

But let us suppose that we were to restructure the church, to recast the community of God’s people in the mold of a *theater*. How would that change things as they stand now? What effect would it have upon our vitality, worship, outreach, and ministry? Let’s see.

The Spectator Event

Assembly is designed to be a spiritual pep session. In other words, it is for

edification, to build people up (1 Cor. 14:26). It is a time when God’s family gathers to share needs, to inspire tenacity, to express love, to celebrate the Christ-event, and to marshal itself for action (Heb. 10:23-25). Assembling is not the whole experience of Christianity. It is not even inherently a “public” aspect of it; it is just one part.

But if we were cast in the mold of a theater, the assembly would be the main and almost sole expression of Christianity. The sharing group experience of assembly would turn into a “production” with an “audience” that would have to be “conducted.” We would need a “program.” And “ushers.” Spontaneity might be allowed to some extent, but it would not be the norm. Formality would be the norm, and carefully-guarded rituals (the manner of serving communion, the format of the “service,” the physical posture of prayer, etc.) would be paramount.

Question: who is the spectator that views our worship and gathering? Is it not God? But with the theater syndrome we become the audience. Or worse, if we decide to “kill two birds with one assembly” and try to do our evangelizing in our assembly, then the non-Christian outsiders we usher in become the audience. And our assembly becomes a “production” which is put on to entice them into being one of us!

Structure could be improved but some very valid points.

Is that what we want? Is that the way it was meant to be? Are not our assemblies already too passive? Too theatrical? Is not the difference between being merely a spectator and being a participant the difference between a living, effervescent movement and a bored society of watchers? Contemporary assemblies often are not even flexible enough to reintroduce such Biblical forms as the *Agape* feast, the holy kiss, or the Amen without the old guard raising a fuss.

The Stage

According to the Bible, to "preach" is to herald the news. The apostles looked upon themselves as newscasters of Good News, and did not go into pulpits but into all the world. The marketplace was their stage. Do you know the word "pulpit" comes from a Latin term meaning "stage"? It is a theater word! And if we are to have a "stage" for our "audience," then we will need an "actor." Why not hire a full-time "pulpit-man" (lit. "stage-man")? Then we could have a very good "program."

Putting Christianity in the theater motif would probably not only change the structure of our assemblies (i.e., building auditoriums to resemble theaters and conducting ourselves as if we were trying to put on a show), but it would eventually change our way of thinking about Christianity. We might confuse our buildings with God's Temple and think of them as holy ground. We might forget that God's Spirit lives in our bodies and transforms us into his Temple (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Consequently, we might come to consider the preacher more of a performer, or P.R. man, or orator whose sweet voice and charming personality are the drawing power of the church! (Cf. Ezek. 31:33-34.)

Clocked Devotion

We are told that the early disciples often met secretly in caves and cata-

combs. Such meetings were intimate, as they would express the saints' love to each other with the holy kiss. They really *cared* about each other. It was dangerous being a Christian, so they depended on each other. That kind of devotion was the impetus of their movement. There was no sitting in pews with their backs to each other. They were partners risking their lives together to proclaim His lordship. They were not interested in what time their assembly ended. They did not throw a fit if the usher ushered them too close to the front or if their cave was not warm enough. They were devoted to Jesus.

What about us? What do we think "devotion" means? The "devoted" person today goes to church three times a week. And then we worry and fret if the "service" goes overtime.

Admission Fee

We often hear in sermons on giving the stale joke about the parents who griped about the singing, the preaching, and everything else, only to be reprimanded at Sunday dinner by their little son's quip: "Well, I thought it was a pretty good show for fifty cents!" Perhaps that contains more truth than we recognize. Is going to church like going to a movie, where we are ushered in as spectators to a performance, just a *show*, and our contribution constitutes an entrance fee?

Almsgiving (the giving of our money to the poor), which was nearly the sole reason for giving in the early church, is almost a forgotten aspect of Christianity today. We do not give to the poor. We give to maintain our "budgets," as if it were all a big production effort, with the preacher being the main attraction. Our money is selfishly spent on our theaters! In manipulating our people, we pound the pulpit and assert that negligence in giving equals treason against Jesus. For a member to give to the poor during the week, or

support orphan homes across the ocean, or financially minister in some way that does not go through the "church treasury," is cause for great suspicion and sometimes disfellowshipping.

The Comfortable Pew

Back in the beginning the Good News of what Jesus offered was so great that people accepted the challenge of cross-bearing (Mt. 16:24). They were ready to pay the price of their lives and allegiance. The apostles did not have to sugar-coat their message or pussy-foot around with the promise of rose gardens. They attracted multitudes because they had *good news*, and the people rose to meet their challenge.

Ironically, in this day of big promotion with our expensive buildings, fancy offices, soft carpets, and comfortable pews, we are still losing our youth and struggling just to maintain our numbers! Our people won't even rise to meet the challenge of assembling together. That has become a heavy burden. Our ranks are full of unconverted, indifferent and disgruntled souls. Yet we are still afraid of really challenging them lest we lose some. Certainly we have great sales pitches and better enlistment gimmicks. Perhaps we have forgotten about the

Good News and that our physical allurements are effete by themselves.

Conclusion

But is the church already cast in the theater mold, and do we need therefore to restructure the restructured church? I don't know. However, the evidence reveals that we are dreadfully close to "putting on a show," and there seems to be an overabundance of theater paraphernalia: our carpeted stage and the professional actor who "delivers" the "sermon," for examples. We have our main attraction (Sunday morning), with a kind of second feature program (Sunday and Wednesday evenings). And what about the "preacher voice" — the holy tone with which some preachers suddenly adorn themselves when they step onto the stage? Could it be that our theatrics are robbing us of Christianity?

Let us never lose sight of the early church's emphasis on partnership with Jesus, as individuals and as a body, where sharing, ministering, and loving were pre-eminent. Church buildings and pulpits are not wrong, but they can be abused. Let's not compete with Hollywood. After all, we have a different mission. Don't we? □

Seems to be an outcry without a context

The Ultimate Christian Right

STEVE FOX

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In the past I have written out of hope. Quite often I have written because of joy. Today I am writing because of a sense of frustration.

We, as American citizens, have heard much lately about human rights. I wish we as Christians could come to an understanding of Christian rights. When I was growing up, my parents and teachers tried to teach me how to make a proper decision. I hope you'll

not think I'm conceited if I say that as an adult I felt I was doing an adequate job of making those decisions. However, quite recently some of my "preacher friends" have been trying to make those decisions for me.

I have been told in the last two months that since I have baptized divorced couples without demanding that they separate, I am an "unsound" preacher. I have been told that what