

forgiveness, the presense of God's indwelling Spirit in the believer's life and a firm conviction that He is very present in our worship.

4) I was moved virtually to disbelief in the absence of any spirit of hostility and antagonism, a freedom from the basic ugliness which has in the past characterized many such unity efforts; for even when difficult and hard questions were raised, they seemed to come from searching, loving hearts; and there seemed to be a total freedom from accusing, judgmental attitudes one toward another. 5) While there was healthy willingness to acknowledge our past failures, the concern was to do more than merely wail at the past. There seemed present a genuine desire to find constructive answers to difficult questions, to lay out new Biblical missions and ministries; to avoid novelty and innovations for the mere sake of change, and to avoid being different for difference's sake.

6) One could hardly have missed the deep concern for the peace and unity of the Body of Christ, and the intent of those present to exert every effort "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" and to avoid if humanly possible (by God's grace) further disruption and divisions in the Church of Christ on earth! 7) My sincere impression is that many healthy challenges and changes are being wrestled with in congregations across the land, and that no one Christian or congregation should get the "Elijah complex" that they alone are left to face this awesome task.

My word of exhortation and encouragement to leaders in our brotherhood churches is to awaken to the many members who may have unmet needs, or frustrations from empty worship services, or strong convictions about whether your congregation is being led in the Way of the Lord. It might be easier and simpler to withdraw from such members since they are a threat sometimes to church leaders, or at least, ask them quietly to leave and find another congregation; but it may be that God is trying to open the eyes of the leaders through the babes in the congregation; for did not the prophet say that "even a child shall lead them?" And did not our Lord quote or paraphrase the truth that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast established truth? Fellow elders and preachers, fellow leaders of God's people, I personally appeal to you that you have sensitive hearts and attentive ears to the voices within your congregations crying out for the truth which can make them free.

Our indebtedness to the Central Church in Irving, Texas and to its preaching minister, Jimmy Carter, for this memorable event in the life of our brotherhood is deep. Pray for our brotherhood; pray for all who seek healthy and essential change; pray for ugliness wherever it is found; pray for unity and oneness; and above all, "Let us put on love which is the bond of perfectness."

Joseph F. Jones, Chairman
Editorial Board, *Integrity*

May/June 1985

Integrity

Editorial: "The Word of Truth"

The Self-Disclosure of God

Joseph F. Jones

The Authority of Scripture

Amos Ponder

Facing Problems of Hermeneutics

Hoy Ledbetter

An Open Book

Thomas Lane

Coping With the Challenge of Change: Review and Reflections

Joseph F. Jones

Editorial Advisor
Hoy Ledbetter

Editorial Board
Joseph Jones
Laquita Higgs
Natalie Randall
Dean Thoroman

Business Address
10367 Carmer Rd.
Fenton, Michigan 48430

Subscriptions
are by written request. Although there is no subscription charge (we depend on contributions from readers and God's grace), contributions are necessary for our survival. Since we are approved by IRS, they are deductible.

Manuscripts
written exclusively for INTEGRITY are welcomed.

Please notify us
when you change your address, so that you will not be dropped from our mailing list.

Available back issues
will be sent upon request, but our treasurer would like a contribution to cover mailing expenses.

"The Word of Truth"

How gratifying it is to know that God has never left His people without guidance, without His "word of truth." The apostle Paul enjoins Timothy to do his best to present himself as a workman who has no need to be ashamed, "rightly handling the word of truth." God has graciously provided us with the Word of Truth, inspired in sacred Scriptures, and profitable to make the man of God complete, equipped for every good work. The church may be viewed as the People of God under the Word of God, for indeed we are.

One of the most meaningful of all divine characteristics is that our God is a self-disclosing God; among all other purposes He wants to share Himself with us, to be our God and that we may be His people. While God has disclosed Himself in many and various ways to Israel and the Church, His Spirit has not left us without written account of His self-disclosure and this Word is normative, or authoritative today. So affirms the Apostle Paul. This normative Word must, however, be sincerely and as accurately interpreted as is humanly possible, through sound hermeneutics and prayer and the Spirit's guidance.

To these three notions of: God's self-disclosure, the normativeness or authority of the Word, and the need for an adequate interpretative approach to Scripture, we have devoted the articles in this present issue of *Integrity*.

A special feature of this issue is a review of the "Unity Conference" as it has been characterized by some held at the Central Church of Christ, Irving, Texas on January 17-19. I was privileged to attend and participate in this unique event and experience; and indeed it was one of the mountain-peak experiences in my spiritual pilgrimage.

We thank each of you who responded so warmly and generously recently to this ministry. Past issues on special themes are yet available for a modest cost. We are reprinting the special issues on Unity and Fellowship, available for \$2.00 for the combined issues. Copies of our most recent series on "Life in the Spirit" (five issues in 1984) will probably soon be reprinted; but let us know your desire about additional copies.

Your candid response concerning personal needs of believers and issues or problems with which you feel we should deal would provide rich insight and help to direct our ministry in the way which we believe God desires it to go.

Joseph F. Jones, Chairman
Integrity Editorial Board

The Self-Disclosure of God

JOSEPH F. JONES
Southfield, Michigan

The Hebrew-Christian Scriptures assume an ultimate Being who exists, independent of time and space, yet to whom human endeavors make a significant difference; who is concerned with man's direction and destiny; and who is, most of all, interested in sharing himself with man in intimate personal relationship.¹ The Scriptures also affirm that this Being, variously designated by revealed names to characterize His nature, has, in His own ways and wisdom, been disclosing His intents for man through the centuries; and finally, doing nothing less than to enter the sphere of human existence, characterized by mortality and death, chose to become one of us, so that we might become like Him.² It is our intent in the major articles of this issue of *Integrity* to affirm the reality of God's self-disclosure in His own unique ways;³ to affirm and reflect upon inspired Scriptures in the life of the Christian and the church; and to face some of the difficult but necessary questions about interpretation of Scriptures in an honest and realistic fashion.

God Who Is and Acts

Opening with the assumption of God's Being, and not pausing to argue or defend the assumption, the Scriptures move immediately into affirmation of what He has done among men. In this context of God's self-revelation the late Edward J. Young pointed out that the Genesis account of creation places stress upon God's "absolute monergism,"⁴ and here we see at least four distinctive and noteworthy concepts about revelation: 1) that God is, independent of temporalness; 2) that God acts of His own initiative; 3) that God acts with purpose or design in His loving creative endeavors; and 4) that God acts to His own divine complacency or satisfaction.⁵ He acts to implement His will

for and to man, to share Himself with His own creatures.

It is the redemptive story of the Old Testament that the same God who disclosed Himself in creation also called a people into being; first, Abraham and his immediate descendants, and now his many progeny, Israel. God has made known His ways to Abraham and Moses, and fashioned Israel into a chosen nation; and the basis of this calling and formation of a people is His own gracious and sovereign doing.⁶ Now that God has called and covenanted a people, He must be involved in their historical direction and destiny. Both the event (Deliverance and Sinai) and the interpretation of the event (God's sovereign election for Israel) constitute revelation.⁷

Centrality of Christ in Revelation

From the God who has made Himself known in creation and nature (general revelation, some theologians would call it), and entered into a special covenant relationship with His people Israel, the Biblical record witnesses to centuries of purposeful revelation both through the spoken Word of God and magnanimous events, until the ultimate manifestation of Himself in His Son; for, without question, Jesus Christ is the climactic moment in the divine disclosure.⁸

Within the dimensions of historical process God sent forth His Son, born "in the fullness of time, born of a woman, born under the law."⁹ The Christian Scriptures declare this Jesus to have lived an authentic human life within narrow geographical limits, that He proclaimed God's Rule (Kingdom) as "at hand," and readied men for its presence. In the person of this Jesus the eternal God entered history, identified with mortal and sinful man,¹⁰ and openly challenged Satan and the powers of

darkness, triumphing over them." Crucified, buried, raised—He was proclaimed "Lord and Christ," "King of kings and Lord of lords," the "One who is and who was and who is to come. . . Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth."¹²

In Jesus the risen and living Lord, God continues to reveal His purposes for the church and the nations of the world. He will appear again, a coming that is itself referred to as "the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ,"¹³ and He will call men and nations into judgment. That this judgment is set in an eschatological context at the end of history is not to conclude that He has not been calling men to judgment in the course of human existence, for indeed he has; but the full and final disclosure of God's purposes includes such an ultimate reckoning between man and God. Thus will God's plan for the ages be fulfilled—divine love and divine judgment perfectly blended—and the absolute sovereignty of God will have triumphed. The vision of God's perfect Self will be shared by the redeemed in eternal fellowship, the ultimate purpose in God's self-disclosure.

Revelation: Event and Word. . .

The historic Christian view of revelation has recognized that God revealed Himself both in event and word. That God could act mightily in the process of history, and then interpret that act through prophets and apostles, did not present any theological contradiction in the affirmation that Christ is the Word of God, and the Scriptures are the Word of God. But with the rise of modern Biblical criticism, marked by intense study of the Biblical text, emerged an unprecedented interest in the subject of revelation and inspiration, which eventuated in driving a wedge between the living God in His revelation and the written Word of the Bible.¹⁵

Under the auspices of critical Biblical research, many scholars felt an irreconcilable antithesis between the affirmation of God, the eternal Word, revealed in Christ Jesus, and the claim of Scripture itself to be the Word of God.¹⁶ Thus emerged the widely held contemporary view that revelation must be limited to

the mighty acts of God in history—God confronting men in given times and places—while the Bible was relegated to the position of record, containing man's response to God's revelation. The Bible as revelation, however, containing propositional truth which God had spoken to man, was truncated. Many scholars and theologians found William Temple's formulation of this position representative of their own conviction, that revelation must be restricted to disclosure through personal encounter with God's work in history, and must never be identified with any human words which man has uttered in response to the revelation (i.e., Scripture). "There is no such thing as revealed truth," wrote Temple. "There are truths of revelation, that is to say, propositions which express the results of correct thinking concerning revelation; but they are not themselves directly revealed."¹⁷ Scriptures must be regarded as human response and witness to revelation, but not in the final sense revelation itself.¹⁸

Christ the Word of God

Not only do the Scriptures claim to be the spoken Word of God to man, but they themselves assert that God the Word became flesh and blood, took the form of a man, and dwelt among us—full of grace and truth.¹⁹ In Jesus Christ grace and truth became incarnate, and the Biblical explanation is that "he (Jesus) has made him known (exegesato)." The term has to do with setting forth a narrative; it suggests that Jesus has "now given a full account to the Father."²⁰ From the word used by the Evangelist we get our English word "exegesis," and Morris appropriately comments that "it is a suggestive thought that Christ is the 'exegesis' of the Father."²¹ Jesus Christ, incarnate Word of God, truly interprets, explains, leads us into the full knowledge of the Father. Understandably, the Apostle Paul bursts forth in an affirmation of revealed truth, propositional in character, "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."²²

It is acknowledged by modern theology that Jesus Christ is truly the ultimate in the progressive self-disclosure of eternal God; but that Scripture must be viewed as the record (and that only) of his revelation. The antithesis established, therefore, between Christ the Word and the Bible as the Word seems most unfortunate as well as unnecessary. "Word" (logos) denoted the expression of mind in reasoning and speech; and "God's Son is called His 'Word' because in Him God's mind, character, and purposes find full expression. God's revelation is called His 'Word' because it is reasoned verbal disclosure which has God as its subject and its source. The verbal 'Word' bears witness to the personal 'Word' and enables us to know the latter for what He is, which otherwise we could not do."²³ Surely there is neither contradiction nor inconsistency here; and it is significant to note in this context that while the author of Hebrews begins by hailing God's Son as the perfect image of the Father (1:3), three times out of four the phrase "Word of God" is used not to denote Christ as Person, but the divine message concerning him.²⁴ God's saving events in history must be divinely interpreted; and without spoken or written revelation to give meaning to his mighty acts, our religious certainty rests on a highly subjective foundation dependent upon human response and enlightenment.

Need for Objective and Authoritative Norm

The basic problem which the above approach to revelation posits is that of objectivity in our knowledge of God. If revelation is limited only to events—such as Exodus, Sinai theophany, Exile, Return, or the crucifixion of Jesus—who is to assure us of an accurate and trustworthy interpretation of these events? Cannot God speak his Word to interpret his acts? And cannot spoken truth from God be revelational as well as events? It is the claim of Scripture that God did in revelation both act and speak. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he ap-

pointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power."²⁵ God communicates himself to a man through his "Word of power," as well as the power of his Word in action.

Purpose in Revelation

Revelation has as its end more than intellectual enlightenment or spiritual illumination; its intent is to establish a personal relationship between God and men.²⁶ It is God coming to man to share nothing less than himself in intimate friendship, having removed the barriers and resistances which sinful man is capable of erecting. God in Christ has "reconciled us to himself," and subsequently committed to us the message of reconciliation.²⁷ Pleading with all who would listen and respond to the disclosure of God's love and mercy in Christ, the Apostle Paul entreated, "Be ye reconciled to God." This is the end of divine disclosure, to know God and enjoy him forever.

Since God has mightily and graciously made himself known to man, man can subsequently know God; and to know God through Jesus Christ, interpreted to us through Spirit-inspired Scripture, is to begin the experience of eternal life—friendship with God now, perfected in a never-ending relationship.²⁸

1. Gen. 1-3; John 1:4-5; II Cor. 5:17-21.

2. Ex. 3:13ff.; Psa. 103; Phil. 2:5-11.

3. I have deliberately avoided delving into the dimension of general or natural revelation, and the extent to which sinful man, through reason, can come to some knowledge of God's Being and nature.

4. Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1949, p. 53.

5. See my chapter, "The Past Unfolds the Answer," in *Pillars of Faith*, ed. by Wilson and Womack, Baker, 1973, pp. 88, 89.

6. Gen. 12:1-9; Dt. 7:7-8; Psa. 103; Jer. 31:31-34; cf. G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, London, 1952; pp. 38-86.

7. J. I. Packer, "Revelation," *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, Eerdmans, 1962, p. 1090.

8. John 1:1-4, 14, 18; Heb. 1:1-4.
9. Gal. 4:4.
10. II Cor. 5:21.
11. Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 2:15.
12. Acts 2:36; I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 1:4-5.
13. I Pet. 1:7, 13; II Thess. 1:7.
14. Matt. 25; Acts 17:30-31.
15. J. I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible*, Westminster Press, 1965, p. 13. (Note: I have not attempted to deal with the doctrine of inspiration within the limitations of this article, although the study of revelation must embrace God's means of communicating and preserving that which is revealed.)
16. John 1:1-4; II Tim. 3:16-17.
17. William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, London, 1934, p. 317.

18. Cf. Alan Richardson, "Reveal, Revelation," *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, 1950, pp. 195-200.
19. John 1:1-4, 18.
20. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Eerdmans, 1971, p. 114.
21. *Ibid.*
22. II Co. 4:6.
23. Packer, *God Speaks to Man*, p. 51.
24. Heb. 4:12; 6:5; 13:7.
25. Heb. 1:1-3.
26. Cf. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 198; Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:15-18.
27. II Cor. 5:17-21.
28. John 17:3.

The Authority of Scripture

AMOS PONDER

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork (Psalm 19). Although the heavens declare, I'm not so sure that any of us could hear or see the glory of God if we did not already believe in Him. On the other hand, if we see and understand the handiwork of God in nature it still does not teach us of His will. This is one of the reasons I believe that the Scripture contains the work of God and is authoritative for us today.

There was an accepted body of Scripture recognized by Jesus and his apostles which we call the Old Testament. The oral traditions (Lk. 1:1-4) of the early church were written down and are known as the New Testament. Had these traditions remained unwritten they could and probably would have been changed beyond recognition. Our Scripture then, is the only source of information leading us to a saving knowledge of God, and an understanding of our responsibilities as a Christian.

Philosophy and psychology may help in giving us greater understanding of some of the

Scriptures but these disciplines cannot lead us to God. We come to a knowledge of God through Jesus Christ and to a knowledge of Jesus through the testimony of the Scripture.

Evidences Within the Bible

The continuity of Biblical themes gives credence to its authority. Throughout the Bible we read of Jesus the savior, of faith and of love. In the Old Testament it is the promise of the Messiah, a redeemer and King and in the New Testament the promise is fulfilled. In the Hebrew letter we read of the patriarchs who obeyed God because of their faith in Him. It is impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). This has always been true, even before any of the Bible was written. Love of neighbor and love of God was part of the law. When Jesus came he preached love and expanded its meaning for us. We could go on and on with

common ideas that exist in the Old and New Testaments because truth does not change. This continuity of thoughts throughout Scripture is another reason to accept the Bible as authoritative.

Does Biblical Authority Mean Inerrancy?

Can one accept Biblical authority whether or not he believes in errancy or inerrancy? The fundamentalist viewpoint is that if there is one error in the Bible then all of the Bible is unreliable. God, being perfect would not allow an error to creep into the Bible. The problem with this view is that there are some errors in Scripture. The fundamentalist says that these errors were made by the copyist and were not in the originals. This may be true, however we do not have the originals and cannot verify this. Since we do not have the original manuscripts this seems to be a moot question. The question of Biblical authority is a different question than errancy-inerrancy and can be accepted regardless of our view of the inerrancy problem.

Authority and Conformity

If we all equally respect the authority of the Scripture will we all believe the same things? The answer is obviously no, since there is no one who agrees with another person on all Biblical topics. There is so much difference in our backgrounds, education, knowledge and our abilities that it is impossible for us to see everything alike. We seem to have a tendency in the church to accuse anyone who would disagree with us to be lacking in respect for Scripture. For instance, if you do not agree with all my conclusions concerning baptism I will explain one more time and if you still do not agree, you plainly will not accept the truth and will not respect the authority of the Scripture. This is a very bigoted and judgmental attitude. Who am I to judge another man's servant (Rom. 14:4)? No, we are not necessarily lacking in respect for Scripture when we disagree with one another.

A Balanced View of Scripture

We need to be aware that we can become so slanted in our view of Scripture as to be guilty of Bibliolatry. That is, we can be in love with the Bible but not its message. Jesus told the Jews to search the Scriptures because it was in them that they thought they had eternal life. Jesus reminded them that the Scriptures testified of Him but they had rejected Him and in so doing had rejected life in Him (John 5:39-40). The Jews were so concerned with the legal aspects of the law that they had completely missed the message in the Scripture. We are not too different today when we insist upon our legal interpretation and conformity by all. The Bible was written that we might believe in salvation through Jesus Christ, not salvation in the Scripture. John in writing his gospel states that what he wrote was written that the readers might believe and in believing might have eternal life (John 21:30-31). Also, in a letter to Timothy, Paul says that holy Scriptures are able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (II Tim. 3:15).

Once could hardly claim to be Christian without reference to Scripture. Our faith in God, and our knowledge of Him, rests upon the witness of Scriptures. If we are to be faithful to God's will, we must respect their authority of the Scripture.

Bibliography

The Scope and Authority of The Bible, James Barr, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Penn. 1981.

The Foundation of Biblical Authority, Ed. James Montgomery Boice Zondervan Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1978.

The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable?, F.F. Bruce Intervarsity Press, Downer Grove, Ill. 1977.

The Battle For The Bible, Harold Lindsell Zondervan Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1976.

Amos Ponder resides in Flint, Michigan, and is a charter member of *Integrity's* board of directors.

Facing Problems of Hermeneutics

HOY LEDBETTER

There was once a man who, in his quest for divine guidance, decided he would open the Bible at random and with closed eyes put his finger upon the passage which would reveal what God wanted him to do. His first attempt yielded an example to follow: "Judas went and hanged himself." Finding that too extreme to bind upon himself, he tried again, and came up with a direct command: "Go, and do thou likewise." Still failing to reconcile himself to this drastic directive, he tried once more, but his finger landed on another imperative: "That thou doest, do quickly." At that very moment he decided that he needed a new hermeneutic.

Not only does this story (which amuses us only because the outcome is so bizarre) illustrate how some people try to force God to speak to them, but it also shows how we try to dictate what he will say. The results of this searcher's inquiry were largely predetermined, for why would he reject the repeated indications that God wanted him to hang himself immediately, unless he had already decided what God could and could not command? And, given his situation, we would have to agree that even the commands and examples in the Bible cannot always be trusted for our specific direction.

We are all in danger of using the Bible in a way that makes God say something he has not said, and we may not realize what we have done until and unless our methodology leads us to a completely unworkable conclusion. When our purposes are well served by them, or when we are in desperate need to defend a position, we may even string true statements together in a manner that makes them add up to a lie. A few years ago I received a tract which argued as follows: John was a missionary; John was a Baptist; John was a preacher; therefore, John was a Missionary Baptist preacher. The

passages which the author cited to prove his premises were indeed appropriate, but between premise and conclusion he switched the meaning of the words with the result that collective truth became a lie. But I doubt that his conscience bothered him for doing so; polemicists can make a virtue out of misuse of Scripture.

At the time, I typically viewed this as an example of Baptist waywardness; only later did I discover that I was guilty of a similar sin. In fact, I probably did a great deal worse, for I was perpetuating a pattern concept which virtually guaranteed division among its adherents. While those of us who held to this concept sincerely believed that we used the Bible responsibly and took it seriously, we did not take it seriously enough, for we were constantly yielding to the temptation to make it say too much, so as to include the practices we approved, or to make it say too little, to justify leaving out Biblical practices we no longer chose to engage in.

As I speak personally about some of the hermeneutical problems I have faced, I will give special attention to "commands" and "examples," the two more credible bases upon which we determined if something was authorized in Scripture. Perhaps it will help us to see ourselves from another's perspective, which seems to be extremely difficult to do. A friend of mine once wrote an article in which he argued that instrumental music in worship is wrong because it is not authorized in the Bible. I took his article and wherever the phrase "instrumental music" appeared I changed it to "individual communion cups." The result was a treatise that would have won high marks from a "one-cup" editor! In fact, it would have made a very fine just-fill-in-the-blanks argument for several of our factions, to show why they op-

posed what other factions did.

A crucial text for our ongoing discussion of worship and Biblical authority is Acts 20:7-8: "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them. . . and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lights in the upper chamber where we were gathered." This passage is treated as if it sets forth a precise formula for eating the Lord's supper, which must be eaten: 1) on the first day of the week; 2) only on the first day of the week; and 3) on every first day of the week. These deductions are taken so seriously that they collectively constitute an essential mark of the true church.

However, this conclusion requires certain assumptions: that the Trojans always did what they are said in this passage to have done once; that they never did otherwise; and that they had done exactly the same thing the previous Sunday. Within my circle we always assumed that the time of day (it was night) was not important, although others made that a condition of acceptable eating. But the biggest assumption was that what they did at Troas was done by every New Testament church and therefore must be done by all succeeding generations. This is a lot to assume. Nevertheless, we expected everyone else to see the correctness of our position and made their acceptance of it a test of fellowship.

We always followed the Lord's supper with a church collection, which was regarded as authorized by a direct command of Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:2. Perhaps we were especially drawn to this passage because it specified the first day of the week as the time of action. Unfortunately, Paul's directive provided for a special collection, not a regular one. In anticipation of his coming to Corinth to receive relief for the poor Christians in Judea, he ordered each believer at Corinth to privately set aside and treasure up the amount he would give to this relief fund. There is no reference to a contribution at church, although one might have been taken. We have assumed that the Corinthians attended to this matter on the first day of the week because that was when all churches met, rather than because it was payday, or some

other reason not known to us.

A passage bearing a stronger resemblance to our pattern is Galatians 6:6 ("Let him who is taught in the word share all good things with him who teaches"), since it seems to be a general rule and is for a purpose more in keeping with our usual reason for the collection. It does have a serious drawback, however. It calls for the individual to pay his teacher directly and makes no allusion to the church treasury. We have probably ruled it out as, not unscriptural, but impractical. Except for that disadvantage, it might have become an essential mark of the Lord's one church. But that honor went to a verse which long ago served its original purpose.

A more impressive example of what we have left out of our pattern church is the "holy kiss" (or "kiss of love") which was imposed upon the early church by five direct commands (the aorist imperative is used in each case). Since it is enjoined in so many contexts, it was obviously widely used—or should have been, if the references are intended to counter neglect. As with other commands in the Bible, we may question why it was given or whether it was intended to be a perpetual rule, or even a rule at all. But there can be no question that it has a great deal of authority behind it, and the fact that it is not generally used today must be accounted for.

If we say that the kiss has found an acceptable substitute in the handshake, then what other substitutions may we make for the commands of Scripture? If we say it was discontinued because of impurity, do the commands of God fall before the abuses of his people? If we claim that the Biblical orders were not meant to enjoin the kiss but rather to purify it (holy instead of sensual), why do we not keep the purified version under the assumption that the apostles would have discarded it if it had been fitting to do so? Or if we concede that a changing culture necessitates a change of commandment, then have we not admitted a hermeneutical principle that gives culture a great deal of leverage on specific rules and examples of the Bible? Finally, if we claim to go all the way back to the Bible and restore the

church in its pristine purity, are we not embarrassed by such a glaring omission?

Similar questions might be asked about neglecting the practice of the elders anointing the sick with oil when they pray over them. Those who leave that out today make a statement which may turn out to be more comprehensive in its simplifications than they will find tolerable.

In their quest for that elusive model of Christian worship in the New Testament, some brethren today look to 1 Corinthians 14:26: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." If not a pattern, this passage is at least seen to offer an approved option in worship. However, there are good textual and contextual reasons for concluding that Paul was criticizing rather than encouraging the Corinthian practices (for a recent discussion of this question see Ralph P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation*), and the text therefore is merely descriptive and not normative for future generations.

To be able to distinguish between normative and descriptive texts is a special challenge of the contemporary church. It is also our ongoing duty to establish a working relationship between Bible and culture. We have already declared, by action if not by argument, that culture affects Biblical authority. We need to effect a reconciliation of the two, not by

weakening Scripture so that no conflict occurs, but by showing how that strong Bible statements may, for good and sufficient reasons, cease to apply. This is a ticklish undertaking, which can open the door to rule by human opinion. But, in view of the numerous assumptions it requires, as we have seen from even this brief discussion, so does the pattern concept.

We need to abandon the pattern concept as a disaster, the starting point of innumerable divisions, the source of much internal distraction and destructive debate, and something that is chiefly useful for the questionable purpose of justifying our right to exist as a separate denomination. It inevitably makes us respect Scripture less, not more, because it creates an inordinate need to exaggerate our information about the New Testament church. Arguments from silence are precarious at best, deceitful at worst, and invariably lead to the wasting of energy in futile attempts to explain why they work even though some of our favorite practices are never mentioned in the Bible. Let us speak where the Bible speaks, remain silent where it is silent, and pray that we may always understand the difference between the two.

Hoy Ledbetter was the founding editor of *Integrity*, served as editor-in-chief for fifteen years, continues as editorial advisor, and serves with the Brook Valley Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

too, deeply affected by the Bible, through their contrary passion to extinguish its light.

It is well known that the Bible is a perennial bestseller. It is available in editions ranging from illustrated children's paraphrases to meticulous scholarly modern English translations, to study versions garnished with cross-

referencing systems and concordances, to tape recordings for use by the blind, even, recently, to a Reader's Digest abridged edition.¹

Many people of sensitive and inquiring spirit have turned to the Bible to absorb its bounty of truth to fill the spiritual vacuum of their lives.

The Bible's influence upon the celebrated leaders and the anonymous heroes of history has been extensive. The Bible has exercised enormous influence upon American culture, political structures, and social movements. The Bible is, perhaps, even more than the Constitution, America's formative document.² Biblical concepts of freedom, justice and compassion constitute the best ideals of American, as indeed any, society.

Yet despite the recognition that is often accorded it, for some the Bible is a book unopened and unheeded; a book to which some minds are closed in prejudice, ignorance or confusion. Some ask: What is so special about the Bible? How can I decipher and understand it? What can it mean to me?

The Bible's own most succinct commentary upon itself, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, suggests to us the Bible's origin, significance, and availability. The Scriptures, Paul explains, come to us bearing the message of God Himself: "All Scripture is God-breathed."³ This legacy from the Lord properly commands our attention and obedience: it is essential "for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." And, as it must be in order to accomplish its purpose for us, the Bible is an intelligible book: it is "able to make [us] wise for salvation."

The Bible is God's authoritative and effective life-changing communication to us. Let's explore the Bible's character and value.

God-breathed

The Bible is the book whose ultimate origin lies uniquely with God. The Bible is God's authentic self-revelation to us. Moreover, it is, as we say, inspired; literally, "breathed forth by God."

A few words will be helpful about these two important, complementary concepts, *revelation* and *inspiration*. "Revelation" means that God

tells us about Himself, what He is like, and what He requires of us, His creatures designed for communion with Himself. It is necessary for such fellowship that God should disclose Himself to us, for He is a transcendent being of whom our senses have no direct knowledge.

God presents certain things about His intelligence and power and providence to us in nature (Psalms 19:1-6; Acts 14:17; Romans 1:20) and in history (Acts 17:26, 27). But these secondary, derivative evidences of God do not tell us every important facet of His character and His plan for us. As someone has well said, discerning the things of God in nature and history alone is like watching a film made in a foreign country: we may be able to infer something of the characters' motivations and intentions from the action we see, but our comprehension remains incomplete and fallible unless the words of the actors are translated for us in English subtitles or in overdubbed sound.

God not only reveals Himself to us in the works of His hands, but in words and meaning. In the incarnate Christ He taught us His ways and showed us the glory of His grace (John 1:14, 18). God also impressed His message upon the minds of His prophets and preachers and writers in certain centuries past. The written Scriptures are the record of God's self-disclosure, not only telling us of God's mighty deeds, but explaining to us in verbal or semantic fashion what God means for us to know and to do.

The Scriptures thus *reveal* God's character and will to us. God through the written Word tells us what we could not have fully discovered on our own. *Inspiration* means that God aroused His message in the minds of the Bible's human authors, preparing them by His providence to spontaneously write His Word, and giving them His Holy Spirit to supervise them in this labor, so that they, penning their own words out of the abundance of their own converted hearts, conveyed perfectly the things God means us to know and obey.

The process of inspiration involved the total participation of the minds and personalities of the human writers, as well as the supervision of the divine Revealer; accordingly, the Scrip-

tures reflect the individual literary and linguistic styles of these diverse human writers. Because they were composed as genuinely human documents meant to address real life needs of people known to their authors, Biblical books reflect, and are properly interpreted by, the authors' reasons and circumstances in writing. In addition, different Biblical writers stressed different aspects of doctrine and practice as the immediate situations of their addresses required.

A Dependable Book

What is so important about this notion of inspiration? Because of God's supervisory involvement in the writing of His Word, the Scriptures contain God's revelation to us in a trustworthy form. Inspiration guarantees the truth and authority of the Bible.

Consider, as well, other assurances of the Bible's reliability as a vehicle of God's message. The dependability of the Scriptures is made certain by the origin at the hands of men who were personally acquainted with the events and truths about which they wrote. "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," one apostle tells us; "[we] were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16-18). Another apostle attested to the earthly life of the Lord "which we have seen with our eyes" firsthand (1 John 1:1-3). Luke affirmed the truth of the things he wrote by noting his careful investigative procedures: he sought the testimony of "those who from the first were eyewitnesses" (Luke 1:1-4).

We may trust the Bible's teachings, because of the very fact of its preservation and transmission in written form. Had God entrusted His message to unassisted human memory and word-of-mouth transmission alone, we could not feel confident that the teachings we heard today were what God revealed so long ago. By inspiring His followers to commit His message to the durable medium of writing, God has insured a more objective, less corruptible propagation of His Word.

Though the original manuscripts which held it have long since turned to dust, this written

Word has been scrupulously maintained by painstaking copyists who have handed its message to us across the centuries. Yes, copyists can make mistakes, and an error made in one manuscript may be inadvertently copied into subsequent editions. However, the transcribers of Scripture have handled the Word with such reverently meticulous attention to detail that when we compare the many editions of the Scriptures made over the centuries, we find amazingly little deviation in wording. And we have thousands of such manuscripts and textual portions to compare, vastly more than in the case of any other ancient literature. There is in fact no passage of the Bible in which any disputed or alternative wording or phrasing suggested by variations in ancient textual readings would affect any significant teaching or doctrine or command of God as we understand it now.

Finally, the dependability of the Bible as the medium of God's message is made sure by the careful formation of the *canon*, or standard collection of inspired books. The Old and New Testament rosters of books regarded as the authentic Word from God came into being as the Israelite nation and the early Christian community approved and circulated certain books as bearing prophetic or apostolic authority. These books we may embrace as having passed the rigorous test of acceptance by men and women attuned to God's will through the ages.

An Imperative Book

The Bible is an inspired book. It is also a compelling, commanding book. It tells us what God would have us believe and do. It unveils for us God's provision for our salvation and abundant life. It is a lamp to guide us in spiritual matters (Psalm 119:105). It is, as Paul wrote, "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness;" in sum, "able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

The Bible offers us encouragement and warning in our sojourn in God's ways. It confronts

us with the tearful example of men and women who failed God (and themselves) in ages past. It also uplifts us with the joyous example of those who braved trials and hardships, and persevered in faithfulness, receiving the Lord's approval. The Bible reminds us of God's constant presence and providence to help us along (Matthew 28:20; Romans 8:28; et. al.). "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that though endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

An Intelligible Book

To achieve its divinely-ordained results, the Bible must be a book we can understand. It is not, as some people plaintively urge, an incomprehensible book. God speaks in order to be understood. He does not speak in code or arbitrary, esoteric symbols. If we read the Bible with common sense and care, we find that it speaks to us plainly of the tremendous things of God.

To understand God's message in the Scriptures, we need simply examine the Bible using the ordinary precepts of logic and language we would employ in reading any other document. Each word and sentence of Scripture we should take at its primary, usual meaning in the context of its surrounding passages (watching, of course, for language that is intentionally figurative). We must remember each author's immediate purpose in writing, and consider how his statements were designed to meet the needs of the believers who first read his words. If we encounter a perplexing statement, we can often deduce its meaning by figuring what it would have had to say in order to accomplish the author's evident intent for his original audience. The author's historical and cultural background must also be taken into account. Some statement or allusion of the author's which may sound odd to us may be explained in reference to some custom or artifact common in his day that is unfamiliar to our routine experience today.

If we run up against difficult sayings or controversial points in Bible study, we must not

become discouraged. We must continue to study, perhaps laying the problem aside for a while and returning to it afresh later, until a plausible interpretation begins to suggest itself. Commentaries and the critical observations of other students of the Word can help us. If we find ourselves in disagreement with fellow Christians on some such point of interpretation, we must not permit this to interrupt our fellowship, but should study humbly together in continuing acceptance of one another in the Lord who binds us all in His love.

We may take assurance, too, that the Bible's overarching, vital message is clear to all who investigate the Word. The Bible at first glance seems a disparate collage of writings of various types produced by a number of diverse authors. These writings are one in portraying the theme of man's need and God's love. The many Biblical books are like the several melodies which weave into the coherent harmony of a great master work. Indeed, this remarkable unity and clarity of sixty-six books composed in various literary styles by many authors over the span of fifteen hundred years, is one of the facts by which we recognize that here we have not a mere human religious or philosophical anthology, but a single Book prepared according to a single divine purpose.

Put It To Work

Above all, we must read the Bible with receptive minds and hearts, with willingness to accept honest conclusions and to obey what the Word commands. We must read the Bible not just as a textbook for information — though it is that, if not that alone, and all legitimate action must be founded upon correct knowledge. We must also read the Bible as an urgent letter from the Lord speaking to each of us personally! Thus we may rejoice in the Bible's promises, must heed its admonitions, and must do what it directs. The Bible is our Lord's authentic, authoritative Word "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The Bible is a book imbued with holy power to persuade our minds, convert our hearts, and transform our lives. Let us search the Scrip-

tures that we may recognize, receive, and submit to God's power to make us pure people. Let us proclaim to others the good news written in the Word, for it is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). The Scriptures which rule our hearts can be on our reverent lips a mighty tool in leading others to redemption and renewal. Let us open the Bible to ourselves and to others: for it opens for us the door to life.

Coping With the Challenge of Change

The days of January 17-19, 1985 provided the time and occasion for about two hundred Christians of Churches of Christ (non-instrumental) to meet at the Central Church in Irving, Texas to explore the direction and mission of churches facing the challenge of change in our contemporary society. This "unity conference" as some began to call it, was planned and guided by the leaders of the Central Church of Christ in Irving, and they are to be highly commended for their vision and courage in bringing about such an event.

Areas of interest and priority pursued during the conference were: change and how to effect it with minimal disruption; growth (or lack of it) within changing churches; music, including special groups and even instrumentation; the denominational use of the name "Church of Christ" in the exclusive sense we have come to employ it; church polity, or the governing of the church, including the decision-making process and the role of elders; structure, worship innovations, house churches, and methods of carrying out the church's mission; and women's role in leadership and worship. Leaders do not have to be theologically liberal, negatively critical, or reactionary to the existing situation to prepare such a list of needed areas; but they do have to be persons of vision,

¹Condensed from the Revised Standard Version, this is an excellent literary achievement up to the Reader's Digest's usual high standards of performance.

²Kenneth L. Woodward, David Gates, et. al., "How the Bible Made America," *Newsweek*, C (27 December 1982), 44-51.

³All Scripture quotations here are from the *New International Version*.

Thomas Lane resides in Cincinnati, Ohio and is a Christian minister who has contributed frequently to the pages of *Integrity*.

courage, intellectual honesty, and genuine love for God and man.

Rather than employing an approach with one or two name speakers for such a conference, the weekend was centered around several major panel presentations, with competent and committed men and women sharing initial presentations, followed by small group response, and then plenary session feed-back. Fifteen panelists, on five separate panel themes, lovingly but vigorously pursued such themes as "our response to the great social needs and issues of our day;" the message which the church is sending out to the world today: what actually is it, and is it really the Good News of what God has done in Christ for sinful and needy man; the ministry of women in the work and worship of the church; the nature and reality of our worship experiences; and "exploring values and weaknesses in our heritage."

While no particular individual was singled out for praise and honor, the presence of two brothers was obviously felt for the immeasurable impact they have made on so many lives and churches. In his own inimitable way, Leroy Garrett shared at a fellowship dinner some vignettes of leaders to whom we are all indebted in various ways: C.S. Lewis, William Barclay, and Malcolm Muggeridge. On Satur-

day morning, J. Harold Thomas, in a deeply emotional moment, assured the gathered believers of the ever-present "Lord of the Winds" who can still the winds and the waves and bring peace to the troubled heart or troubled church! From across the land came "weather reports" of changes being effected in the churches—not change for change's sake—but in concerned efforts to make God more real in the churches and the Gospel more vital in the world to which it is preached.

Changes and Challenges

It may be significant to cite areas of concern most commonly reflected by participants and registrants.

1) There was deep concern that Churches of Christ are not speaking a relevant and dynamic Gospel of Christ to the needs of our present world.

2) Deep concern also was felt over the legalism and rigidity, authoritarianism, and inflexibility of many church leaders (elders and preachers) which stifle the growth of Christians and churches, fostering a religious exclusivism more like the Pharisees than characteristic of Jesus the Lord.

3) Many leaders felt that our traditional and/or ineffective approach to worship has produced either a negative and unfruitful response on the one hand, or disgust, doubt, and indifference on the other. Worship which often seems to lack any spiritual dynamic in either leaders or congregation is uncritically perceived as "worship in Spirit and in truth."

4) The continued stifling of women in the worship and ministries of the church is correctly assessed as great loss of abilities in furtherance of the Kingdom; as discouragement of God's women servants; and the maintaining of a status quo attitude and practice which breeds discontent and unhealthy relationships in the Body.

5) There exists the need for in-depth and scholarly re-assessment of our Restoration Heritage, its original intent and its values and weaknesses. Has this great vision for the unity of all true believers in Jesus as Lord been realized or has it been misunderstood and

become the instrument of increased divisiveness among the People of God?

6) What shall be our stance (attitude and practice) toward the Christian world of believers, other Christian churches, who not seeing truth as we see it, and having real theological differences, nevertheless claim to be sincere followers of the Lord Jesus Christ? (Complicating this problem is the life and fruit of such Christian believers, their witness to the world, their commitment and evangelistic zeal which so obviously seem to out-strip that of our churches. Jesus did comment one time that "by their fruits ye shall know them.")

7) Finally, present at the conference was a sense of grief, genuine Christian hurt over our brotherhood's exclusivistic view on unity and fellowship, toward those within our own movement, as well as those of the Christian world at large. What an urgent need exists to explore anew with genuine openness of mind, freedom from fear, and Christ-like love for all others the essence of Biblical unity and Christian fellowship.

Impressions and Conclusions

I was deeply grateful to God for the privilege and joy to be a part of this conference as a member of the Troy, Michigan congregation and representative of *Integrity* journal. While the following conclusions may not be valid to some when subjected to the rigors of sharp intellectual and rational scrutiny, they are at least my personal impressions and assessment of three exhilarating days in my life. 1) There seemed to be a genuine recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord, and the earnest desire to submit to His leading; and a deep reverence for the authority of "sacred Scriptures" as inspired of God and normative for the "man of God" to become fully "equipped for every good work." I did not sense any disrespect for the written Word of God, but a healthy reverence for its truth. 2) A conscious effort seemed present to follow Paul's injunction to "Welcome (receive) one another, even as God in Christ has received us." (Romans 15:7) 3) Our worship moments evidenced a new joy and dynamic, rooted in the awareness of divine