

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.

(Continued from previous page)

Dear *Integrity* Board,

Thank you for the joy and tremendous spiritual uplift I receive from reading your periodicals as I have done since you began publishing. You cannot measure the benefits received by those of us willing to read, study and accept insights and teaching which have been overlooked or silenced for so many years, particularly those concerning the Holy Spirit. Praise God!

It is my prayer that I may continue contributing financially on a more lucrative basis even though I am on a fixed income. Keep up the articles which keep us from continuing in a God-starved community.

Much love in Christ,
Helen Berg
Port Arthur, Texas

Enjoy your articles.

Homer D. Matson
Jefferson, Oregon

Keep up the good work. I am a Presbyterian who finds much that is good in *Integrity*.

D.K. Carpenter
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Gentlemen:

I have appreciated your magazine for many years, since 1978. I frequently photocopy articles from *Integrity* to hand out in my classes at church. May God bless your work.

In the love of Christ,
John Ponder
Tucson, Arizona

Integrity Board of Trustees:

I want to compliment you on the Sept./Oct. (1984) issue. It was excellent and in my opinion, one of the best recently...I know it will be an issue kept and re-read by a lot of us.

Keep up the good work.

In his love,
Wanda and Gene Hatcher
Franklin, Tennessee

Reading *Integrity* these past years has been a joy to me. At 79 years of age I am still learning.

The entire September/October 1984 issues is most interesting.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely in Christ,
Fred M. Engle
Roswell, New Mexico

Integrity

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Pain, Suffering, and the Sovereignty of God

(Part II)

“Because God is sovereign, he must be related in some way to suffering,” writes T.B. Maston in his challenging little book, *God Speaks Through Suffering*. In this second issue of *Integrity* on the theme of pain, suffering, and the sovereignty of God, our writers have tried to wrestle with the more pragmatic questions of how to accept the reality of suffering in a world where believers still hold to the sovereign control of God in his world and his church; and not only to hold onto a firm belief in the presence and purposeful working of God, but to cope with the reality of evil and pain in God’s world.

Elton Higgs wrestles with the universal and ageless need of man to put God on trial, to question His goodness and loving purposes, and in skeptical fury to challenge God’s fairness. His conclusion is the Biblical response, that “the only key to the mess around us and within us is the mystery of the love of God through Christ.” Hoy Ledbetter has again blessed us with his rich insights into this most difficult of subjects, challenging us with “some Bible characters who have faced up to God’s sovereignty;” and what a trio of characters he has chosen—Balaam, Jonah, and Jeremiah! You will both smile and cry and be awed as you read Hoy’s material.

Upon reading the first paragraph of Bruce Kilmer’s article you may shudder and want to close your eyes to ugliness of evil in the world; but read on, for this bright young Christian leads us from the blackness of sin and pain and suffering to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God manifested in the face of Jesus Christ! And finally, Epi and Reba Bilak, some of the greatest saints of God alive today, share briefly some of their struggle to accept the bitter and untimely death of Jamie, their 21-year-old son who died July 13, 1984, as the result of a tragic accident in Lausanne, Switzerland. (See my personal note at the introduction of their article.) We have only extracted some of their most poignant insights from several written documents (so much more might have been included.) The parents’ reflections and the touching tributes of others who knew Jamie, will, I hope, portray a family that has tried to live and serve and suffer in humble submission to the sovereign will and working of God.

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Can God Be Put On Trial?

ELTON D. HIGGS

Dearborn, Michigan

In an age and a society where legal action is rife, one might imagine someone bringing an accusation against God with the following set of indictments: (1) The Author of the universe was remiss and irresponsible in creating a world in which evil was possible, especially a kind of evil which could be transmitted from generation to generation (2) Having perpetrated that first crime against humanity, God has shown himself callous to the continuous suffering of his creatures, allowing it to go on for thousands of years without sustained relief or substantial improvement. (3) God has furthermore set up impossible moral demands of his crippled creatures and has threatened them with eternal torment of not measuring up to his demands or even for being ignorant of the specifics of his plan of salvation.

This is a very heavy set of accusations, and if any of them were proved against the Creator, his credibility and worthiness would indeed be destroyed. A number of people have assumed over the years that such charges are unanswerable and manifestly valid, and they have therefore concluded that mankind is eminently justified in not paying any attention to a morally deficient “God.” Still others have wanted to have their cake and eat it too, by not merely dismissing the idea of God as insupportable, but keeping the discredited Deity around to bear the brunt of their bitterness.

The Problem of Evil

Both kinds of morally sensitive (and often indignant) anti-theists, however, overlook the fact that berating the Biblical concept of God doesn’t solve or do away with the Problem of Evil (If God is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing, why does evil exist?) The core of that problem (Why does evil exist?) remains for anyone who expects the world to be better than it is. Mankind does not have to accept the existence

of God to be dismayed by the frustration of living in a world that is inimical to, or at least unconcerned with, the achieving of man’s highest hopes, which usually have to do with attaining emotional, social, and physical security. All of these are militated against, not only by natural forces in the universe, but by man’s own perverse selfishness. It’s quite as easy to be a disillusioned humanist as it is to be a bitter theist, for an absurd world is hardly more acceptable than one that seems cruelly unjust.

If man does not escape from the incongruities of his situation by accusing and consequently rejecting God, then he is in a vulnerable situation when he appeals to some standard of morality which he can use against God. Ironically, he is indebted to the very system he is trying to discredit when he presumes to “trap” God in the net of His own goodness as defined in the Bible. If God is the source of moral and spiritual goodness, then He is necessarily superior to it and defines it; therefore, He cannot be judged by Man’s understanding of it. On the other hand, if man has determined that humanity is the only source of moral standards, it is inconsistent to want to appeal to any kind of absolute standard at all, for man’s standards are necessarily relative. Finally, if we are to talk about adherence to moral standards, the record of mankind can hardly be taken self-righteously as the yard-stick to measure performance. The overall logical difficulty of “arguing” with God is that if God exists, especially as presented in the Bible, what ground does man have to stand on at all to argue with Him? As Paul says, He “dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:15). He is not defined or named by anything outside Himself; He says, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:13-14). Indeed, how can we have any concept of Him at all outside what is revealed in the Bible?

Charging God with injustice, then, is a dead-end strategy, both spiritually and logically. If we are the standard, it does no good to blame anyone but ourselves for our troubles; indeed, there is no logical reason at all to expect the world to be better than it is. On the other hand, if we concede God's existence, even to berate Him, we are driven to the realization that whatever limited understanding of God we may ever hope to achieve will come only in our submission to Him and our participation in His involvement in the world. Perhaps as inheritors of the Western tradition we are at a disadvantage in coming to this kind of submission, for we are used to assuming that rulers have to earn the respect of the people and the right to rule. In the human realm that concept has some validity, but we should be careful not to extend this principle by analogy to the relationship between God and man. God's call to man is unconditional: "Acknowledge your bankruptcy before me and accept my grace with no reservations, for I am the only source of goodness and the only worthy object of worship and praise." If only we could learn to accept how much God has to teach us through our praising Him!

The Mystery of God's Love

God cannot speak to us in the midst of our rebellion. Just as Cain's anger and jealous indignation blocked out what God had to say, so we too may render God's message to us ineffective if we insist on bringing Him to a reckoning before opening our hearts. This is not the world's way, nor man's way, for we are deeply conditioned to insist on getting a fair shake—even from God. What we fail to realize is that, as bad as things sometimes seem to us, if God had insisted on absolute fairness, we would have no hope at all. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The only key to the mess around us and within us is the mystery of the love of God through Christ. Once we accept this love as a working principle in our lives, it changes our perspective and gives us a vision of God's purposes and a perception of God's power at work.

God Suffers With Us

I will be so bold in conclusion as to suggest a few things that I think God has to say to us, out of Christ's love and sacrifice, about the Problem of Evil. First, let us be sure to exclude from the question those many times that hardship obviously produces character and makes people more useful. Such instances may include anything from hard work and discipline to prolonged illness or loss of a loved one. These come in some measure to everyone, and what they produce depends largely on the maturity with which they are encountered; they may produce benefits purely on the natural level, but they are certainly experiences that God often uses to our advantage on a spiritual level. Secondly, let us also exclude the direct and natural consequences of sin (such as the physical results of debauchery), which may be harsh, but can hardly be called unjust; and even these evils may lead to repentance and reformed lives. That leaves us with evils which come to people in some extraordinary way and are not connected, so far as we can see, to what they deserve—such as mass disasters, natural or man-made. These come as a result of the kind of world we live in, where either the perversity of mankind or the system of cause and effect in the natural order, which mankind is no longer in harmony with, results in seemingly senseless pain. To this pain, there is no answer for the unbeliever; and even for the believer observing such pain in others there is no completely satisfactory answer, for our perception—particularly our sense of time—is severely limited. We must rely on the message that God suffers with those who suffer; He does not stand aloof on His assertion that "every knee shall bow" to Him (Isaiah 45:22), for the New Testament context in which that passage is quoted is Phillipians 2, in which the worship inherently due to God is, as it were, earned anew by the humble sacrifice of Jesus on the cross: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that

Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (vv.9-11).

In the face of such love, we can only turn in praise to God for his work in the midst of evil and ask that He help us "not (to) be overcome by evil, but (to) overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). It is only God's goodness that

What The Seers Saw

HOY LEDBETTER

Decatur, Georgia

The sovereignty of God is a term which has fallen among thieves, who have robbed it of its Biblical content and left it a poverty-stricken theological expression. It has been seized by such folks as the radical Calvinists who begin with themselves in working out their views of God and employ the term in a way that makes God a monster. It has been stripped of its real force by legalists who cannot trust anyone but themselves. But this term needs to be rescued from perversion and restored to its rightful place in our working vocabulary. It is not just an important concept; it is vital.

It seems to me that the more we think in legal terms, the more trouble we have accepting the notion of the sovereignty of God. Until we have felt the overwhelming force of God's love, we will never be able to believe that we can trust him completely as a truly sovereign being. It is not enough to talk about the sovereign power of God and never mention his sovereign love. It is of fundamental importance that we feel the full impact of Jeremiah 31:3: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." God's love is not bound. It knows no limit. It will not stop at a cross. It is not held back by a national boundary—even that of a very wayward nation. It is utterly unconquerable and unending. Once we accept that sovereign love, we will have no trouble with other teaching on sovereignty.

is sufficient to combat the evil which threatens to overwhelm us.

Dr. Elton Higgs has been a faculty member (and sometimes administrator) at the University of Michigan (Dearborn) since 1964, where he is Professor of Medieval English Literature. He and his wife, Dr. Laquita Higgs, both serve as *Integrity* board members, and are frequent contributors to the journal.

My burden in this article is to discuss some Bible characters who have faced up to God's sovereignty. Of the many possibilities I have chosen three, and perhaps because I am a preacher, they are all prophets. Encounters with these have helped me to wrestle with materialism and exclusionism, as well as the experience of being a depressed, stress-ridden bearer of God's message.

Balaam

The story of Balaam (Numbers 22-24) is both tragic and comical. Balak, king of Moab, having seen the devastating advance of Israel en route to the Promised Land, tried to persuade the Mesopotamian super-prophet Balaam to curse them. These two bungling B's make quite a pair. Even though Balaam insisted that God had ordered him not to curse Israel and that he could not go beyond the command of the Lord, even for a house full of silver and gold, neither he nor Balak was quite willing to accept that. Therefore Balak kept coming back to Balaam, even when he seemed to be losing ground in so doing, and Balaam, who Peter charged with loving "gain from wrongdoing," and who shares his place in history with his ass, tried to keep his options open.

If Balak does not seem to be too bright in making repeated self-defeating appeals to Balaam to curse God's people, we may view

him as a desperate man who was out of alternatives. He belongs to a long stream of folks who cannot accept the sovereignty of God but insist on manipulating him to suit their own purposes, and who may even persist in the wrong way in the face of overwhelming evidence that time is running out.

With regard to Balaam, when the "dumb ass spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness," as Peter so vividly put it, he brought out how dimwitted and hardheaded even a well-known prophet can be. This incident, unique in all history, reveals that an ass, the classic model of stupidity and stubbornness, may be closer to the mind of heaven than the reputable prophet who commands a large fee for his services. But—we may need to remind ourselves—it does not glorify the ass; it only suggests that the fact that one speaks for God does not mean he is otherwise especially holy. What we should observe here is that the sovereign Lord may occasionally, perhaps even today (as you may have suspected), use a donkey to accomplish his purpose. It is the inspiration of the Spirit, not the character of the mouth, that discloses the mind of God.

But if God can use an ass, he can use a Balaam. Therefore even "this numb-skulled, money-grubbing, heathen seer," as Gordon Wenham describes him, "is inspired by the Spirit of God with a vision of Israel's future destiny truly messianic in its dimensions." And he learned that the sovereignty of God is not merely a subject for lip service, but a fact that must be practiced at all times, and to ignore that fact entails some risk.

Jonah

Proverbs 21:1 asserts that the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, and he controls it as easily as a farmer redirects the flow of water in an irrigation ditch. Since the king is usually thought of as the perfect example of an autocrat, this verse is a very strong affirmation of the sovereignty of God. That the heart of the king must ever be subject to the Lord is a principle which has often been exemplified in history and is still in force. That God's sovereignty over sovereigns extended to the

king of Nineveh is a fact which Jonah took with him to that ancient city when God directed him to go there and cry out against it. But along the way Jonah had to learn for himself that (to borrow Paul's words) "the gifts and call of God are irrevocable."

When Jonah first received his marching orders, as most children know, he tried to flee from the presence of the Lord and set out in the very opposite direction on a ship bound for Tarshish. Here we have some tension between man's free will and God's sovereignty, and it will be useful to remember that while Jonah was free to choose to flee, he was not able to choose the consequences of his decision. In his case the chickens came home to roost very soon. The sovereign Lord would not let him go, but "hurled" a great wind upon the sea which finally led to the pagan soldiers tossing Jonah overboard.

But still Jonah did not get off the hook; he was not allowed to escape his responsibility by death. God "appointed" a great fish to swallow him. In his underwater retreat, Jonah had three days to practice his prayers and receive an "attitude adjustment" which, while it did not cure his exclusionism, surely made him wary of making too much of freedom of the will.

When God spoke to the fish, it could no longer keep a good man down, and vomited up the recalcitrant prophet. Then, when God told Jonah the second time to go to Nineveh and "proclaim in it the message that I tell you," he went, though evidently reluctantly and grudgingly. But he still had something to learn about the sovereignty of God.

When the king of Nineveh, whose heart was in the hand of the Lord, was convicted by Jonah's proclamation, he made repentance a matter both of personal practice and public law which extended over to herd and flock. God, seeing this repentance, was pleased to spare the Ninevites, but Jonah, who still had to learn to see the world through God's eyes, was furious that he would be gracious and merciful to the Ninevites. So God made some appointments for him. As the prophet was "cooling off" in the shade of a booth, God "appointed" a plant to give him shade, then a worm to cause it to wither, and then a sultry east wind, through

which he was taught to pity, and his pity was selfish. He felt more pain over the loss of the plant than he would have over streets full of Assyrian corpses.

Whether he ever grasped God's sovereign love for the Ninevites we do not know, but he was not the last prophet to need the lesson. Like kudzu and the poor, his exclusionism seems to always be with us. It has been said that Jonah was a disobedient, not a false, prophet, and in a way that is true. Still we may ask: If one tries so hard to separate God's sovereignty from his sovereign love, is he really a spokesman for heaven?

Jeremiah

Jeremiah suffered more abuse than preachers are usually called upon to bear. Exposed to ostracism and plots against his life by his own villagers, and facing persecution and cursing everywhere he went, he led a lonely, forsaken life. He was shut up in the court of the guard and debarred from entering the house of the Lord. He was beaten and put in the stocks. He served time in a dungeon cell where life expectancy was so short he was afraid of dying there. He sank in the mire of the cistern which was his prison. And he finally felt the heavy chains of captivity. But the fact that he bore such mistreatment is not what makes him stand out.

Jeremiah had a terrible ability to identify with the impending doom of his people. One wonders how this could be more graphically stated than in 4:19: "My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the trumpet, the alarm of war." Naturally this agony would overflow into earnest prayers for the people, but God told him repeatedly not to pray for them; he would not hear. There was no remedy for his awful pain: "My grief is beyond healing, my heart is sick within me."

The profound emotional conflict his ministry produced is revealed in a series of laments in chapters 11-20 in which we discover that he almost broke under the tensions and gave way to anger, despondency, and even longing for the peace of death. He saw himself as a gentle lamb being led to the slaughter, never know-

ing what would happen next, and as a man of strife and contention, drawing the cursing and persecution of his countrymen, even his own villagers.

This lonely and tortured preacher could even venture to the brink of blasphemy, as when he asked God, "Wilt thou be to me a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?" An honest question, but he went too far, so God called him back: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me."

On another occasion he spoke in language which stuns us, asserting, "O Lord, thou has deceived (lit. *seduced*) me, and I was deceived (i.e., I let myself fall for it)." But he never gave up, for he said, "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." He could not quit. He cursed the day he was born, but he never held back one jot or tittle from the message entrusted to him.

But why could he not resign? How could this tortured man, who barely held up under his tensions, who was a failure by the world's standards and in terms of measurable results, who found no inner peace, and who had to watch his whole congregation go steadily down the drain—how could he keep on speaking what nobody wanted to hear? There is only one reason. He believed in the sovereignty of God.

Jeremiah could recall that day when God called him to be his prophet, when he tried to beg off because he did not know how to speak and was only a boy, that day when God told him that he had consecrated him before he was born, that even then he had appointed him to be a prophet to the nations. God had a plan for his life, and he would work it out. And he promised him then, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you."

Later on, the great prophet may have seen that promise in a different light, but he could never forget it. He was sustained by the sovereignty of God, knowing that his very existence was a part of the divine purpose to be fulfilled. This sovereignty was not confuted by anything that happened—by the departure into

captivity, by his own imprisonment and persecution, by his failure and despondency—for he knew that there was always Someone to praise. His prayer was: “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for thou art my praise.”

Thou art my praise is a wonderful word for us today. When we feel like the failures we often are, when we receive criticism rather than affirmation for the deeds we do and the truth we proclaim, when the people we serve make no positive response and the whole result of our labor seems to be that things get worse instead of better, then we may say, “Thou art my praise.” Because the sovereign Lord with his

Light For the Darkness

J. BRUCE KLIMER

Lansing, Michigan

Shawn, a six-year-old boy, looked into my face and with tears in his eyes and a tremble in his voice described the pain and bewilderment from his being sodomized by his mother's boyfriend. What could I say? What would Jesus say? Why, O Lord, did this have to happen? Why did Lisa, another six-year-old, have to have corrective surgery on her vagina to repair the tears and rips inflicted on her in a brutal rape? Why was Debbie, a nine-year-old girl, sold by her mother to give sexual favors to strange men? Why was Steve, a four-month-old, in intensive care with two broken arms and a crushed skull because his mother repeatedly threw him against the wall? Why did we find Danny, a small baby, beaten to death and stuffed in a trash bag at the bottom of a trash barrel? Where, O Jesus, were their guardian angels? How long, O Lord?

Severe Pain and Suffering

As an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and head of the Family Services Division for Ingham County, Michigan, I must constantly deal with children who are abused and exploited by adults. The pain and suffering are so severe,

sovereign love is with us, even when we are burned out and bitter. He is the potter, and if the vessel he is making is spoiled in his hand, he will rework it into another vessel, as it seems good to him to do.

Hoy Ledbetter needs no introduction to *Integrity* readers since he was the founding editor of the journal, and served as its editor-in-chief for fifteen years until his resignation in March, 1984; since that time he has continued to serve as Editorial Advisor to the Editorial Board. Hoy and wife, Lillian, with daughter Priscilla, now live in Decatur, Georgia and serve with the Brookvalley Church.

the effects so long lasting, and the children so helpless that I wrestle daily with how to face the evil that seems to engulf the world.

Stories like the above can be multiplied. Many are worse, some are not as bad, but all are not just stories, nor just statistics. Each one involves a real person — a person with a name, with a personality, with a mind, and with a soul. How many can we face, or know, or read about and remain sane — remain human? In order for us to survive, are our only alternatives to either become callous and hardened or to ignore them? What does our faith and our relationship with Jesus have to offer in these situations? We can preach vengeful, scared, or hateful sermons. We can offer a pious analysis of what went wrong. We can turn the other way. But can we hurt and hurt, over and over again, and not collapse under the sorrow and pain?

How could Paul say:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

II Corinthians 4:8-9.

He could say this because he had seen the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ to which he refers in II Corinthians 4:6. This knowledge is more than a superficial statement that “everything is all right.” Furthermore, it is more than the theological explanation that “God is in control.” Paul is talking about experiencing God. This is not an emotional state that can be “worked up.” It involves both knowledge and feelings, but transcends both. This experience sustained Paul through the suffering he describes in II Corinthians. And we learn in Ephesians that Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians to continue to deepen their understanding and knowledge of what God had done and was doing with them. Ephesians 1:18-19 and Ephesians 3:16-19.

Suffering is part of the process through which we come to experience God. Suffering tempers our body, mind, and spirit, leading us to a place where our will can be surrendered and then empowered by God.

The evil of this world can cause us paralysis in the form of apathy or depression. If we seek some escape from evil, we will find that eventually pain and suffering penetrate every hiding place. Our only hope is to allow the suffering brought about by evil to move us in such a way that we allow God's power to transform us.

Hope Sustains Us

We look to Christ and his suffering and see our own hope. He has saved us! This knowledge sustains us in spite of our feelings and through every possible circumstance. We can fail and succeed knowing we are connected to the ultimate victory of Christ. We can face both suffering and pleasure with a knowledge that there is a deeper reality to which our individual purpose is linked. We may cry, but beneath the tears is hope. Because of Christ, this hope is not wishful thinking. It is confident expectation.

As I face each hurting child, I pray for the light of God to keep me from stumbling and I ask for their healing. I cannot see Him heal them all, but I can see Him through Christ, and I go on.

Ever since Adam and Eve listened to the Liar and Murderer, human beings have tried to bear and understand pain and suffering, evil and death. The writer of Job sets out to explain suffering and leaves us with this seemingly obvious truth: God is God. Sometimes the more we wrestle with understanding suffering, the more confused we become — until we, as Job, experience God out of the whirlwind. Or as Paul said: until we have in our earthly body of suffering the treasure of the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” II Corinthians 4:6-7. Job and the men and women of old saw the treasure from a distance. Hebrews 11:13. You and I see it up close, but reflected in the face of Christ so that the light might not blind us but rather show us the way in this evil world of darkness. Our eyes have not grown accustomed to the light. It is as if our pupils are still dilated from walking in the darkness of sin and we cannot see perfectly. I Corinthians 13:12. But as our relationship with Christ grows, we can face suffering and not be destroyed by it. We may see unclearly, but we do see.

The Light Still Shines

The light still shines through the suffering and confusion. The light may be at the end of a tunnel, but it still shines. We welcome it (Hebrews 11:13); even though our backs are bent and our hearts ache. We swallow the lump in our throat and with a faith that defies feelings, defies pain, and defies evil, we move on. Not with a callous heart, not ignoring pain; but struggling, comforting, and crying, as we mumble, speak, sing, and finally shout for joy, having seen and experienced the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ!

He says He is coming soon. Amen, Come, Lord Jesus!

Dr. Bruce Kilmer is a deeply committed Christian, loving husband and responsible father; he and his wife Diane both serve as *Integrity* board members, and contribute frequently to the journal. By profession Bruce is an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and head of the Family Services Division for Ingham County, Michigan.

“Why?” Reflections and Tributes

on the Death of a Son

EPI AND REBA BILAK

Lausanne, Switzerland

Editor's Note: On Friday, July 13, 1984 Jamie Bilak, 21-year-old son of Epi and Reba Bilak, Lausanne, Switzerland, died as the result of a tragic automobile-motorcycle accident. Churches and individuals from around the world responded in Christian support to these Christ-centered and loving parents. Here are some of the Bilaks' thoughts on the death of their beloved son, and also some of the countless tributes which they received. Truly, Epi and Reba Bilak have put Jamie's death into the purposeful will and loving hands of a Sovereign Lord; and as Epi said in many messages after Jamie was laid to rest, as was said of that saint of old, "He being dead, yet speaketh."

REFLECTIONS OF PARENTS

*Why! Why!
Why us? Why now?
Why so soon?
Oh, why, Lord Jesus . . . ?
Lord Jesus, help us!*

*"For though he cause us grief,
yet will he have compassion
according to the multitude
of his loving kindness.
For he doth not afflict willingly,
nor grieve the children of men."*

Lamentations 3:32-33

In His great compassion and according to the abundance of His love to us the Lord sent His help through those who came to be with us and

to pray. And others sent telegrams, letters, cards, printed material and other things.

What all this means to us is well expressed in words of Grace Noll Crowell:

TO ONE IN SORROW

*Let me come in where you are weeping, friend,
And let me take your hand.
I, who have known a sorrow such as yours,
Can understand.
Let me come in—I would be very still
Beside you in your grief;
I would not bid you cease your weeping, friend,
Tears bring relief.
Let me come in—I would only breathe a prayer,
And hold your hand,
For I have known a sorrow such as yours,
And understand.*

We do not have the answer to the why, and even if we had, we would not understand, and would ask like Mary, "How can this be?" We are the Lord's servants. May it be to us according to what you say, Lord. (See Luke 1:31-38).

For the past we want to say, "Thank you, Lord," and for the future, "Yes, Lord Jesus. We are your servants; let it be to us according to your word."

Editor's Comment: These expressive reflections were written in September, 1984, only a few short weeks after Jamie's death; but they couch a surrender to the sovereign love and will of God through which the hurt and mystery of death can be accepted.

TRIBUTES

"He was a boy we appreciated very much, to see pass by regularly along the road—when he was smaller and later as a young man. He was always very communicative and very friendly.—a Swiss neighbor.

"When I pause to reflect on times we have been with Jamie it's difficult to believe he's truly no longer with us. I pray that it will not be long when we can think of him and be comforted rather than confused and hurt."

"I've lost a very special brother when his life seemed to be just beginning. Although we don't grieve 'as pagans do...who have no hope,' that Jamie-sized hole in our lives is going to take a lot of getting used to. I thank the Lord I had the chance to know and love Jamie, even though it brings pain now. He was special—is special!"

"Jamie...was such a loving and caring person and will be missed by all who knew him. I treasure many happy moments spent with your family...Jamie will always live fondly in my memories."

"Jamie blessed your lives and many others during his short lifetime. I guess it's not ours to understand the "whys"—Acceptance will take time."

"Jamie had a special niche in my heart. He had a sweetness rare in a boy, I think."

"He was so kind and sweet."

"Jamie was really a blessing to me."

"Jamie was a very kind, special person,"

"We remember Jamie very well from our visit in your home and then your visit in ours. He was a person who enjoyed life and through his life gained respect. He would have surely done much good for the Church if God had given him a longer life. For some reason that did not happen. It is evident the Lord has called him to fulfill another mission. We are ac-

cepting it in faith that there's a better life and higher aims for which man appears on this earth."

"His mission has been accomplished, and I am confident that our loss is Heaven's gain."

"Though his life was short he influenced and inspired so many, both young and old."

"I have always considered all of you as my 'second family', and the loss I feel myself is as if Jamie were my very own brother."

"All I know to do is to tell you how much we love you and how special Jamie was to us, and his memory will be a source of happiness for so many."

"Jamie had a 'natural joy' of living, and it tended to rub off on those around him. We are so glad we got to know him."

"I think he personified the little child in all of us. He enjoyed every thing he saw, ate or was with. He said and did all the things most of us would like to do and say, and did it with no malice, but with pure innocence. He wanted a cowboy shirt — He played with my children. He snapped pictures of arms, legs and tonsils all through Stephanie's wedding! He absolutely enjoyed himself, and I'm glad that's the way I remember him."

"We continue to cry and pray when Jamie is being discussed."

"His life will continue to be a very positive message."

"He sat behind us in Church the last Sunday (July 1) in Switzerland, and I enjoyed his voice so much when he led the singing."

"I know you rejoice in his love for his family, his love for the Lord and the sweet spirit expressed through him. I was particularly impressed with his efforts during dinner when Catherine was present to try to help her feel at ease with all the strangers and to try to bridge

the gap for her with no English and all of us with no French. Many young people that age would have avoided the situation rather than dealing with it as Jamie did.”

“I’m so thankful that the Lord permitted me to be with Jamie just a few days ago, so that I could learn to know and appreciate him just a little better. I sat next to him for breakfast the last morning we were in Lausanne. Stella and I got to ask him about his dreams and hopes for the future. He told us something of what he had been doing and was planning to do. Even though all of this was cut short, I will treasure the few moments with him that morning. The time in worship service just a little later hallowed for me the memory of Jamie as he led singing and did his part in leading us in worship that morning. There are about twenty of us in this part of the world who will have the same fond memories of Jamie.”

Many have asked about a memorial fund for Jamie. We want to finish renovating the apart-

Sovereign Grace and Human Weakness

JOSEPH F. JONES

Southfield, Michigan

It may sound a bit neurotic to say, “Now I am glad to boast about how weak I am;” and the idea certainly does not harmonize well with either the Stoic view of life or our contemporary notion of the strong and self-sufficient life. But the words and the view are set forth by that “man in Christ,” Saul of Tarsus who was transformed into a mighty witness for the sovereign love of God manifested in Jesus Christ.

But perhaps Paul was only speaking in jest, not too seriously, attempting to palliate the hurts and sufferings of some Christians who were likely complaining of their lot in life. *Me genoito!* Never, be it not so; for this man is

ment at Avenue de France where he and Catherine lived after they were married and dedicate that in his honor. We think that would please him. But we feel the greatest memorial would be for those who have been touched by his death to turn to the One who conquered death—dedicate, or rededicate their lives to Him. (Jamie wanted so terribly to reach out to those in distress and without the Lord.) In this way he will have truly triumphed over death! “He being dead, yet speaketh.” (Hebrews 11:4).

Anyone wishing to have a part in this memorial should send their contributions to the Minter Lane Church of Christ, P.O. Box 2872, Abilene, Texas 79604.

Epi and Reba Bilak are internationally known missionaries to countries behind the Iron Curtain, primarily through their radio work since 1959. Their radio ministry bears the name, “Slavic World for Christ Broadcast,” and while supported generously by many churches and individuals, is sponsored by the Minter Lane Church, Abilene, Texas.

describing his anguish with what he characterized as “a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated.” But if this were not adequate to teach Paul the reality of hurt, suffering, pain, then listen to his more graphic description—not self pity—found in II Corinthians 11:23-29:

“With far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in

danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

Not that he needed to validate this list of human weaknesses, but the apostle did add, and God “knows that I do not lie.” What kind of interpretation is it then, which Paul is giving to the inadequacies of all mortals, and especially the suffering often associated with the Christian life? It certainly is not a rational response of human wisdom, for some in our contemporary world will characterize it as pretty sickly, giving it a rather sophisticated label of being masochistic. Neither is it a denial of the reality of the hurt which humans can experience, nor an affirmation of the great human strength and fortitude which some mortals can demonstrate under duress. He is not bragging about his capacity to bear up under or even enjoy suffering when the apostle writes, “I will boast of the things that show my weakness...I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, ...insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.” This perspective of pain and suffering can only be had when life is viewed in the light of divine sovereignty: not just sovereign power and will, but sovereign love!

His Grace is Sufficient

Crying out in his agony Paul heard the reaffirming voice of the Sovereign Lord, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul, I will not remove all of life’s hurt, pain, and anguish, although I could in sovereign power do so; rather I give you something far better—the power of sovereign grace to bear it. It is a pallid analogy but it attempts to make this affirma-

tion of “the power of Christ” resting upon Paul real (II Cor. 12:9). Four men of ordinary size and strength were struggling mightily to carry a heavy piano up a flight of stairs, when a brawny, muscled weight-lifter approximating 300 pounds said, “You four fellows get on the other end of the piano, I’ll handle this end!” And he did! It is the sustaining power of the risen, living Lord which enables us to bear up under pressures and power of evil, to endure steadfastly under suffering, and to smile even through the bitterness of our tears.

Benefits to the Sufferer

Suffering borne through the perspective of divine love and sufficient grace brings significant benefits to the sufferer. 1) Suffering rightly interpreted can develop strong character, steadfastness of purpose, and the capacity to endure under stress. (Romans 5:3,4). Just as exercise develops strong muscles and alert minds are sharpened through difficult problem-solving, so character, strength, endurance derive from suffering accepted and borne through the perspective of faith in His sovereign caring.

2) Suffering rightly perceived brings about patience (which many so desperately need), provides a more realistic assessment of our own limitations, creates in us that divine quality of empathy which enables us to weep with those who weep, to ache with those who hurt, to be sensitive with the compassion of Christ toward the predicament of earth’s woes.

3) Suffering perceived through the agony of Gethesmane and the hurt of Calvary enables the believer to pray with an understanding of “Thy will be done” that is impossible for the rational, legalistic, or humanistic mind. It is that submission amidst blood and sweat and tears to the “Nevertheless, Thy will be done” which brings into sharpest focus God’s direction for our lives. Through the suffering and labor of the mother comes a new life with all its radiance and potential; just so when one has his own personal Gethesmane and Golgotha will the sovereign power and sufficient grace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ fashion him into a new life. Tempered, refined, made more dependent on the Lord through suffering

firm with Paul, "for when I am weak, then am I strong...that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

4) It is the sovereign presence and power of God that sustains and saves. Isaiah captured this vision of God and spoke to Israel of old a message that yet stirs the believer's soul:

"But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior'." (Isaiah 43:1-3a)

What then can evil, pain, suffering ultimately do to one to whom the eternal God has said, I formed and fashioned you? I redeemed you, and I called you by name; you are mine! Can

Pain, Suffering and the Sovereignty of God

(Continued from page 70)

Integrity board members are deeply grateful that so many readers continue to support us with your prayers, letters of encouragement, and generous gifts; and by generous gifts I do not mean necessarily large amounts as much as the spirit and attitude of the givers. For "God indeed loves a cheerful giver," and with every gift whether large or small there is usually an encouraging note of appreciation.

Several *Integrity* publications may well be of interest to some of our readers, and may be purchased for very nominal cost. Norman L. Parks, *Woman's Place in Church Activity*, a thirty-six page booklet on one of the most vital issues facing the church today, sells for \$2.00 per copy or \$1.50 in lots of ten or more. Two

prevail? Never, affirms this inspired man of God.

Let the man who dared to say that he would boast in his weaknesses conclude this message for us. Who or what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can the many and bitter forms of suffering drive us to despair and death? Can tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness (want), or peril, or sword? "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." For the apostle is sure beyond any doubt that nothing—absolutely nothing in all creation, nothing but our unbelief—"will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39).

Dr. Joseph Jones has been associated with *Integrity* for many years of the journal's history; presently serves as Chairman of the Editorial Board and the Board of Directors. Marriage and family therapist, psychologist and Christian minister, and former college professor, he has served with the Troy Church of Christ, Troy, Michigan for the past 18 years.

special issues⁷ on "Unity and Christian Fellowship" are ready in a bound unit, and three special issues on "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage" are also available in a neatly bound volume. These special bound issues also sell for \$2.00 per bound volume, or \$1.50 per volume in lots of ten or more. Cassette tapes are now available on the January/February 1985 issue, on the exciting theme: "The Unity Which the Spirit Gives." This was a 20 page issue containing various articles, accounts of mergers, and reflections on the significance and practicality of such unity movements among Restoration churches. The cost is \$3.00 per tape.

Joseph F. Jones, Chairman
Integrity Editorial Board

Readers' Response

Dear *Integrity* Board,

Please forgive me for neglecting to write sooner and express my appreciation for your wonderful paper. I see *Integrity* as a labor of love by men of integrity who love God and are in tune with God's heart's desire that we be experientially one body in Christ growing in our knowledge of Jesus, as we lay down our sanctimonious exclusivism. Oh, how He loves us! How good it is when we are set free to love all men who have accepted Jesus as Lord. May God continue to bless you with boldness that is permeated with His love.

Bonnie Broome
Santa Ana, California

Dear Sir:

Enclosed is a check to be sure I continue to receive *Integrity*. I appreciate your efforts very much.

Thank you,
Enos O. Moore
Grenada, Mississippi

Keep up the good work.

Jim Webster
Manassas, Virginia

Permit me to suggest that I, for one, would like to have a bit of biographical information about each of your writers. I have known some of them, but not many. It seems to me this addition would make *Integrity* of greater interest to many of us.

F. Burton Doyle
Allison Park, Pennsylvania

(Editor's note: Others have also asked for information about the writers and we are now including a paragraph at the end of the articles.)

Perhaps with Bro. Thomas' article on the Holy Spirit the paper should be re-named "Courageous."

I cannot go his distance on the subject but have concluded that we in "the brotherhood" are guilty of "limiting the Holy One of Israel" in this area as well as other areas.

I think the danger of some "far out" articles is that some brethren—disenchanted with the status quo—will go farther to the "left" than they should because they won't study the matter too well for themselves.

A faithful reader in Michigan

Integrity is appreciated.

L.J. Fortenberry
Lufkin, Texas

I have especially enjoyed reading *Integrity*. Your in depth articles on the scriptures have been a spiritual blessing in my life. I thank you.

Mrs. Ralph Terry
McGregor, Texas

Dear friends of *Integrity*,

We appreciate your on-going dedication and commitment to the word. Thank you for your call to significant Christianity.

We have been especially blessed by the issues on "Life in the Spirit."

Where the Spirit is recognized as the gift from the Father—for her comfort and guidance and power—the church comes alive. "...Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." II Cor. 3:17. And joy, and other good fruit. Gal 5:22.

Sincerely,
Everett and Helen Champney
Albuquerque, New Mexico

(Continued on next page)